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Dahms, Torkelson expect two-week push will end session

Lawmakers expect bonding bill to be passed

April 13, 2012

By Josh Moniz - Staff Writer , The Journal

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NEW ULM - It should only take an intense two-week push to end the current session of the Minnesota Legislature, said Sen. Gary Dahms and Rep. Paul Torkelson during their Thursday visit to New Ulm.

Questions about how long the Legislature will remain in session and whether legislators would cut the session short, regardless of whether some big bills get passed, have been floating around Minnesota for weeks. Senate Majority Leader Dave Senjem had pushed lawmakers to end by April 8, which did not happen.

Torkelson (R-Nelson Township) said he expects that the Legislature will stay in session until work on the major bills is completed.

Dahms (R-Redwood Falls) concurred with Torkelson, adding that he thought two weeks would be sufficient. He added that the Legislature would likely ramp up its work schedule, shifting from roughly five hours a day on floor sessions to all-day sessions and possible Saturday sessions.

Bonding

On the bonding bill, Dahms and Torkelson said the bill should definitely be passed this year.

Because a bonding bill was passed last year during the special session, it has been unclear what size bonding bill will be passed this year and whether it will be passed at all. So far, Gov. Mark


Dayton presented a \$775 million bonding plan in January. The Republican-controlled Legislature presented much smaller preliminary bills. The House presented a \$220 million State Capitol building renovation bill along with a \$280 million public works bill. The Senate presented a \$496 million bonding bill.

Dahms said he expects the final bonding bill to settle in the lower end of the \$400 million range. He said that the bonding bill passed last year covered a number of issues. He said that the combination of last year's bill and a smaller bill this year would be sufficient to cover all needed projects.


Both legislators said they expect the bonding bill to avoid funding for most regionally or city specific projects, like improving civic centers, in favor of focusing on infrastructure and repairs to state buildings, like the State Capitol.

Vikings stadium


On the Vikings stadium, Dahms and Torkelson said they needed to see more substantial plans and commitment from the City of Minneapolis before any bill could advance. Both said they had only had minor interaction with any of the stadium bills so far, but they didn't feel enough details about funding and city support had been

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...not enough. Some questioning and support has been
fleshed out. However, they said there was still a possibility that a
stadium bill could be passed this year, though it would take much
more work to get it moving.

Taxes

On the tax front, Dahms and Torkelson said they believed the
proposed phasing out of Minnesota's business property tax was
still active and likely to proceed to Gov. Dayton's desk. The
proposed bill would reduce the property tax on Minnesota
business when it went into effect and gradually increase its
reductions each year until it was eliminated. Torkelson pointed out
that the tax was unusual for most states. He said that it was
nothing but a burden on business and should be eventually
eliminated.

Highway14

On Highway14, Dahms and Torkelson said they aware of the
concern that the long-sought, four-lane expansion from New Ulm
to North Mankato may not be part of the Minnesota Department of
Transportation's 20-year plan. Torkelson said it's challenging to
get an emphasis on Highway 14 due to how many other projects
are vying of MnDOT's limited funds.

Dahms said he has taken the proactive action of organizing an
April 18 hearing with MnDOT on Highway 14 to bring attention on
the project. He said that several regional leaders, New Ulm City
Council members and members of the New Ulm to North Mankato
segment of the Highway 14 Partnership would speak at the

hearing.

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