

Maine's 128th Legislature returned to the State House last Thursday (August 30) for what is commonly assumed to be the latest session date in the state's history. It was the first time the House and Senate had resumed activity since mid-July when the two bodies initiated a special session to pass crucial appropriations bills that dealt with nursing home and community service provider funding, as well as omnibus reform of Maine's legalized adult-use and medical marijuana markets. This special session was made necessary several months ago by a non-typical refusal of certain elements within the Legislature to extend its statutory adjournment date past April 18.

In short, at that time the Legislature adjourned its 2nd Regular Session with hundreds of proposed bills outstanding. However, a pair of joint orders were authored to preserve those bills that were without final disposition until a theoretical special session could be negotiated and convened. Following on and off negotiations between then and early June, legislative leadership resumed discussions in earnest after Maine's primary Election Day in June. This resulted in the July special session that, in addition to the aforementioned legislation, saw the passage of dozens more bills there simply had not been time to finish prior to April 18.

Progress in reaching final closure to the session was slowed later in the month, though, when disagreement erupted over an otherwise routine "errors bill" that sought to correct mistakes in the passage of prior legislation. Among these errors was a language technicality in a previous appropriations bill to fund the Maine Clean Elections Act program, specifically the mechanism by which funds could be dispersed to registered candidates. The issue, though contentious for several weeks, was rendered moot by the Maine Ethics Commission when they voted earlier in August to clarify the intention of the language allowing for the release of funds. This paved the way for negotiations to return and finally end the session.

The two chambers convened Thursday morning and finally adjourned at roughly 11:45 that evening. Throughout the course of the day a number of major legislative items were passed back and forth between the chambers, allowing for their enactment and eventual journey to Governor LePage's desk. Among these was the errors bill, LD 1894, after the clean elections-related language was stripped to satisfy the House Republicans who generally oppose the program.

In addition, LD 1655, Governor LePage and his Department of Administrative & Financial Services' long desired attempt to conform to federal tax reform, was enacted by both chambers. This legislation will make changes to filers' personal exemption and standard deduction, while also conforming to a number of business and international tax models structured after President Trump's

2017 federal package. The Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee also held a late-night public hearing on a bill proposed by Secretary of State Matt Dunlap to fund unforeseen expenses associated with Maine's newly implemented ranked-choice voting system.

Prior in the week, the Health & Human Services Committee held public hearings and work sessions on a number of child welfare and safety bills prompted by multiple child deaths earlier this year. These were also taken up by the Legislature Thursday and made their way between the two bodies, several eventually being enacted.

A bill that will allow for the construction of a monument to Gold Star Families beside the State House's Vietnam Veterans Memorial was also enacted. This had been advocated for by a coalition of volunteers, many of them the close relatives of deceased service people, and received unanimous support from the Legislature.

A "veto day" is presumed necessary to address expected vetoes by Governor LePage of several of Thursday's enacted bills. As such, the presiding officers advise that the Legislature may return on September 12th or thereabouts to address the vetoes and to finally adjourn *sine die*. Whether the Legislature finally adjourns or not, in keeping with the spirit of the First Session, the Second Session of Maine's 128th Legislature was also one of intense negotiation and historic length.

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