



July 2022

Dear Friends and Neighbors –

I hope you and your family are well. The 2022 legislative session ended, but two things have not changed: 1) I’m as grateful as ever to serve our area in the Minnesota Senate, and 2) my job is to speak for everybody in the district, no matter who they are (or how they vote).

In February, the state announced a projected budget surplus of \$9.2 billion. For context, our two year budget is about \$52 billion, so the surplus was a sign of a healthy state economy - as was record low unemployment. As a result, legislators were looking to return part of the surplus to our citizens. A good start was passage of a \$3.2 billion unemployment insurance trust fund/frontline worker bill. It provided significant help for our businesses and workers. We also passed modest funding bills for agriculture, veterans, rural broadband, and mental health.

Unfortunately, we missed a big opportunity in the final month of session. We had a signed agreement in May - Governor, House, and Senate - to pass \$4 billion in tax cuts and spend another \$4 billion to help with education, long-term care staffing, public safety, and more. The details were not worked out before our required adjournment on May 23, but we could have easily compromised in a short special session. Certain legislators would not agree to do so. Let me be clear: I think legislators should be required to return for a special session and finish our work. Regardless, thanks (and stay tuned).

Nick



Bringing constituents to tour the Senate Chamber, to answer questions and listen to their thoughts, remains one of my favorite things to do at the Capitol.

Senate and Senator Nick Frentz Successes

Agriculture & Drought Relief for Farmers (HF 3420): The bill provided \$1.2 million in funding for the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab at the U of M to help our livestock producers with testing and preventing disease outbreaks. The bill included \$18.4 million for drought relief grants, and included funding to respond to High Path Avian Influenza and for our Rural Finance Authority disaster fund. .

Adult Mental Health Initiative (HF 2725): \$60 million for mental health services and staffing across our state, including the basics of my bill for the Adult Mental Health Initiative (SF 4473). This legislation was a high priority for Blue Earth and Nicollet County Human Services.

Rural Broadband (HF 3420): A combination of funds (general fund, the federal infrastructure bill (IIJA), and American Rescue Plan) provided over \$210 million to broadband projects. This will be a major step forward in getting high speed internet to all Minnesotans.

Pensions (3530): As a member of the Pension Commission, I was glad to vote “yes” on this bill. It allows retired teachers to return to the classroom without financial penalty, alters the vesting schedule for police and fire pensions, and expands eligibility for DHS employees in the Minnesota State Retirement System Correctional Plan, among other provisions.

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**State Senator
Nick Frentz**
**2022
CAPITOL
REPORT**



How I voted on the budget surplus bills and why:

These are the budget bills that *did* pass this session, and while they were not everything we should have done, each represented bipartisan compromise and was important to Minnesota.

Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund and Frontline Worker Bonuses (SF 2677):

YES vote

This was the largest appropriations bill we passed all year, and I was glad to be a voice for both business owners and employees. The bill sends \$750 checks directly to approximately 667,000 Minnesotans who served as essential workers during the pandemic and included \$2.7 billion to fully replenish the UITF, which helped prevent a possible increase in UI tax payments for our businesses. BTW, the UI trust fund is one of the best anti poverty programs we can have.

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (HF 3765):

YES vote

The ENRTF was established in 1988 through a constitutional amendment and holds assets generated by the Minnesota State Lottery for the protection of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources. There was an argument about process: even though the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) failed to reach a consensus on recommending specific projects (which is the normal approach, and allows broad input and debate), a bill was passed anyway. With over \$70.8 million spread among 78 projects in the final bill, this legislation will fund significant good work.

2022 Outdoor Heritage Fund (HF 3438):

YES vote

\$159 million in spending on projects designed to "restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife." The bill provided \$35 million for nine projects impacting prairies; \$13.2 million for five projects impacting forests; \$26.7 million for seven wetlands projects; and \$83.3 million for 22 projects impacting habitats.

Omnibus Health and Human Services Policy (HF 4605):

YES vote

This bill increased the number of families eligible for food assistance from the Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (SNAP) by expanding the income eligibility from 165% to 200% of the federal poverty line. This expansion will have no cost to the state budget, and yet allows nearly 1,500 additional families to access needed food benefits, paid for entirely by federal funds.

Omnibus Liquor (SF 3008):

YES vote

A long time coming, this compromise bill will allow cocktail rooms and distilleries to sell cocktails and up to 750ml per customer (in approved containers). Most notably, it also raises the "growler cap" from 20,000 to 150,000 barrels, allowing some of the largest Minnesota craft brewers to sell growlers (larger containers) on site.

State Contracts (HF 3346):

YES vote

Our state employees help make Minnesota run smoothly. The Legislature is responsible for approving State Contracts, and I was a proud "YES" vote for our state employees wages, benefits, and workplace safety issues. The ratified contracts cover more than 40,000 workers, including corrections officers, staff at state residential schools, radio operators, many of whom live and work in our district.

Omnibus Veterans and Military Affairs (SF 4233):

YES vote

The bill appropriates \$52.3 million in additional funding to the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs and the Minnesota National Guard. Nearly \$25 million in new funding will be distributed as service bonus checks to post-9/11 veterans and Gold Star families and there is \$8.2 million for Veteran Stable Housing Initiatives.

Proposed Local Bonding Projects

In May, there was an express agreement to pass a \$1.4 billion bill for bonding (borrowing) projects - which also failed to get done. These projects create jobs and provide critical infrastructure and it is widely understood that we will just have to pay more later, as materials costs are rising. These are the bills I chief authored:

City of Mankato - Wastewater Treatment Facility

(SF 3273): \$30.0 million for the new, badly needed facility. The project would help serve six neighboring municipalities with roughly 65,000 residents.

St. Peter Regional Treatment Center (SF 2455):

\$17.8 million to design, remodel, construct, and equip buildings for the Minnesota Sex Offender Program on the St. Peter campus.

MSU Mankato (SF 3030): Minnesota State would receive \$7.08 million to design and renovate the basement clinical sciences building to house Armstrong Hall students. This funding will also include designing the new Armstrong Hall facility.

Caswell Park Improvement (SF 667): \$8.5 million for the City of North Mankato to construct, furnish, and equip a regional indoor field house to serve the community and regional athletics.



Senate committee hearings are a critical part of the process. In March, MN Public Utility Commissioner Joe Sullivan of Mankato testified on one of my bills in the Senate Energy and Utility Finance Committee, where I serve as the Ranking Minority member.



The groundbreaking ceremony in April for the Highway 14 four lane extension from Nicollet to New Ulm was a historic moment. As chief author of the bill, I was proud to be joined by US Senators Klobuchar and Smith, Governor Walz, and others.

Leadership

Assistant DFL Leader

I was glad to be elected again to serve as an Assistant Minority Leader in the Senate, This helps give our district, and all of Greater MN, a voice in leadership discussions and negotiations regarding policy and budget issues. I also remain the chair of our Clean Energy and Climate Caucus. It's more work but I really enjoy it.

Committee Assignments

I proudly serve on the Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy Committee, the Energy and Utilities Finance and Policy Committee (where I serve as the Ranking DFL Member), the Rules and Administration Committee, Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement, and the Legislative Audit Commission.