

GAVEL-TO-GAVEL COVERAGE OF THE 2003 MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

EDITOR'S CORNER

As the Minnesota Legislature heads toward its second policy committee deadline and its Easter break, legislators worked to process major bills through committees. On the agenda this week was Xcel Energy's nuclear cask storage proposal to allow continued storage of spent nuclear fuel at its Prairie Island nuclear plant, the so-called Racino bill to add slot machines at Canterbury Park racetrack and the preparation of various budget bills in committee. The House of Representatives will complete all of its budget packages in their first committees by next Tuesday for further processing after the Easter break. The Senate is following the same process. Leaders in both legislative chambers have reiterated their desire to end the legislative session on time on May 19, 2003. Many State Capitol observers wonder whether that is really possible.

NAMES AND NUMBERS

Senate

Senate Information 651-296-0504
Majority Leader John Hottinger 651-296-6153
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

PUBLISHER: PETER COYLE
EDITOR: JAMES MCGREEVY III
7900 XERXES AVENUE SOUTH
SUITE 1500
BLOOMINGTON, MN 55431
952-835-3800
FAX: 952-896-3333
E-MAIL: pcovle@lhdl.com
www.larkinhoffman.com

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Issues to Watch:

DFLers Tell Minnesotans How They Want to Fix the State Budget:

This week, both the House and Senate DFL caucuses unveiled their respective proposals to fix the state budget deficit. The proposals call for higher spending on E-12 education programs over current biennial spending, while cutting government spending in other areas. In addition, the Senate plan proposes an increase of \$1 a pack to the state's cigarette tax and both plans contemplate an increase in the tax rate of Minnesota's top income-earners. The tax hike would affect Minnesota families with income of \$200,000 and above. Governor Tim Pawlenty and House Republicans criticized the proposals because of the proposed tax increases.

House Republicans Bank \$100 Million From Racino for Budget:

It looks like the gaming issue will be hotly debated right up to the end of this year's legislative session. The House Republican caucus assured that prospect by including \$100 million of revenue from the proposed Racino at Canterbury Park as part of its budget-balancing plan. The inclusion of Racino revenue as a budget-balancing tool is a significant change in the legislative debate on the issue and is further evidence of House Speaker Steve Sviggum's (R-Kenyon) change in position on gaming. House and Senate DFLers, long opposed to non-tribal gaming expansion, have not included any gaming revenue in their budget proposals.

Push-Polling Ban Advances:

Legislation to require political pollsters to give their names, addresses and political affiliation to those that they call on the telephone advanced through the House Government Operations and Veterans Affairs Committee last week. The measure is designed to combat the prevalent use of "push-polling," a form of political solicitation that is couched in the context of a seemingly objective opinion survey. It is argued that requiring full disclosure of a surveyor's name and political affiliation will help stop the practice. A similar bill is being debated in the Senate, but has yet to reach the Senate floor.

Quote of the Week:

"Mr. Chair, this is the Bachman-Ranum amendment? I'm excited!"

- Sen. Geoff Michel (R-Edina) commenting on the unusual circumstance that brought Sen. Michele Bachman (R-Stillwater), a strong conservative, and Sen. Jane Ranum (DFL-Minneapolis), a committed liberal, together to offer a joint amendment to a bill in the Senate Education Policy Committee.

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