

Legislators: Progress real but unnoticed

By Tim Krohn

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MANKATO — Amid the contentious debates over balancing the budget, health care and K-12 education reform, less noticed progress was made on issues that will help businesses and local economies.

That was the message from three local lawmakers who met with business and civic leaders Friday.

“ There was tremendous support for transit and rail,” said Rep. Terry Morrow, DFL-St. Peter, referring to development of a statewide transit plan.

Sen. Kathy Sheran, DFL-Mankato and Rep. Kathy Brynaert, DFL-Mankato, said the Legislature also passed legislation that creates tax credits for business investments, improves research, science and technology improvements at colleges, and streamlines the process for permits and regulations.

There was also creation of a rapid response team within the Department of Employment and Economic Development that can assist struggling businesses with the goal of keeping people employed.

Sheran said a bonding bill

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Session had disappointments

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created jobs and invested in infrastructure. “ The disappointment was that is wasn’t big enough.”

The disappointments of the session were, for the lawmakers and participants assembled by Greater Mankato Growth, more numerous than the successes.

Brynaert said the decision not to accept federal funding to expand the number of people eligible for Medical Assistance “ will hurt the most needy of our state.” And she said, it will

harm outstate hospitals who will have to provide more unpaid medical care.

The issue, which got tied up in political debate over "Obamacare," will result in the state losing \$1 million per day, Morrow said.

The three said lack of progress on making substantial changes to the way taxes are collected and health and education reforms were bogged down in an increasingly political process.

They said lawmakers, working in committees, do make substantive recommendations based on good research and data. But when things hit the legislative floors, partisanship and the desire for TV sound bites create rancor.

"It creates a sense of hopelessness and disengagement by the public," Sheran

said.

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