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

EDITOR'S CORNER

Despite the fact that there is only three weeks left to go in the 2004 legislative session, the pace at the Minnesota State Capitol does not reflect any sense of urgency. Legislative leadership continues to be unable to come to an agreement on how to structure the conference committee process on the budget proposals adopted by each body of the legislature two weeks ago. The Minnesota House of Representatives passed both their omnibus bonding and tax measures out of committee last week. Each of those bills will be debated on the House floor later this week. In the Minnesota Senate, all of the legislative action centers on the Senate Taxes Committee. Tax Committee chair Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Minneapolis) and his committee colleagues worked everyday last week crafting the Senate tax proposal. The legislation should come out of committee sometime this week. Perhaps with an eye toward an endgame in legislative budget negotiations, Senator Pogemiller has said he will hold hearings next week on each of the gaming bills proposed this session. House Republicans want gaming revenue to be a part of any final budget package coming out of the legislative session. For today, however, some legislative Republicans will be joining President George W. Bush as he campaigns in our state. Today's visit is President Bush's eighth to Minnesota since becoming Commander-in-Chief.

NAMES AND NUMBERS

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Minority Leader Dick Day 651-296-9457

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Issues to Watch:

House Capital Investment Committee Finalizes Bonding Bill:

The House Capital Investment Committee adopted its bonding legislation last Wednesday. The bill totals \$682 million. The measure includes several of Governor Tim Pawlenty's proposals recommended earlier this session. In addition, the House gave more bonding money to Minnesota's two public higher education institutions, the University of Minnesota system and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. The House also funded the controversial Northstar Rail commuter rail line proposed to run between Big Lake and Minneapolis. Its proponents see the rail line as a transit alternative to ease rush-hour congestion on Interstate 94 and Highway 10. The bonding bill will be heard in the Ways and Means Committee tomorrow. Look for the Senate to adopt its bonding proposal after the House bill passes out of that body. The Senate bill is expected to be closer to, if not in excess of, \$900 million.

Welcome to Stadium Week at the State Capitol:

Today's hearing of the House Taxes Committee kicks off a week of hearings in the Minnesota House on stadium financing issues. The Taxes Committee starts today with an overview of Governor Pawlenty's proposal to build two new stadiums in the metropolitan area for the Minnesota Twins and Minnesota Vikings. The committee will also learn how other cities, states and counties have dealt with stadium controversies. In addition, representatives of the University of Minnesota will appear before the committee to discuss the need for a football stadium on the university's Minneapolis campus. House Taxes chair, Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka), has been critical of Governor Pawlenty's proposal, so passage of the bill is, by no means, a certainty.

Phosphorus Fertilizer Limitations Broadened:

The House passed legislation last week to ban the use of phosphorus lawn fertilizer on some lawns statewide on a vote of 88-40. The measure, sponsored by State Representative Denny McNamara (R-Hastings), aims to protect Minnesota's lakes and streams by prohibiting the use of phosphorus lawn fertilizer on established lawns. Some contend phosphorus fertilizer run-off depletes the oxygen supply of waterways, creating algae. The legislation broadens the phosphorus fertilizer application restriction from the current seven-county metropolitan restriction, adopted in 2002, to lawns across the state. Some rural legislators see the fertilizer ban as a prelude by the environmental community to isolate farmers, and farm run-off, as the real cause of water pollution in the state. This fight will likely continue in the years to come.

Quote of the Day:

'Mr. Chair, I must be getting Iron Range amnesia – you know, you forget everything, except the grudges – because I don't remember hearing this bill in committee this session.'

- State Representative Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia) expressing concern about inclusion of language regarding the Canterbury Park "Racino" in the House Tax Bill.

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