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Minnesota House of Representatives

HOUSE DFL LEADER

May 24, 2016

Speaker Kurt Daudt
Minnesota House of Representatives
463 State Office Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

To Speaker Daudt:

The chaotic end to the 2016 legislative session was again an embarrassment for the Minnesota House of Representatives. By waiting to process and pass all the major bills in the final hours and minutes - some of which did not even get vetted in a public conference committee - House members were not able to adequately represent their constituents and ordinary Minnesotans lost their ability to participate in the process. Members were forced to vote on bills that had been negotiated and written behind closed doors without public meetings and that members had not even read. The language of the bonding bill and amendments were literally unavailable to several of our members. This bad process led to the House of Representatives passing a bonding bill that was littered with errors: major projects that had been agreed to were left out (Hermantown Wellness Center, the Duluth Steam Plant, the Polk County - North Country Food Bank). The language of the bill would not have allowed any money to be used for Highway 14. And perhaps most alarming, the total bond authorization was \$1.2 million rather than \$1.2 billion. This is not a staff problem; this is a time management and bad process problem. And it is bad for Minnesota.

I am particularly troubled by the omission of another provision that would have raised the cap on county regional rail authority contributions to fund rail projects from 10% to 20%. By failing to include that provision, you torpedoed hundreds of millions of road and bridge investment over your refusal to allow a local government to spend its own money the way it sees fit.

I am also troubled by inaccurate statements you have made to the press about what happened on the last day of session related to that provision. In rushing to blame Senate Democrats while taking no responsibility yourself, you claimed that you never agreed to raise the cap on county regional rail authority contributions. That is false. In the early evening on Sunday, I joined a meeting between you, Majority Leader Peppin and Senator Bakk in Senator Bakk's office. Senator Bakk gave you the amended language related to lifting the cap. Senator Bakk made clear that any deal on bonding needed such a provision included. You took the language without rejecting it. Telling reporters otherwise is simply false.



The incident, however, raises a larger problem. Because the meeting occurred behind closed doors and the bonding bill never went through a public conference committee process, there is no way to independently verify anyone's account of these high-stakes negotiations involving billions of dollars of public money.

The trust of the people in their government is too important to allow this to happen again. As such, I suggest that leadership negotiations about any potential special session be conducted in public meetings and that the leaders confine themselves to setting broad parameters for any bill that may come up during the special session. I also suggest that all bills be negotiated in a public conference committee/working group where all provisions are openly discussed and voted upon. Finally, I suggest that we agree that the public and legislators be granted at least 24 hours to review any bill debated in a special session so that we can avoid the serious errors that were included in the end of session bonding bill.

We all must take responsibility for how the House of Representatives conducts its business. Over the years under both Democrats and Republicans we have seen conclusions to the session that are not transparent to the public. I would submit that the last two years were the worst yet. As lawmakers, we owe it to the public to work together to change this for the better. As a start, any work leading up to and during a special session should be conducted in the public.

Sincerely,



Paul Thissen
Minority Leader

cc Governor Mark Dayton
Majority Leader Tom Bakk
Minority Leader David Hann