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Commentary: Bonding bill can get us through COVID-19

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By Mike Ganz, president of the Central Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council, St. Paul, MN

This year is a bonding year at the Minnesota Capitol. This is when the Legislature authorizes the state to sell bonds to raise money for public construction projects to benefit the entire state. These investments can help build and preserve public buildings, fuel local economic development, and provide safe water and roads. Investment in public infrastructure projects will create the needed economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and keep Minnesota's communities working.

Townships, cities, counties and state agencies have requested over \$5 billion in unmet needs that could fund over 500 public construction projects across our state. While not all of these projects will get funded, a strong bonding bill will create the stimulus we need to strengthen Minnesota's economy during these difficult times.

Bonding is a valuable economic development tool to fund our state's economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. In our region, construction professionals will be ready to take on these new infrastructure projects safely. Construction workers and their

contractors are committed to high quality, family sustaining jobs and ensuring that going to work is safe for workers, their families and our community.

What does a state bonding package mean to us locally? There are more than 20 bonding projects that have been proposed for our region. For example, \$5.6 million has been requested for the Runestone Community Center (RCC) expansion. The RCC has served as a gathering place for West Central Minnesota since its opening in 1978. The expansion will add approximately 44,000 square feet to the existing 76,000 square foot facility. A market study that was done in 2013 showed an expansion at the RCC would create \$1.2 million in new spending annually and a \$71,800 fiscal impact to the tax base. Not only would this bonding project boost the local economy, it would also keep our community working.

In funding this and other projects, the Legislature should consider a balanced approach to funding building, water and transportation infrastructure. This will allow the state to maximize its bonding power to provide ongoing economic stimulus to all the areas of our state that need it most.

In these final weeks of the legislative session, the Minnesota Legislature has an opportunity to both provide the state with an economic recovery package and help communities like Alexandria and our region prosper. Our legislators can support our community by developing a bonding plan that keeps local people working and funds the critical infrastructure that our local communities and the state need.