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ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026

2026 Minnesota Legislative Session: A Closely Divided Legislature

The 2026 legislative session is underway at the Minnesota Capitol and is shaping up to be a challenging and closely watched year for policymakers and stakeholders alike. With narrow political margins, limited budget flexibility the session is expected to focus on targeted issues rather than sweeping policy changes. The session convened on **February 17, 2026**, and must adjourn by **May 18, 2026** (the legislature cannot pass any legislation on the 18th).

Political Landscape

The political dynamics at the Capitol are particularly noteworthy this year. The Minnesota House is currently **evenly divided** (67 DFL-67 Rep), meaning bipartisan cooperation will be required to advance any legislation. Meanwhile, the Minnesota Senate is controlled by the DFL with a **one-vote majority**, creating a very slim margin that also requires careful coalition building.

Because of this balance, both chambers will likely proceed cautiously, and many policy proposals will need bipartisan support to move forward.

Adding another layer of complexity, **2026 is an election year**. Legislators are already looking ahead to the fall campaigns, which can make controversial or politically sensitive proposals more difficult to advance. Historically, election years tend to produce shorter agendas and more incremental policy changes as lawmakers remain mindful of their constituents and campaign considerations.

Increased Security at the State Capitol

A new weapons screening has taken effect at the Minnesota State Capitol for the legislative session. The screening process will closely resemble entering many other government buildings, as well as major sporting events or

concerts, with modern equipment able to screen most individuals in just a few seconds, while bags and other large items will need to go through a scanner.

Budget Outlook

Unlike the large budget surpluses that shaped policy discussions in recent years, the **current budget forecast leaves limited room for new spending initiatives**. As a result, lawmakers are expected to focus on a **relatively small supplemental budget bill** rather than a large expansion of programs.

However, 2026 is also typically a **bonding year**, meaning the legislature will consider a capital investment package to fund infrastructure projects across the state. Bonding bills typically include investments in transportation, higher education facilities, water infrastructure, and other public assets. As always, reaching agreement on the size and scope of the bonding bill will require negotiation between both parties and chambers and must pass by 2/3 majority vote...not a simple majority vote.



Pending Legislative Issues

An emerging issue area is Thermal Energy Networks (TENs) (Senate File 4287/House File 4122). These systems use shared underground infrastructure to provide heating and cooling to multiple buildings, often utilizing ground source geothermal technology. Utilities are currently exploring TENs as part of Minnesota's clean energy transition with developing pilot projects and data collection around the state. This legislation would mandate TENs systems and require widespread deployment. Utilities and operators express concern with this approach and prefer waiting for the pilot project to generate sufficient data to evaluate the cost, op-


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Spots Still AVAILABLE for the 2026 Blue Flame Golf Tournament!

It's time to dust off your clubs and mark your calendars — the **Minnesota Blue Flame Association Golf Tournament** is back! Join us on **June 11, 2026** at the beautiful **Cannon Golf Club** in **Cannon Falls** for a fun day of golf, networking, and friendly competition with colleagues across the industry. Shot gun start at 12:15 PM.

This annual event is a great opportunity to spend time outdoors with customers and peers while building valuable connections. Whether you're aiming for a hole-in-one or just enjoying the camaraderie, it's always one of the most popular Blue Flame events of the year.

Event Details

 **June 11, 2026**

 **Cannon Golf Club**

**REGISTER
TODAY!**

Your registration includes:

- 18 holes of golf with cart
- Lunch and dinner
- Two drink tickets
- Awards reception
- A full afternoon of networking and fun



In addition to playing, **sponsorship opportunities are also available** for companies looking to gain extra visibility and connect with industry professionals. It's a great way to showcase your organization while supporting the association.

Spots fill quickly, so be sure to **register early and explore sponsorship opportunities today at [BLUEFLAME.ORG](https://blueflame.org).**

We hope to see you on the course for a great day of golf, networking, and Blue Flame fun!

Blue Flame Lodge Returns to the Minnesota State Fair in 2026

The Blue Flame Gas Association is excited to once again welcome thousands of fairgoers to the **Blue Flame Lodge** at the **2026 Minnesota State Fair**, running **August 27 – September 7**.



Open daily from **9 a.m. to 9 p.m.**, the Lodge will once again be a lively hub filled with education, giveaways, and friendly faces. Thanks to the dedication of more than **35 volunteers who staff the Lodge each year**, fair visitors enjoy a welcoming place to stop, relax, and engage with industry experts.

A Welcoming Outdoor Space

The Lodge's inviting outdoor space will again feature landscaping provided by **Superior Landscaping & Irrigation**, showcasing natural gas fire features such as tables and firepits.

MN Exteriors will be unveiling new features outside the Lodge that will add to the lively atmosphere around the exhibit.

Inside the Lodge

In past years, thousands of items have been shared with fairgoers — from colorful yardsticks and reusable bags to water

bottles and jar grips — helping spark conversations about natural gas safety and efficiency.

Comfort by Design will be on hand to talk about fireplaces, while **Auer Steel/Bryant** representatives will share information about HVAC systems and home comfort technology. And answer safety questions from **Gopher State One Call** to get your "ever popular" colorful yardstick.

A Popular Stop for Water

The Lodge's water bottle filling station has become one of the fair's hidden gems. With filtered water sponsored by **Air Mechanical**, the station recorded nearly **19,000 water bottle fills last year**, making the Blue Flame Lodge a refreshing stop for thirsty fairgoers.

With engaging displays, helpful information, and a welcoming atmosphere, the **Blue Flame Lodge continues to be a highlight of the Minnesota State Fair** and a great way to connect with the public about natural gas.

If you are interested in helping develop new ideas for the Blue Flame Lodge or volunteering during the fair, please contact **Annette at ahenkel@blueflame.org.**

Mark your calendars for August 27 – September 7, 2026 for the next **Minnesota Get-Together!**

**Grab a friend
or coworker
and sign-up to
volunteer!**

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erational performance, and long-term effectiveness of thermal networks in the state.

Another perennial issue is around strict, prescriptive reporting requirement on excavation projects (Senate File 4339/House File 4233) without allowing any flexibility for utility engineers.

Other legislation impacting the natural gas industry is eliminating the sunset of the gas utility infrastructure cost (GUIC) rider (HF 3830/SF 3954). GUIC is utilized for natural gas line replacement/relocation in order to meet safety requirements and is an important tool to provide flexibility to utilities to address specific types of capital projects on the gas distribution system.

Looking Ahead

With a tied House, a one-vote Senate majority, and the pressures of an election year, the 2026 legislative session will require careful negotiation and bipartisan cooperation.

Engagement and monitoring will remain critical as lawmakers work through these issues and consider policies that could influence Minnesota's long-term energy infrastructure and investment landscape.

Spotlight on the Public Utilities Commission

While lawmakers are in the throes of a busy legislative session, attention is also turning to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC). The PUC — composed of five commissioners appointed by the Governor to staggered six-year terms — plays a pivotal role in shaping the state's energy future through its oversight of utilities, rates, and infrastructure investments.

One issue drawing particular focus is **line extension allowance policy**, which governs how utilities extend gas service to new developments and how those costs are allocated. Line extension allowances are a long-standing mechanism to ensure equitable access to utility service. Removing these allowances would shift significant upfront costs to new customers, creating barriers to access for households and small businesses, especially in rural and growing communities.

A hearing is expected to be scheduled in the next few months for the PUC to make a final decision on the policy.

Member Dues

To be included in our on-line **Membership Directory** we must receive your dues by April 15.

Upcoming Events**Thursday, June 11, 2026**

Blue Flame Golfing Event — Cannon Golf Club

Thursday, Aug. 27 - Labor Day, Monday Sept. 7, 2026

Blue Flame Lodge at the MN State Fair

Thursday, September 10, 2026

Blue Flame Fishing Event — Mille Lacs Lake

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Let us know...

If you have something to submit or an address change.

If you would like to submit information to be considered for the next member newsletter or have an address change, contact Annette at ahenkel@blueflame.org



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Blue Flame Advertising Opportunities

Support the Association while reaching hundreds of natural gas industry professionals.

Contact us to reserve your advertising opportunities, including the next Association Newsletter edition.

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