

State Representative **ANDY WELTI**



2006 E-NEWSLETTER

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Creating Small Businesses and Jobs Locally

I am a co-author of the “Hiawatha Fund” – HF 1369—which is a plan to allow Southeastern Minnesotans to invest in their local communities. In 1999, the University of Minnesota’s Experiment in Rural Cooperation tried to make it possible to keep local money locally invested. The model conceived will establish a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, which will use both public and private dollars to make local investments in the region. The plan is to create a base of regional investors and local businesses that will benefit from long-term capital funds. The total investment pool will not exceed \$5 million.

The Hiawatha Fund will offer two kinds of investment opportunities: 1) the sale of preferred stock to institutional investors, including banks, utilities, non-profits, etc.; 2) the sale of citizen notes to average investors—similar to EE Savings Bonds.

The fund will operate in cooperation with the Southeastern Minnesota Development Corporation, the University of Minnesota Experiment in Rural Cooperation and the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation.

Are You Looking at Starting up a Business?

The 2005 edition of “A Guide to Starting a Business in Minnesota” is available free of charge, from the Minnesota Small Business Assistance Office at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)

in St. Paul. This book offers a concise description of major issues affecting anyone starting a new business in Minnesota. The guide has a resources directory, telephone numbers of organizations, a list of all permits and licenses required to start a new business, and information on how to obtain the licenses. Contact DEED at (800) 310-8323 to obtain the guide.

Prescription Drug Discounts

Note: this information was sent to my office, I am providing it to you as a reference source. I do not endorse these programs.

With 45 million Americans lacking health insurance, Pfizer has been stepping up to help those without coverage. Pfizer has aided 14,779 Minnesota patients, who lacked insurance, get the prescription drugs they needed—amounting to \$8,637,914 in donations. In District 30B, they helped nineteen individuals. For information regarding Pfizer and its programs, call their toll-free number: (800) 444-4106.

There is a new resource available to Minnesotans who are paying high prices for prescription drugs. A new discount pharmacy, located in St. Paul, FairCare Rx is offering savings up to 80% off traditional pharmacy prices. If you are interested in this service, you can visit them online at www.faircarerx.com.

Transportation

This session, I am looking forward to supporting nearly \$60 million in local roads, and bridge bonding under discussion at the Capitol - if it makes

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it into the final bonding bill. Last year \$40 million was dedicated to local roads and bridges. Wabasha and Olmsted counties would benefit from the increased investment. In 2004, Wabasha County asked for \$909,355 in bonding for roads and bridges; Olmsted county requested nearly \$3,726,689. Our region requires significant investments due to our topography and infrastructure needs.

Want to Know Where to go Fishing on Opening Day?

Minnesota anglers can go online and access fishing information for the upcoming season. The website, *www.MinnesotaHelp.info*, gives specific information about fishing statewide, by location, useful to people of all ages.

Veterans

I voted to support HF 2921, which is also known as the "Governor's Veterans Bill of 2006." This bill contains numerous provisions intended to help children and families of soldiers. Part of the bill requires employers to give workers unpaid leave to visit an injured soldier. The bill also appropriates \$3 million to the State Soldiers Assistance fund, which is used for financial and other special assistance for veterans.

I authored a bill and was granted a hearing in the Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs Committee this past week. The bill requires that employers grant up to a day of unpaid leave for family members who want to attend a send-off or homecoming ceremony. The leave issue arose at a local legion meeting this past year and I soon found out that being granted time off for these ceremonies is not a "given" for all family members. The vast majority of employers are very respectful of our soldiers and their families, but there have

been a few cases where a law such as this would have helped military families. Two testifiers—a wife of a formerly deployed Iraq soldier and a mother of three Iraq soldiers—testifying on behalf of the bill, did an outstanding job. The bill passed unanimously out of the committee and is now in the Commerce Committee.

Dairy, Ag Land Property Taxes and Biofuels

I fully support HF 2879, which is an income tax credit for dairy farmers. This could provide up to \$50,000 in expenditures for improving equipment or constructing new buildings on dairy cattle farms. The credit equals 10 percent of expenditures made in tax years 2006 through 2011.

I authored HF 3366, which establishes a study for a low-interest revolving loan program for the purchase of dairy cattle. The study would determine if there is enough interest from private agribusinesses to contribute to a state-matched revolving loan account. The final product may closely resemble the program established in the state of Wisconsin, which has been very successful in maintaining the state's dairy herds. The bill passed unanimously out of the Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Committee, which I am a member of and honored to serve on.

I supported a measure authored by Representative Dorman that would increase the maximum market value of agricultural land and buildings classified as a homestead. The maximum value increased from \$750,000 to \$1,000,000; this applies to taxes due in 2007 and beyond.

In the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, I voted for HF 2781. The bill appropriates money

to the University of Minnesota to create a National Center for Biofuels Research. This year's appropriation will be \$2.5 million, enough to cover the cost of preliminary design work. Our state is a leader in both biofuel production and use. This center could ultimately lead to Minnesota becoming the "Saudi Arabia of biofuels in the U.S." While our economy has already benefited significantly from ethanol and bio-diesel, we have only begun to scratch the surface of our potential to create alternative energy.

Newborn Screenings

I recently toured the new Department of Agriculture and the Health Department labs. Both labs are set up to deal with most infectious diseases and potential pandemics. The Health Department labs specialize in newborn screenings which lead to early detection of rare disorders in babies, thus allowing treatment to begin promptly after birth. Each year in Minnesota, 90 newborn babies are diagnosed with a rare disorder. Early treatment can often positively alter the long term effects of the disorder, allowing the child to live a normal life.

Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs Committee Issues

HF 3187, in the Government Operations and Veterans Affairs Committee is legislation that prohibits legislators from receiving daily allowances during a special session called within 60 days of the end of the regular session. The legislation states that if the legislature does not pass the required legislation by the end of the regular session, legislators would not be paid *per diem* during the special session. I did not take *per diem* during the 2005 special session. I coauthored a bill with similar language prior to the special session.

Changing the Legislative Process

HF 3241 states that a bill or conference committee report may not be voted on for final passage on the same legislative day that it is heard. This requirement may be eliminated by a two-thirds vote of the body in which it is being heard, or by an executive order. I supported this measure, because it would give legislators time to review large omnibus bills that have been presented to the body during the final hours of session.

In the Governmental Operations and Veteran Affairs Committee, I voted for a measure proposing a constitutional amendment allowing representatives to serve four year terms. Half of the senators and half of the representatives would be up for re-election each election cycle. This would take affect in 2012, if it were passed by the legislature. I believe this measure would lead to better government.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee

HF 3614 is a bill creating a new classification for utility vehicles (UTV's). These 'class 2' vehicles are driven at slower speeds, are slightly wider and heavier than ATV's, and often carry up to three people. These vehicles, such as the John Deer Gator, are currently classified as 'off-road vehicles' (ORV's), which is the same classification as large four-wheel drive trucks. With the change in classification also comes a change in the areas these vehicles are allowed to travel. This bill would allow for the vehicles to be driven on maintenance trails and forest roads, on which 'off-road' vehicles are currently allowed access. The UTV's would be allowed to run on future trails designated for ATV's and ORV's. I supported creating the new classification for these utility vehicles.

FUN FACT

Lottery sales in District 30B from July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005 were nearly \$3 million. These sales led to the lottery donating \$200,578 to the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and \$422,793 to the General Fund. At the end of the year, \$1,328,217 in prize money was claimed in the district! Statewide, there were \$408.5 million in lottery sales for 2005. Since the lottery was conceived in April of 1990, it has generated \$1.35 billion in revenue for the state of Minnesota.

"April showers bring May flowers," and if the recent weather is any indication, the grass will soon turn green, flowers will appear, and farmers will be in the fields for spring planting. I wish all of you a wonderful beginning to spring.

Enjoy your week!

Andy

