

Minnesota Government Update - Week in Review - May 6, 2011

Posted by [John A. Knapp](#) on May 06, 2011

Final Committee Deadline Reached

The Minnesota Legislature has now passed its final committee deadline for the 2011 session. All policy bills for the session are now required to be out of committee in both houses of the Legislature to remain alive this session. With the committee deadline looming, this past week saw a flurry of activity with bills being added to or removed from committee schedules with short notice.

Meanwhile, the pace of legislative deliberations on the budget side of things was decidedly slower. Facing a deadline for adjournment on May 23, little apparent progress has been made on resolving overall differences between the Governor and the Legislature on the overall size of the State budget. So far, only one of the session's major tax and budget bills has become law, the Omnibus Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill. Conference committees on the other tax and budget bills will resume next week, but without agreement between the Governor and the Legislature on an overall budget target, little real progress will be made, and a legislative special session becomes more and more likely.

Gaming Takes Center Stage

Multiple gaming expansion bills were heard this week in the Senate State Government Innovation and Veterans Committee. The committee heard three very different gaming bills. A compulsive gambling appropriation bill (SF650), authored by Sen. Paul Gazelka (R-Brainerd), was passed out of committee. Also passed out of committee was a lawful gambling tax rate modification (SF702), authored by the Chair of the Committee, Sen. Mike Parry (R-Waseca). The linked bingo and electronic pull-tabs authorization bill for charitable gaming operations (SF1116), authored by Sen. Bill Ingebrigtsen (R-Alexandria), was laid on the table after testimony. Sen. David Senjem's racino bill was scheduled to be heard at an evening hearing but Sen. Parry unexpectedly cancelled the evening hearing at the last minute, claiming scheduling conflicts.

In the House, the racino bill (HF1352), authored by Rep. Bob Gunther (R-Fairmont), received an information-only hearing. The proponents were allowed ample opportunity to address the committee while the opponents were given less time in front of the Jobs and Economic Development Committee. Chair Gunther indicated an intention to bring the issue back at another time for additional consideration.

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Sen. Doug Magnus (R-Slayton) and the owners of Block E in downtown Minneapolis held an invitation-only press conference this week on a proposal for a Block E casino, which they are calling “Minnesota Live.” The vision is a state-owned, Las Vegas-style casino with supporters that include Minneapolis business leaders and elected officials. Proponents say the casino will bring in millions of new visitors helping to revive a stressed downtown economy and potentially more than \$100 million a year into the state’s general fund. Opponents of the plan include Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak as well as American Indian gambling interests. The plan would gut and completely renovate the struggling movie-and-restaurant complex at Block E near the Target Center and install as many as 3,200 gambling machines by the spring of 2012. Rep. John Kriesel (R-Cottage Grove) introduced HF1675, on Friday, May 6, which is the Block E Casino proposal.

Voter ID

The House took up Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer’s (R-Big Lake) voter ID bill on Thursday, spending over three hours debating this highly controversial bill. HF201/SF509 passed on a party line vote of 73 to 59. The bill requires all voters to present a photo identification card with their current address before receiving a ballot. The Senate passed a different version of the bill, authored by Sen. Warren Limmer (R-Maple Gove), also on a party line vote at the end of April. The version passed by the House will go back to the Senate where the Senate will either vote to adopt the House changes or request a conference committee to work out the differences between the bills.