

Voters demand progress at Legislature

By Doug Loon

Change swept the nation in this year's elections as America woke up to a President Donald Trump in his upset victory over Hillary Clinton. Change propelled the shakeup in Minnesota's political landscape, too, as Minnesotans affirmed their support for divided government. The Legislature is now firmly Republican. The executive branch remains Democrat under Governor Mark Dayton.

Voters were also crystal clear about their expectations that the governor and Legislature will govern – that they will work together to develop, debate and pass solutions to our state's most pressing problems. No stalemates. No stagnation. Our policymakers must use the experience of the last two years to build a record of progress that all Minnesotans will be proud of. The Minnesota Chamber and our local partners are ready to do our part.

The election offers some key takeaways:

- Personal economics were on Minnesotans minds – especially health care, but also economic growth and wage growth. Everyone wants to be part of a growing economy.
- Good candidates and hard work produce solid results.
- The House and Senate are mirroring each other in the state's political landscape. Democrats are being elected primarily in the urban core and are increasingly liberal; Republicans hail in primarily the outer ring suburbs and regional centers.
- Republicans are making substantive gains in the suburbs that we have not seen for years.

The Senate now stands at 34 Republicans and 33 Democrats, according to unofficial results. Two races are within the vote totals that trigger automatic recounts. Margins in the House are larger with 76 Republicans and 57 Democrats elected. In addition, one House seat remains unresolved; a special election is scheduled for February 14 for District 32B.

The Minnesota Chamber and our partners are ready to present, discuss and help pass solutions that will accelerate the development and growth of our statewide economy. Our annual Minnesota Business Benchmarks provides an excellent springboard for our legislative agenda. Our top priorities for 2017 are:

- Reduce business taxes that undermine growth, entrepreneurship and expansion of Minnesota businesses.
- Pass long-term, comprehensive transportation package that increases investment in the state's multimodal infrastructure.
- Allow flexibility in workplace regulations and oppose one-size-fits-all mandates; pass statewide pre-emption of local labor mandates.
- Provide employers with more options and greater flexibility in providing health care coverage for employees.

The election provides the political landscape for the 2017 Legislature. The budget forecast will set the financial parameters. The 2016 Legislature adjourned with a \$729 million surplus for FY 2016/17 which will likely change in the December 2 report.

We are most effective at the Capitol when we build relationships and elect legislators who understand business issues. That's why the Minnesota Chamber works year-round to recruit and elect pro-business leaders regardless of political affiliation. We're pleased with our results. Our Leadership Fund PAC was victorious in 70 of 77 House contests and 32 of 39 in Senate contests.

The 2017 Legislature convenes January 4, and our work has already begun. The election results are shaping our 2017 proposals. Now, policymakers and business leaders must work collectively to adopt them. That way we will be ready for the future – ready for change and ready to grow.

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