

Why some in St. Paul want a full-time Minnesota Legislature

By Alex Derosier
Cloquet Pine Journal

ST. PAUL — Senators and representatives at the Minnesota Capitol have until May 23 to decide how to borrow money for major public works projects and how to use the state's record \$9.25 billion budget surplus.



Long

Each year, lawmakers have just a few months to make important decisions on policy and spending for the state of Minnesota, though some have suggested the state join the 10 others with a full-time legislature.

What stops that from happening now? Under the state Constitution, the Legislature may only meet 120 days each year and can not convene after the first Monday after the third Saturday in May. There is an exception to this rule: Under pressing circumstances, the governor can call lawmakers back to the capitol for a special session. Gov. Tim Walz has done so multiple times since he took office in 2019.

"The state's challenges don't stop in May, and we shouldn't stop working for the people then either."

JAMIE LONG,
MINNEAPOLIS DFL REP.

Supporters of a full-time legislature argue that such a change would help create a bigger pool of experienced lawmakers and allow for better consideration of policy and spending decisions. Two Twin Cities area Democratic-Farmer-Labor lawmakers introduced a bill this month that would allow Minnesotans to vote on a constitutional amendment that would remove restrictions on the number of days lawmakers can meet each year.

Minneapolis DFL Rep. Jamie Long, who is sponsoring the bill in the House of Representatives, said the modern world demands a legislative body that can react quickly to fast-paced challenges.

"The state's challenges don't stop in May, and we shouldn't stop working for the people then either," Long said in a statement in support of the bill. "We

should follow the lead of states like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio by stepping up to meet the complex issues of a 21st century economy."

Long and Senate sponsor Lindsey Port, a Burnsville Democrat, make several arguments in favor of year-round legislative activity. Budget projections are typically released in late February, and lawmakers typically have just three months to decide how to allocate funds, for one.

In a statement in support of a year-round legislature, Senate Minority Leader Melisa Lopez-Franzen, DFL-Edina, said the short turnaround period forces lawmakers to rely on large package bills, known as omnibus bills, to allocate funds and make policy decisions. Omnibus bills are often criticized for their lack of transparency, as many proposals are lumped into a single large bill.

Supporters also argue that under the current system many senators and representatives must hold other jobs in order to make a living, meaning office is more difficult to hold for

people with middle and lower incomes. Lawmakers currently make a salary of \$45,000 a year.

The bill proposing a full-time legislature is unlikely to gain traction this session and does not have the support of Senate leadership, though its introduction highlighted the different perspectives lawmakers have on how the Capitol should operate.

Senate Majority Leader Jeremy Miller, R-Winona, last week rejected the concept of a full-time legislature, saying it would bring the negative aspects of national politics into the state capitol.

"Moving to a full-time legislature is an absolutely terrible idea and would move us more toward Washington, D.C.-style politics," Miller said in a statement. "It's important to maintain the current citizen-legislature to ensure we don't have a legislature full of career politicians."

California, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Alaska, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio and Wisconsin have full-time legislatures.

Follow Alex Derosier on Twitter @xanderosier or email aderosier@forumcomm.com.



Steve Kuchera / Duluth News Tribune
Chickens are currently restricted to their coop at Locally Laid Egg Co. in Wrenshall as a precaution against the avian flu.

FLOCKS

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"We appreciate the patience of flock owners as we extend this pause on poultry events to continue evaluating the risk (avian influenza) poses to their birds while at home or on the road at a fair or other event," she said.

Glaser added the state is monitoring the fairs coming up in June, and hopes the extension of the ban will suppress the virus and allowing things to proceed as planned.

Lori Gamble, owner of Promised Land Farm, said there is always the possibility of the virus passing through the area.

"It is always somewhat of a concern," she said.

The chickens at Promised Land Farm are kept within an electric fence and away from ponds on the property to keep them away from wild birds.

"(We are) being aware of our biosecurity," she said. "Doing what we can to minimize potential losses."

Lower temperatures this spring have resulted in fewer migratory birds passing through the property than usual, Gamble said.

"As birds come north the potential (for infection) increases," she said.

Gamble said having a ban on transporting birds has not affected her farm, but should the restrictions change, it could bring problems.

"Potential to stop products, even eggs, that would change things for us," she said.

ABORTION

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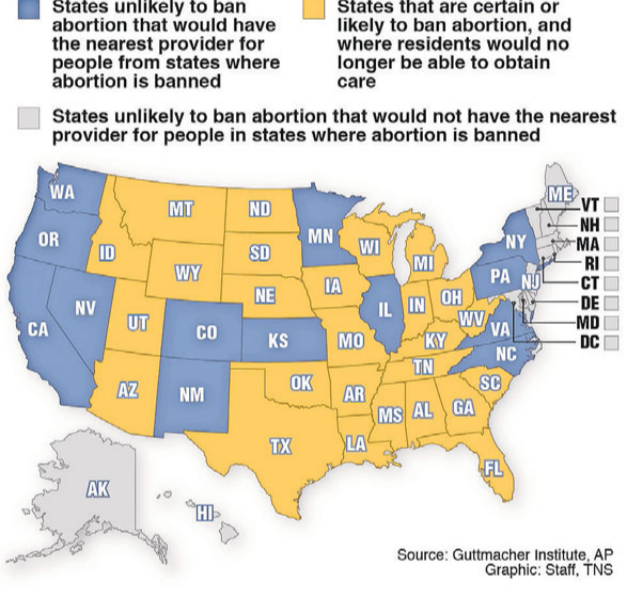
The governor's reelection campaign on Monday night sent out a news release noting that the field of Republican candidates for governor has said they would push to outlaw abortion access in the state.

"If this ruling holds, the governor's office will be the last line of defense for reproductive rights in Minnesota," Walz Campaign Manager Nichole Johnson said. "When the Republican candidates for governor say that they will end reproductive rights in our state, Minnesotans should take them at their word."

Minnesota's Supreme Court in a 1995 case upheld the right to an abortion under the state's constitution, so the U.S. Supreme Court's decision wouldn't affect the state's restrictions. But Minnesota clinics could see an influx of people from neighboring states coming across the border for abortion services if the court upholds a Mississippi law banning abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy except in the case of a medical emergency

If Roe v. Wade falls

If the U.S. Supreme Court weakens or overturns Roe v. Wade, 26 states are certain or likely to ban abortion.



or severe fetal abnormality.

Minnesota's neighbors to the west — North Dakota and South Dakota — have "trigger" laws that would immediately outlaw abortion within 30 days if Roe v. Wade is struck down.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Monday night tweeted that she would tee up a special legislative session to roll back access to abortion in the state if the draft proved to be authentic.

"If this report is true and Roe v. Wade is overturned, I will immedi-

ately call for a special session to save lives and guarantee that every unborn child has a right to life in South Dakota," the first-term Republican wrote on Twitter.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin and Michigan still have laws on the books deeming abortion illegal. Those states could enforce those provisions depending on the high court's decision.

To the south, Iowa GOP lawmakers are organizing a campaign to pass a constitutional amendment that says abortion is not protected by the



Evelyn Hockstein / Reuters
Protesters sit outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington early Tuesday morning after the leak overnight of a draft majority opinion that appears to signal the court's decision to overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade abortion rights decision later this year.

state's constitution. Minnesota abortion providers have said they were preparing for an influx of out-of-state patients if the court rules to overturn Roe v. Wade and triggers state laws that limit services around the region.

Meanwhile, abortion opponents have said they'll continue pressing state lawmakers to restrict access to abortion services in the state. "When this decision is finally handed down, the real work of pro-life organizations across the country will begin," Minnesota Family Council said in a statement. "As we have been

doing for years, we will work to protect women and children in Minnesota from abortion at the Legislature, in the courts and through elections."

Under current law, Minnesota requires a

24-hour waiting period between the first contact with a provider and an abortion procedure and requires physicians who perform abortions to read from a script before the procedure. State law also mandates that both parents of a minor have to sign off before an abortion.

The state has seen a relatively steady decline in induced abortions since 1980 and the total number of procedures reported to the state in 2020 was less than half that reported four decades ago. In 2020, the Minnesota Department of Health reported that 807, or roughly 9% of the total 9,108 abortions in the state, were induced in residents of Iowa, Michigan, North Dakota, South Dakota or Wisconsin.

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