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

EDITOR'S CORNER

Last week's events at the Minnesota State Capitol inched everyone closer to a May adjournment. Both the House and Senate Republican caucuses rolled out their plans to balance the current-year budget deficit and, at least partially, address future deficits through the use of revenue from the proposed racino at Canterbury Park. The racino is estimated by the House Republican Caucus to pump \$30 million into the state's coffers to deal with the current deficit. House and Senate DFLers have yet to unveil their plans for deficit reduction, although that could happen this week. Both the House and Senate continue to work through their respective committee deadlines. The House is likely to be done with much of its committee business by the end of March with the Senate deadlines to end by the Easter/Passover break. That gives the majority caucuses in both houses plenty of time for the politicking that always comes when conference committees begin. The budget conference committee will have to deal with the racino proposal, the size of health and human service cuts, and other politically-charged tax and spending issues before the anticipated adjournment can occur. Other conference committees, which will likely begin work after the holiday break, will be formed to negotiate the provisions of other omnibus policy legislation and the bonding legislation now making their way to both chambers.

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Issues to Watch:

Senate Debates Outsourcing Measure:

On Thursday, the Minnesota Senate debated legislation authored by State Senator Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook) to require state contracts be performed by United States citizens and to provide sanctions against employers who "outsource" work. The bill does not allow companies, with some exceptions, that send more than 100 jobs out of the country to do work for the State of Minnesota for seven years. Conceding that he did not know whether any work contracted by the State is currently sent overseas, Senator Bakk said the bill should be passed to "make a statement that taxpayers' dollars should not be used for services performed overseas." The legislation faced tough scrutiny from Senator Bakk's colleagues on both sides of the political aisle and, after an extensive debate, Senator Bakk tabled the bill. The measure could come back before the full Senate later this session, if Senator Bakk has the votes to pass it.

House Adopts New K-12 Standards:

Also on Thursday, the Minnesota House of Representatives passed legislation to create new academic standards in science and social studies for Minnesota's K-12 public school students. The latest action is part of a larger battle being waged across the United States between liberals and conservatives over what and how subjects should be taught to students. With the demise of the Profile of Learning standards and the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, Education Commissioner Cheri Pierson-Yecke convened volunteer committees over the summer and fall to draft new standards. The committees' drafts were adopted by the House with some additional amendments. The Senate's Education committees have reviewed the draft standards and are moving a different set of social studies standards through the legislative process in that body. Expect fierce conference committee debate over the final versions of the science and social studies standards once they are passed by each body.

Quick Hits:

Last week, Senate committees drafted omnibus bills for agriculture policy, liquor policy, gaming policy, and crime prevention. These bills will be heard by the full Senate soon. The House Civil Law Committee passed a bill which proposes to disallow state grant awards to Minnesota college students convicted of rioting. The full House will take up the bill next. Striking Metro Transit bus drivers and their supporters from other labor unions held a rally on the State Capitol steps to show support for the bus drivers' ongoing job action. A mediation session is scheduled for today in the three-week old strike. Republican State Representative Arlon Lindner (R-Corcoran) lost his bid for another term in the Minnesota House when he was defeated for his party's endorsement by Joyce Peppin at the Senate District 33 Republican Convention held Saturday in Rogers. Ullian piper Tom Klein of St. Paul serenaded House members on Wednesday with a rendition of "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" in celebration of St. Patrick's Day.

Need a copy of a bill? Call us at (952) 835-3800.