



Dedicated to a Strong Greater Minnesota

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‘Greater Minnesota session’ ended up being a great disappointment

ST. PAUL—With the 2015 legislative session now in the record books, leaders of the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities (CGMC) and the Greater Minnesota Partnership (GMNP) held a press conference via conference call today to discuss the outcomes of a session they are calling a “wasted opportunity” to address the needs of rural communities.

“There was a lot of talk earlier in the year that this would be the Greater Minnesota session, but ultimately the Legislature and Governor did very little to move our communities forward,” said Heidi Omerza, president of the CGMC and a member of the Ely City Council. “Minnesota did not become a great state by nursing the status quo.”

Omerza, along with Dan Dorman, executive director of the GMNP and a former state representative; Marty Seifert, a former state legislator and gubernatorial candidate who now lobbies on behalf of the CGMC; and Bradley Peterson, senior lobbyist for the CGMC, all expressed frustration with the lackluster session and the lack of significant legislative action on key initiatives.

“The Legislature’s failure to pass a tax bill or a major transportation bill meant that some of our top priorities — an increase in LGA, tax credits for workforce housing development, long-term funding for roads and bridges — were abandoned this year,” Peterson said. “As an organization, we aren’t going to sit back and pretend we are OK with that outcome.”

GMNP leader Dorman, whose organization is the economic development arm of the CGMC, noted that the final jobs and energy bill passed during the special session included some funding for Greater Minnesota priorities such as broadband expansion, job training, infrastructure needs and workforce housing grants, but that the amount of money provided for these programs is too low to have a significant impact.

“Minnesota had a nearly \$2 billion surplus, yet lawmakers allocated less than \$11 million for rural broadband and only \$4 million for workforce housing,” Dorman said. “You could say that’s a start toward addressing a larger need, but the truth is that Greater Minnesota will be stuck in neutral unless our elected officials make a more serious commitment.”

The Greater Minnesota advocates noted that there was strong bipartisan support for all of their key initiatives, which left them all the more perplexed as to why so little progress was made this session.

“The 2015 session didn’t pan out the way we hoped,” Omerza said, “but with so much money left on the bottom line, we have high expectations that they will accomplish more for Greater Minnesota next year.”

A summary of the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities/Greater Minnesota Partnership’s initiatives and the legislative actions taken this session can be found on [this chart](#).

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The Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization representing 85 cities outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Coalition educates legislators about issues important to Greater Minnesota. Visit the CGMC online at greatermncities.org.