

GAVEL-TO-GAVEL COVERAGE OF THE 2005 MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

EDITOR'S CORNER

Even though the start of the 2005 regular session of the Minnesota legislature is still weeks away, there are a number of important pieces of news coming out of the State Capitol. The November 2nd elections resulted in a much smaller margin for the Republican majority in the House of Representatives. The DFL picked up 13 seats to give the Republicans control of the chamber by only 2 seats. A number of senior House Republicans, including the chairs of several committees, were defeated in their bids for re-election. Not returning to the House for its opening gavel on January 4, 2005 are Government Operations Committee Chair Jim Rhodes (R-St. Louis Park), Transportation Finance Committee Chair Bill Kuisle (R-Rochester), and State Government Finance Committee Chair Bill Haas (R-Champlin), just to name three. The results of each race depend mostly on the political dynamics found in the local legislative districts, but pundits guess that last session's gridlock, John Kerry's victory in the state's presidential election and suburban voter anxiety over recent budget cuts to local services contributed to the DFL House's strong showing at the polls last month.

NAMES AND NUMBERS

Senate

Senate Information 651-296-0504
Majority Leader Dean Johnson 651-296-3826
Minority Leader Dick Day 651-296-9457

House

House Information 651-296-2146
Speaker Steve Sviggum 651-296-2273
Majority Leader Erik Paulsen 651-296-7449
Minority Leader Matt Entenza 651-296-8799

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Issues to Watch:

December Forecast Released:

Minnesota Department of Finance officials released the state's budget forecast on December 1, 2004. The forecast projects a \$700 million deficit for the 2006-2007 biennium starting in July, 2005. The shortfall does not include any increase for inflation which could project the deficit up to \$1.4 billion. Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty attributed much of the projected deficit to forecasted increases in the cost of the state's health and human services programs. Governor Pawlenty described the rate of growth in HHS programs as "out of control." He stated he will submit a balanced budget to the Legislature in January which will slow the growth in these programs. The forecast had some good news, as well. Tax revenues were higher in the last six months of the current biennium and are projected to continue to grow through the 06-07 biennium.

Governor Calls for Bonding Bill Special Session:

Shortly after the November 2, 2004 election, Governor Pawlenty called upon state legislative leaders to consider a short special session in December to adopt a Capital Improvements Bill. Legislators failed to pass the bill, better known as the Bonding Bill, in the last legislative session. Governor Pawlenty proposed a measure which would include all projects agreed to by the Minnesota House and Senate last May right before adjournment. Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson (DFL-Willmar) rejected the proposal. Democratic leaders objected to the way Governor Pawlenty proposed the special session. Senator Johnson and other DFLers believe the size of the bill Pawlenty wants is too small and does not include enough projects from many different parts of the state. DFLers were also not interested in allowing lame-duck members of the House, mostly Republicans, to vote on such an important piece of legislation.

Kiscaden Gets a Chair:

State Senator Sheila Kiscaden (IP-Rochester) and the Senate DFL Caucus made legislative history when the DFLers gave Senator Kiscaden the helm of a committee. Kiscaden, who plans a press conference today to discuss her political future, will chair the Senate State Government Budget Division next year. A former longtime Republican senator, Kiscaden switched to the Independence Party in 2002. Since last spring, Senator Kiscaden has caucused with Senate Democrats after her expulsion from the Senate Republican Caucus. Senate DFLers have long coveted her outright switch to the DFL column. However, at least for now, Senator Kiscaden is sticking with the IP and continuing her close ties to the Senate DFL Caucus.

Stay Tuned:

Your editors wish a Happy Hanukkah to all of our readers celebrating the holiday. We will be back in touch with additional *CapitolWatch* editions before the start of the 2005 legislative session.

Quote of the Day:

"Politics is for those who are in it for the long term. Many successful politicians are just those who hang in there."

—Democratic Party powerbroker Harold Ickes