

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NINA MOINI: Well, short on sleep, Minnesota lawmakers are at the Capitol for a session sendoff. They can't pass any more bills. That deadline arrived at midnight. But they're counting up the wins and losses from their three-month stay in St. Paul. They're also bidding farewell to colleagues who've already announced they won't be back in 2027.

SPEAKER 1: For everybody that is coming back here, we will continue to do this work. Please remember, don't take one day, one second, one minute, one hour for granted. And unlike me, try to live in those moments. Try to live in those moments.

NINA MOINI: Lots of emotions on a day like today. Peter Cox has an ear on the House and the Senate, but is breaking away to fill us in. Thanks for being here, Peter.

PETER COX: Hi, Nina.

NINA MOINI: So what has this morning after that final sprint been like? We're hearing from some emotional lawmakers, it sounds like there, up top.

PETER COX: Yeah, yeah. And there's plenty of emotion, but there's also kind of this feel of "the day after final exams" exhale in this place. I saw that just walking in. There were bleary eyes, tall coffees, and just kind of a quiet around the building.

But this is also a moment when what happened or did not happen during the session really shifts toward elections. Overnight, reporters' email boxes were filled up with messaging from members of each caucus highlighting victories, placing blame for what did not get done, or taking credit for staving off certain bills. And that's really a sign, too, of what's ahead. Tomorrow morning, candidate filing for legislative seats opens up. Every single seat is up for election this year. So in other words, the shift from legislative mode to campaign mode will be quick.

NINA MOINI: Going to need more coffee for sure.

PETER COX: Yes.

NINA MOINI: What were some of the marquee bills to beat that midnight deadline?

PETER COX: So the bills that were part of the agreement made between legislative leaders and the governor, all were wrapped up by the deadline last night. That includes a major \$1.2 billion bonding bill that's going to help pay for infrastructure projects across the state, things like roads, water infrastructure, other things like that.

There are two bills that could help Minnesotans' wallets-- a one-year decrease in vehicle tab fees and a one-year increase in the homestead property tax credit. That property tax credit break arrives this fall, and the tab fee cuts set in on January 1. And then finally, the state is stepping in to help Hennepin County Medical Center, known as HCMC, and other hospitals statewide, to ease their financial troubles.

NINA MOINI: OK, and what are some areas that sort of got left behind, at least this session?

- PETER COX:** Well, Nina, Democrats came into the session hoping to tackle two major issues that affected Minnesotans over the last year. One of those was gun restrictions to try to prevent school shootings, and another was to help small businesses that were adversely affected by the immigration enforcement surge. Both passed in the Minnesota Senate, but they couldn't get traction in the House.
- Democrats staged a "day and a half long" sit-in on the House floor in the final days of the session, but that didn't move the ball. There were also some tax cut measures that Republicans wanted to see, including adopting no tax on tips or overtime, but those were not included in any of the final bills.
- NINA MOINI:** OK, so at this point, is everything that passed for sure going to become law, or could there be any last-minute changes?
- PETER COX:** No, I'd expect most will or all will be coming passed into law. In his 7 and 1/2 years in office, Governor Tim Walz has only used his veto power once to stop a bill from becoming law. He was in on the negotiations with legislative leaders to square up an end-of-session agreement. And the provisions in that agreement all seem to have passed in the way they were framed up in that agreement.
- NINA MOINI:** And like you mentioned, today's more ceremonial. I think it was Representative Cedrick Frazier from New Hope we were hearing from up top. But what else are you hearing from some of these lawmakers who may be departing?
- PETER COX:** Well, there's 11 members of the House who've announced they're retiring and 15 retirements in the Senate. So we're hearing from a lot of them. But there's also House members looking to make the jump over to the Senate. There's 10 legislators seeking other offices in politics. So there will be a lot of new faces in these chambers next year. But both bodies are losing some longtime lawmakers. A few had nearly four decades of experience by themselves. Today, we're listening to retirement speeches on the floor. And this is kind of a ritual at the end of every biennium.
- SPEAKER 2:** Our retirement speeches, they're done in order of seniority, the most senior to the least senior-- the least senior to the most senior. Good morning, everybody. [LAUGHS]
- SPEAKER 3:** I would like to just say what I always said that kept me grounded. And back home, they know this. They want to put it on billboards, but I didn't want to do it. But it is my saying is, don't take the bait, and watch your own bobber.
- SPEAKER 4:** It has been an honor and a privilege to be in this chamber with all of you, even those that maybe I don't agree with all of the time.
- NINA MOINI:** Hearing from several lawmakers at once there, Peter. So the House has been tied, the Senate has been split by a single vote. How hard fought will this campaign be to alter those numbers?
- PETER COX:** Well, during the gun control debate, we really heard over and over from Democratic lawmakers that they're going to take that issue to the campaign trail. The inaction, they say, on that issue will reverberate at the ballot box in November. But you'll also see that from Republicans, too, on issues around taxes or not taking a hard enough stance on fraud. Clearly, both parties would much rather be working with an advantage in the House, and they're going to be fighting hard, starting immediately, to secure that in the election.

NINA MOINI: All right, Peter, thanks for stepping away for a moment to fill us in on the latest. Really appreciate it.

PETER COX: You're welcome.