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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

June 28, 2011

The scheduled June 15th adjournment date for the 125th Legislature has passed. With a handful of significant issues still to be resolved, the House and Senate extended the session for five days. The elected officials return this week to complete their work on remaining issues, including a bill to allow fireworks, charter schools and expanding gambling. The lawmakers will also need to decide how to handle several vetoes from Governor LePage.

The one bill the governor did sign into law was the budget. Members of the Appropriations Committee unanimously endorsed a two-year biennial budget. As we have discussed throughout the six-month session, the budget has been and always is the most important issue confronting legislators. The budget provides funding for all state services. With other states making national news for their shut-downs and protest rallies, Maine saw none of this. The process was open and bi-partisan. As everyone will agree, the budget is not perfect; it is a product of compromise and consensus.

The budget does provide several significant policy changes; including a tax cut for the highest income tax bracket, welfare reform and pension system redesign to ensure future solvency. To learn more about the budget visit the link below.

<http://www.mainelegislature.org/LawMakerWeb/summary.asp?ID=280040546>

The session did have several controversial issues that divided the legislators. One partisan divide was on the repeal of Maine's same day voter registration law. Republicans embraced the change as a necessary tool to prevent fraud on Election Day and to allow municipal clerks the time for verification. This measure is on the books in 41 other states. Democrats counter that the repeal will disenfranchise voters. There may be an effort to collect signatures for a People's Veto on this new law.

A second controversial issue that split the parties addressed changes in Maine's health insurance laws. Republicans have longed for the opportunity to bring competition to the state and to provide options for small businesses that are unable to afford health insurance. The law will allow Mainers to buy insurance across state lines. Democrats objected to the bill based on fears that it will negatively impact rural areas of the state where access to care is limited.

As the final days of the session approach, we want to thank all the members of the 125th Maine Legislature for their dedication and hard work. They spent countless hours in Augusta conducting the people's business. They agreed to disagree on issues and kept the focus on how best to generate jobs and create economic activity. To learn more about the more than 1,500 bills that were considered, visit to the state's website below.

<http://www.maine.gov/legis/>

— Cheryl Timberlake
Executive Vice President