

Press Release



For Release: Immediate
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AASP-MN'S HARD-FOUGHT LEGISLATIVE BATTLE GOES DOWN TO THE WIRE

With less than 24 hours before the constitutionally-mandated date for adjournment, AASP-MN provisions to close a steering loophole and prohibit insurer mandates for specific parts procurement software programs and electronic estimating systems were still on the table at the Minnesota State Capitol. However, after a late-night collapse in negotiations between conference committee members and with time running out, virtually all policy provisions - including those proposed by AASP-MN - were stripped from the Jobs, Economic Development and Energy Finance bill. That bill passed the House with just seconds remaining in the 2015 Legislative Session.

Despite a long list of challenges, if not for the dysfunction and breakdown in the legislative process surrounding budget negotiations, AASP-MN Executive Director Judell Anderson believes that the Association had a real chance for its provisions to become law. "We came so close," she said. "If we had been given an opportunity for a fair hearing to make our case, I'm confident the votes were with us. As it is, it doesn't really feel like we got outplayed or beat by our opponent, but rather were the victim of a bad call by the referee," she added.

AASP-MN overcame many obstacles over the course of the Session to keep its provisions in play as the Session came to a close. Among them: a reluctance in the Senate and an outright refusal in the House to grant the bill a hearing; orchestrated attempts by Senate Commerce Committee members to send the bill off "to die"; and a radio campaign by the insurance industry characterizing the bill as anti-consumer and anti-choice. Of course the Association was also up against the usual army of insurance industry lobbyists, including additional contract lobbyists retained just for this issue. This formidable force spread a considerable amount of misinformation far and wide about the AASP-MN provisions.

Some of the highest drama of the 2015 Legislative Session took place on the Senate Floor as AASP-MN's advocates fought to retain the provisions the Association had successfully placed in a finance bill for Commerce Committee matters. During the course of the floor debate, an amendment was offered to remove the AASP-MN provisions from the bill and then a second amendment was proposed to add language which would have rendered the provisions useless. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park) and Senator John Pederson (R-St. Cloud) who spoke very eloquently in defense of small businesses in general and collision repair shops in particular, both amendments were defeated. AASP-MN owes both of them a debt of gratitude for their commitment to support the industry.

The final hurdle for AASP-MN to clear was the House-Senate Conference Committee, whose job was to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate finance bills. This is where the meltdown in negotiations occurred and caused legislative leadership to step in and hastily assemble a skeleton, "lights-on" bill which did not include the AASP-MN provisions.

AASP-MN extends its sincere appreciation to chief lobbyist Kevin Walli and his staff, as well as its 2015 support lobbyist, Mike Beard, for their hard work and long hours on the Association's behalf. Also, a special thanks to the many AASP-MN members who met with, made phone calls and sent emails to their legislators requesting support for the Association's efforts. Without these efforts, the proposal would certainly not have made as much progress as it did.

The 2016 Legislative Session convenes on March 8, 2016. In the meantime, AASP-MN plans to regroup, reassess and recharge to fight yet another day for its members and the entire collision repair industry.