

GAVEL-TO-GAVEL COVERAGE OF THE 2004 MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

EDITOR'S CORNER

Each year, the middle of the legislative session is committee deadline season. Policy legislation must be passed through the committee process to "make deadline" in order to be considered for future action during the session. Bills that do not make the deadline are considered dead for the year. Generally, House and Senate leaders agree on the deadline dates to streamline the process. Unfortunately, this year, leadership could not agree, so the first deadline in the House was last Friday and this Friday in the Senate. Legislators and lobbyists will continue last week's hectic pace as committees debate the details of hundreds of bills. Committee deadline season is the prelude to the real fun of the legislative session - the weeks following the Easter/Passover break when conference committees begin and the caucuses position themselves for the long days and nights leading up to a possible adjournment date of May 17. While committees deal with details, the House Republican Caucus will do the vision thing this week. The caucus plans to unveil its proposal to balance the state's current year \$160 million budget deficit. It plans to cut less out of human service programs than Governor Tim Pawlenty and use revenue from a proposed "racino" at Canterbury Park.

NAMES AND NUMBERS

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Minority Leader Dick Day 651-296-9457

House

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Issues to Watch:

Governor Pawlenty Talks Stadiums:

Governor Pawlenty has now rolled out his plan to build two new stadiums. In a Governor's Reception Room press conference crowded with lobbyists, legislators and interested parties, Governor Pawlenty acknowledged he does not want to lose the Twins or Vikings on his watch as the state's top elected official. His plan calls for, among other items, one-third contributions by the teams to the construction of new stadiums, authorizes host communities to levy local taxes and creates the Minnesota Stadium Authority to negotiate the details of agreements with both teams. Also included in the Governor's plan is the creation of a tax increment financing plan to capture the growth in sales and income taxes related to the teams to help pay for construction. The plan will be batted about the halls of the legislature over the next few weeks.

Bonding Requests Moving Through Legislative Process:

Last week, House and Senate committees began the politically difficult task of narrowing down bonding requests to develop final lists for future conference committee negotiations. The Senate Capital Investment Committee has prioritized the proposals it will take further action on, while individual House finance committees have started presenting their lists to members of the House Capital Investment Committee. It is likely the Senate Bonding Bill will be bigger than Governor Pawlenty's proposed \$776 million package, while the House bill may be smaller. The real action on the bonding bills will not happen for another month.

Senate Moves Two Controversial Bills to the Floor:

Last week, Senate committees moved two contentious bills to the Senate floor: (1) a ban on smoking in public places; and (2) a proposal to raise the state's minimum wage. Both bills are important pieces of legislation for the Senate's DFL majority caucus. The smoking ban eliminates smoking in all public places, including places of employment, public transportation and public meetings. The bill's author, State Senator Scott Dibble (DFL-Minneapolis) called the measure "a long delayed update to the Clean Indoor Air Act." Senator Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul), the author of the wage hike, proposes to raise Minnesota's minimum wage by 30%, from \$5.15 per hour to \$5.90 per hour, on July 1, 2004 and to \$6.65 one year later for large employers. The bill calls for lower increases for small employers, defined as those with less than \$500,000 of gross annual sales. It is likely that both bills will have a vigorous debate on the Senate floor in the coming weeks.

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