



State Representative

ANDY WELTI

2005 E-NEWSLETTER

SESSION END-RUN BEGINS; OMNIBUS BILLS ON THE WAY

I cannot believe that 3½ months of the legislative session is already past. Five weeks remain in this year's session, and a lot of work is still to be completed. If you watch Channel 17, the live broadcast of the Legislature, you will notice that more legislation is being debated on the House floor. Soon, all debates will take place there because committee deadlines are approaching.

Last week I participated in my last policy committee meetings because all of the bills had to be heard in the House and Senate policy committees by last Tuesday. Any bills that have not been heard in these committees are dead for this session unless amended onto other bills. This week a similar deadline will affect all finance bills. The tax committee will continue to meet, however, along with a select few other committees.

With committee work out of the way, I am focusing attention on studying the bills scheduled for debate on the House floor in the coming days and weeks. Beyond that, numerous ideas have been submitted to me on legislative needs. I'm looking forward to the summer and fall; I'll be using that time for research and for drafting legislation to submit for consideration by the House in next year's session.

With session end approaching, this brief will bring you up-to-date on some of the legislation I've voted on.

With an unknown end-of-session workload approaching, I may not be able to write a mid-May session update. Be assured, however, that I will send out a session wrap-up after adjournment.

As always, if you would like to share your opinion on any state issue or legislative concerns, you can send me e-mail, call me or write me a letter. I wish all of you good health and happiness in the days ahead.



HOW TO REACH State Representative **ANDY WELTI**

387 State Office Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155
(651) 296-4378

Toll-Free:
1-888-858-4753

E-Mail:
rep.andy.welti@
house.mn

Webpage:
www.house.mn/30B

AGRICULTURE

I voted for a Dairy Investment Tax Credit, available on investments made for dairy facilities and equipment, that would be deductible from future taxes. Many pieces of ethanol legislation have been presented and passed out of the House Agriculture and Rural Development committee, including my bill, HF2045. This bill would provide up to two, \$50,000 grants for ethanol engine compatibility research. Senator Steve Murphy is author of my bill in the Senate.

JOBS

The minimum wage bill is moving along and I look forward to being part of the bipartisan effort to pass it. The bill currently calls for minimum wage increases

to \$6.40 or \$6.65 by July 1, 2006, depending on your type of employer. If the last enacted minimum wage had been indexed to inflation, our current minimum wage would be \$8.46 per hour. It is estimated that 450,000 Minnesota workers earn less than this wage.

BUSINESS AND HEALTH CARE

Last week I voted for two bills to provide more affordable health care to small businesses and individuals. The first, HF563, allows service co-ops (agencies that provide health care plans to school districts), to sell health plans to private employers. This could potentially increase the number of participants in those insurance pools, leading to lower costs. This bill includes an option that allows pools to be

Rep. ANDY WELTI 2005 E-Newsletter



State Representative Andy Welti and Senator Sheila Kiscaden met, April 8, with 6th graders visiting the State Capitol from Elgin-Millville Elementary School.

either self-insured, or insured by an outside company, provided that public and private employees may not be mixed within the same purchasing pool.

The second bill, HF 588, would make limited benefit health plans available to individuals and employers with fewer than fifteen employees. This bill would allow businesses to provide "flexible benefit plans" exempt from all state health insurance mandates except maternity and other federally required benefits.

These health plans will have to be approved by the Department of Commerce. Insurers would be required to inform employers of exactly what benefits normally required by law are modified or excluded in these flexible plans. Future health care plans must be monitored very closely to determine if the intent of providing quality health care coverage to small businesses at rates they can afford is to be achieved.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

A recent report by the vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis states that supporting early childhood development is one of the most beneficial investments our society can make.

The first five years of a child's life are among the most important. When a child begins to socialize, he or she undergoes tremendous growth and learning. This is why quality childcare and childhood education programs are critical.

Without this necessary support structure, children are more likely to drop out of school, commit crimes and receive welfare benefits. Studies noted in the report describe extremely beneficial returns on this investment in our youngest children, especially among low-income families. The long-term benefits of early childhood development can be as much as \$17 returned for every dollar invested. A quality early childhood program costs between \$9,500 and \$15,000 per child. Unfortunately, these programs are receiving only \$5,000 per child, and in the past few years the number of programs have been reduced.

The early childhood caucus, which I am a member of, is a bipartisan group working on bills targeted towards pre-K education. Our group supports six bills, ranging from restoring cuts made in 2003 and establishing a public/private endowment for early childhood programs, to requiring audits of current programs to determine if they can be combined or modified to improve effectiveness.

TWINS FANS

I voted for a bill requiring the governor to form a taskforce to explore the option of a publicly owned Twins baseball club. The bill would allow the current owners to maintain 25-35 percent ownership of the team with the public investing in the remainder of the shares. No public owner would be allowed to own more than one percent of the team, and it would require a seventy-five percent affirmative vote of all owners to sell or move the team outside of the state.



Rep. Welti attended the first official bonding bill signing ceremony on Monday, April 11. "Southeastern Minnesota will greatly benefit from the projects outlined in the bonding bill. I attended the signing to thank the Governor and members of the Conference Committee for their support for the bill," Welti said.

**Do you want to get this summary by E-mail? Send a note with your e-mail address to:
rep.andy.welti@house.mn**