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Legislative session heats up as sticking points between parties bubble to surface

Local lawmakers drill down on funds for public safety, tax reform

Hannah Davis
News Editor

With Minnesota's legislative session underway, local lawmakers on both sides of the aisle agree that discussions about the state's projected budget surplus, public safety and infrastructure will take up much of their time. Getting them to agree on how to address those issues will prove more difficult.

The legislative session began Monday, Jan. 31, and even though it's not a budget-setting year, the \$9.25 billion surplus has sparked a lot of discussion about spending.

The early sticking points for local legislators was using state taxpayer dollars to pay the federal government back for unemployment insurance. There was an early bipar-

tisan effort to use some of the surplus to repay the unemployment insurance trust debt — about \$1.3 billion the state borrowed from the federal government to keep the unemployment insurance program afloat during the pandemic.

But that fell through when the mid-March deadline passed without any action. That means local businesses will see an increase in their taxes to help replenish the unemployment insurance trust fund, though there is a possibility that if legislators come to an agreement before the end of the session, businesses could be reimbursed for those payments, but that would be a lengthy complicated process.

"They're going to be put in a real not good place in terms of keeping a business going," Rep. Bob Dettmer (Dist. 39A) said.

Rep. Anne Neu Brindley

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Submitted Photo

Brothers of Mike and Ken Anderson pause to take in the sight of Mt. McKinley during their trip.

Camaraderie and community found on Iditarod

Forest Lake brothers complete trip along Alaskan trail via snowmobile

Natalie Ryder
Community Editor

Not many siblings plan to ride the Iditarod trail via snowmobile as the seasons shift from winter to spring for a vacation, but Forest Lake natives Doug, Ken and Mike Anderson knew it would suit

them.

"We were talking about this off and on for the last couple years, and then kind of like a year ago, we decided to do this," Doug Anderson said.

The three spent about a year getting supplies together and shipping them to Alaska, but the brothers didn't need to spend much time getting familiar with the trail, as Ken raced the Iditarod 17 times between 1999-2017. He placed in the top 10 six times, but has retired his mushing days and

turned to a snowmobile trip with his brothers.

"He's never done it by snowmobile, and he wanted us to be able to go with and see the trail," Doug said.

Ken knows many people along the trail and some mushers competing, which allowed the three to feel that sense of community along the expansive trail in the last frontier.

But Ken's mushing experience,

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News

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Iditarod

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while helpful, didn't necessarily make for an easy experience.

The Andersons weren't on a tight schedule like the mushers, so the brothers took their time completing the trail, which they did in about eight days starting in early March ending in mid March. The first-place musher of 2022 finished the race in about eight days and 14 hours on Tuesday, March 15.

The three rode on their own snowmobiles, with one of the machines pulling an almost 1,000-pound sled with barrels of fuel, a tent and essentials to get the three of them to each of the towns along the trail. The weight of the tent, which held a collapsible oven to warm it, was heavy, so they primarily planned to stay in cabins

along the trail. They stayed in an occasional bed and breakfast, and, one night, the garage of a mechanic.

"We were trying to avoid using the tent as much as possible," Doug said.

On one of the first nights of the journey, they had to pitch the tent around 3 a.m. alongside the trail after struggling up an icy hill.

"One heavier snowmobile that doesn't have studs on the track, you know, tried getting up there. Got to the top and then slid all the way back down in reverse to the bottom," Doug said.

Getting the snowmobiles up the hill was tricky enough, even without towing the 1,000-pound sled of gear. When they tried pulling the full sled with each of the snowmobiles, they decided half of the sled's contents would



Submitted Photo

From left, Mike, Doug and Ken Anderson completed the Iditarod trail on snowmobiles in eight days this March. Ken previously competed as a dog musher in the Iditarod 17 times, with his last race in 2017.

need to be unpacked and carried up the hill. Then Doug hopped back onto the studded snowmobile, drove a mile back to get the momentum to pull the half-full sled up the hill.

"As I got to the top, my brother was standing right there, and I'm totally spinning out. And they get behind it, and they're push-

ing it and we just barely, barely ease up that hill," Doug recalled.

After they refilled the sled and got back on their way, it was nearly midnight. By the time they reached their destination, they had rode nearly 80 miles. And when they finally reached the safety cabin, which included just two bunk beds to sleep on, they were dismayed to find someone else had beat them there.

After the rough night in the tent, the three decided they'd try to beat the group of six snowmobilers, which they'd later find out was called the Bearcat group, to the next town.

"Immediately, [when]

we pull into McGrath, there's a little bar there and the first thing I do is get a beer and bring each of my brothers a beer," Doug joked.

Camaraderie

The decision to beat the group of six snowmobilers to the cabins was the closest the Andersons got to racing on this vacation. But the competitive spirit in those early days to fight for the safety cabins later faded into camaraderie when the Bearcat group showed up to a cabin the Andersons and a hiker were already at.

"Of course we [said], 'Come on in,' and we had a nice night. They shared their boxed wine with us," Doug said. The 10 of them slept in a four-person cabin together.

Among the locals, snowmobilers, hikers, bikers and the mushers competing in the race, there was collective camaraderie along the trail to ensure everyone made it safely from place to place. Safety and knowledge about the trail and machines the Andersons rode on were crucial to finishing the trail. They were no strangers to snowmobiles before this trip, as they grew up riding them in northern

Minnesota.

"You could not do this trip unless you have the ability to ride decently and/or repair stuff on the fly with whatever you might have on hand," Doug said.

In the 1,000-pound sled, they had replacement parts to fix some typical issues that may occur with snowmobiles. But when one of the machine's oil lines blew out, they were stuck without the correct-sized tube to repair it.

"It was a nice day, but it was windy. And we're repairing, and we didn't really have the right diameter hose," Doug said.

They didn't have the replacement part until a group of Norwegian snowmobilers, who were on the trail supporting the rookie Norwegian musher Hanna Lyrek, stopped to help them.

"Then we became friends with them, saw them at a bunch of other stops," Doug said.

The kindness of residents and travelers of the Iditarod trail and is what surprised Doug the most.

"Unbelievable, you know, how accommodating everybody was and just wanting to help you out," Doug said.



Tax



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