

Jensen brings legislative update to Owatonna restaurant

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OWATONNA – With several key votes coming up in St. Paul, concerned citizens filled the back room of The Kitchen during Sen. Vicki Jensen’s monthly legislative update.

On Saturday morning during her third “Saturday with the Senator” discussion, Jensen, DFL-Owatonna, updated the crowd, handed out literature and answered questions about Highway 14, taxes and education.

She started the hour-long talk by saying she was disappointed that Minnesota DFL Gov. Mark Dayton said he wouldn’t sign a transportation bill if it includes an increase in the gas tax, which is currently about 30 cents a gallon.

Since the 2013 session started, Jensen was placed on the Senate Transportation and Public Safety Committee and authored a bill that would have allocated \$431.6 million to expand Highway 14 to four lanes, \$219 million of which would have been dedicated to the stretch of road between Owatonna and Dodge Center.

“I’ve done a lot of work on that. It’s very, very important to me and to this district. It’s something that I have worked on for a long time,” Jensen said.

The senator said she was very pleased with work of the chairs of the transportation committees for the work on projects outside of the Twin Cities.

“They’re not interested in a metro-only bill,” she said. “They’re not going to do that, and it was very evident when we worked together before the omnibus bill came out. It would have increased taxes, but increasing taxes in a way that would affect and impact the entire state of Minnesota, not just the metro area.”

Jensen said the current omnibus bill being discussed would have just enough funding to keep the lights on and pay the salaries of MnDOT.

“There would be nothing for Highway 14, nothing for transit, nothing for any type of expansion at all. It just keeps the lights on,” the senator said.

As the bill is currently constructed, Jensen said she could not vote for it in committee, and she doesn’t believe there are enough votes, even in the Dayton’s own party, to pass the bill out of the Transportation Committee. Jensen said there will be meetings throughout this week and into Saturday if necessary to finalize a passable bill.

Tax incentives for Greater Minnesota

On March 18, with Owatonna mayor Tom Kuntz at her side, Jensen testified in front of the Senate Taxes Committee for her bill, which, if passed, would provide business expansion tax incentives to Greater Minnesota businesses.

Blooming Prairie's state Rep. Shannon Savick, DFL-Wells, authored a similar bill in the House.

Jensen said the bill is a common sense approach to helping Minnesota small businesses expand and grow, creating jobs for residents of Greater Minnesota and helping businesses by reducing their tax burdens. Jensen hopes the new tax incentives help businesses hire more workers in Greater Minnesota.

If passed, Greater Minnesota businesses would receive sales tax exemptions on qualifying purchases, property tax exemptions for improvements of commercial property, income tax credits based on wages and number of full-time employees and state general tax exemptions for businesses who want to expand to Greater Minnesota.

"The main portion of my bill is retention, not just creating new ones," Jensen said.

To qualify for the tax incentive, businesses would have to do three things: (1) have operated for more than 12 months in Greater Minnesota, (2) pay employees at least 120 percent of federal poverty rate and (3) agree to expand its employment in Greater Minnesota by a set number of employees.

"Twin Cities metro area businesses currently receive the bulk of economic investment incentives through programs like the Angel Investment Tax Credit program, and statewide solutions continue to benefit the metro area disproportionately," Jensen said. "My bill seeks to create a more balanced approach."

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