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Protecting Wages, Caring for People Are Top Priorities for 2018 Advancing Minnesota Agenda

Senate Republicans announce session priorities that include tax conformity, investments in infrastructure and school safety measures

(St. Paul, MN...) Minnesota Senate Republicans today announced their Advancing Minnesota agenda for 2018, following a historically productive 2017 session. The top priority for the upcoming session is protecting Minnesotans' wages from any inadvertent increase in taxes resulting from the historic federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Other top priorities include strategic investments in state infrastructure through a bonding bill, and a "Caring for People" agenda that includes improving school safety, preventing elder abuse and fixing the state's driver's license system.

"Republicans will follow up the most productive session in Minnesota history with a 2018 Advancing Minnesota agenda that focuses on people at all stages of life," said Majority Leader Paul Gazelka (R-Nisswa). "We care about people – their take home pay, their access to childcare, their mental health. We want their kids to be safe at school and their parents to be safe in their long-term care facility. And we want Minnesotans to get their tabs and driver's licenses processed in a timely manner."

The centerpiece of the 2018 Advancing Minnesota Agenda will be dealing with the federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

"The new federal tax bill gives us a great opportunity to protect Minnesotans' wages, simplify our tax code, and grow Minnesota's economy to remain competitive with our neighboring states," said Senate Tax Committee Chair Roger Chamberlain (R-Lino Lakes).

Republicans announced three goals related to the federal tax changes:

- Protecting Minnesota wages – the federal tax changes lower rates for 90% of Minnesotans, but expose more income to state income taxes. Without legislative changes, Minnesota families and small businesses will overpay \$459 million this biennium and \$1.1 billion next biennium.

- Simplicity – the federal tax changes make filing simple for nine out of ten Minnesotans. Without legislative changes, Minnesotans will be filing their federal taxes on a postcard but hiring an accounting firm for their state taxes.
- Growing the economy – the federal tax changes are already making an impact on the U.S. economy. Without legislative changes, Minnesota will fall behind other states like Wisconsin, Iowa and North and South Dakota.

Senate Republicans also touted a “Caring for People” agenda that features increasing school safety, improving elder abuse complaints and fixing the failed driver’s license system known as MNLARS.

School safety proposals will include funding to help districts with security improvements for their schools, and changing state regulations that restrict fire evacuation procedures in local schools.

“One thing we can do immediately to respond to school shootings is free up resources for local school districts to make their buildings safer for our children,” said Sen. Carla Nelson (R-Rochester).

Senator Eric Pratt (R-Prior Lake) added, “Every school is unique, and a one-size-fits-all approach won’t work. Local school districts need to be given the decision-making authority to do what works to make schools safer in their community.”

Republican proposals will also demand more oversight and accountability at the Department of Health’s Office of Health Facility Complaints so that incidents of elder abuse are properly investigated.

“Elderly and vulnerable Minnesotans, and their families, have suffered for too long due to bureaucratic backlogs and inaction. We’re going to get them answers, accountability, and action this session,” said Sen. Karin Housley (R-St. Mary’s Point). “Our priority will be on creating a more transparent, accountable process for facility complaints, providing better access to data sharing for families and caregivers, and working to change the culture of neglect and intimidation within the state bureaucracy.”

Caring for people also means addressing the complete failure of the new driver’s license system and holding the Dayton administration accountable for delivering licenses and tabs to Minnesota drivers in a timely and efficient manner.

“The administration’s handling of the driver’s license system – a project that has been underway since 2008 and cost more than \$90 million – has been a colossal disaster: If you talk to car dealers, deputy registrars, and customers across Minnesota, there is serious frustration – and it is not getting better. The state agencies responsible for the new system have not demonstrated they are capable of addressing these problems,” said Sen. Scott Newman (R-

Hutchinson). "With Minnesotans caught in the crosshairs of this debacle for months, it is time to make the personnel changes necessary to get it done."

Other "Caring for People" initiatives for the 2018 session include:

- Access to childcare – removing burdensome regulations that are contributing to the decline in access to childcare, especially in Greater Minnesota.
- Mental health – funding mental health crisis centers to reduce the impact on jails and emergency rooms.
- Opioid abuse – building on successful pilot programs that emphasize community involvement, and delivering funding for more treatment, prevention, and after care for individuals battling this terrible addiction.
- Health care cost transparency – empowering consumers with the information they need to make better choices about their health care costs.

A "bricks and mortar" bonding bill that will invest in sustaining and building infrastructure throughout the state will be another main focus for Republicans in 2018. The Senate bonding bill will feature maintaining state assets and investing in essential local needs such as road and bridge safety projects, wastewater treatment upgrades, and asset preservation. Mental health crisis centers will also receive the funding necessary to better respond to emergency situations.

"Last year's bonding bill directed \$255 million toward roads and bridges all over the state. This year, we will continue to fund dependable roads so families can travel safely and businesses can function efficiently," said Sen. Dave Senjem (R-Rochester). "Additional funding for mental health crisis centers will also prevent emergency room overflow and result in better outcomes for patients."

Senate Republicans announced their original Advancing Minnesota agenda one year ago on February 23, 2017 and accomplished many of their objectives during the historically productive 2017 session. To build on that success, Republicans plan to bring forward specific policy proposals after updated budget forecast numbers are announced February 28, 2018.

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