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Legislative Update for the Week of February 27, 2006

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1. Welcome

Welcome to my bi-weekly legislative electronic newsletter. Every two weeks I'll send you an update on what has happened in the Minnesota Senate. This is a great way for me to stay in touch with you and I look forward to keeping you abreast of all the topics of the day.

In addition to the attached newsletter, which gives you an overview of Senate activity, I'll be providing you with details about my own legislative proposals and activities related to the Higher Education Budget Division, which I chair.

2. News from the Capitol

Session started on Wednesday of last week - March 1st. The energy level in the capitol skyrocketed as we watched groups rally, visited with constituents and conducted our first floor session in the Senate chamber. Everyone is in gear, and we'll have to move fast to pass our bills before this short session is finished on Monday, May 22, 2006.

On Thursday we traveled to the University of Minnesota St. Paul campus for our Higher Education Committee meeting. We heard a presentation regarding development of a higher education accountability system for Minnesota.

3. Goals for this Legislative Session

Violent Video Games

"Adults Only" or "Mature" video games are intended for adults, not children. Yet many of these violent games are making their way into the hands of our children. To remedy the situation, I have proposed that anyone under the age of 17 who rents or purchases a restricted video game be subject to a \$25 fine. Additionally, businesses selling or renting video games would be required to post signs informing their customers of this policy. The Senate passed my legislation last year. We are now waiting for the full House to take action.

Comprehensive Sex Education

The danger of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are life-threatening, yet many of our children are unaware of the serious consequences of sexual activity. We need a more comprehensive, age appropriate, and medically accurate family life and sexuality education to help our children better understand the risks they face. Our current law is limited in scope and has inadequately prepared students for decisions and consequences. I have proposed new language that defines "comprehensive family life and sexuality education" and establishes curriculum requirements for primary and secondary schools. The Senate included my proposal in our omnibus education bill in 2005, but the House rejected it.

Flame Retardants

Certain chemicals, known as brominated flame retardants (BFR's), are used in electronics and furniture products to reduce flammability. These chemicals, however, have started to show up in mothers' breast milk. They are linked to developmental problems in children and may cause cancer. Public and private sector efforts to remove BFR's around the world have already had some success, and safer alternatives are available without sacrificing fire standards. I have introduced a bill to phase out the use of these chemicals in manufacturing and sale of products containing these chemicals.

International Marriage brokers and Human Trafficking

Minnesota is one of the major human-trafficking entry points in the U.S. The number of victims of sexual exploitation, forced labor and other human-trafficking abuses is long and growing. To stem the tide of this heinous crime, I have proposed a bill that would regulate international marriage broker businesses, provide prospective "recruits" with information about their rights, and finally provide resources for victims of these crimes. I also have proposed legislation to create and fund a trafficking taskforce in Minnesota.

Sex Tourism

Minnesota already prohibits prostitution, but our regulations regarding sex tourism are not strong enough. We need to ensure

that sex tourism businesses will be shut down and that their owner's will be prosecuted. My plan would increase penalties and facilitate prosecution for these individuals.

Climate Neutral Bonding

Minnesota has recently passed legislation requiring new state buildings to develop sustainable building designs, a great step in the right direction for our environment. I have introduced a bill this session to specify that these buildings receiving bonding funding be designed and operated to generate no net increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

St. Paul/East Metro Bonding Projects

My proposal for this year's bonding projects includes renovating the Union Depot into a multi-modal transit station and improvements along the Mississippi River in St. Paul.

The Dream Act

Some of Minnesota's brightest high school graduates are prevented from pursuing further education and professional dreams because of circumstances beyond their control. They were brought to the U.S. as a child when their parents entered the country without proper documents. As such, they are "undocumented" students and required to pay out-of-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities. The heavy financial burden is further exacerbated by the fact that these students are not eligible to receive federal or state financial aid. I am proud to have introduced the DREAM Act that would allow for any student (including undocumented students) to qualify for in-state tuition rates at state universities and colleges under the conditions that the student has attended a Minnesota high school for at least 3 years, has graduated (or equivalency) from a Minnesota high school, and has registered and been accepted to a public college or university.

4. Important Events

While there's always something going on around here, I want to highlight a few events for you. First, precinct caucuses are tomorrow, Tuesday, March 7. Continue this great Minnesota tradition by attending your local caucus and have a say in the candidates and platforms that our state political parties will adopt. Visit the Secretary of State's website at www.sos.state.mn.us to find your caucus location.

I want to personally invite you to a District 65 Town Hall meeting. Join me and Representatives Thao and Mariani as we discuss your concerns. Saturday, March 18th from 10 a.m. until noon we'll meet at Neighborhood House in the Paul and Sheila Wellstone Center for Community Building. The address is 179 Robie Street East, and we'll be in the Anna Heilmaier Room (Room 212). I'm excited to have this chance to hear your thoughts and answer your questions about the 2006 legislative session.

Finally, I want to share with you an invitation from the Minnesota Women's Consortium for their "Women Come to the Capitol" event on Wednesday, March 22. In addition to workshops on issues such as immigration, women's health care, and GLBT and reproductive rights, women from around the state will have a chance to talk with their legislators. Contact my office for event registration details.

5. Get involved!

As always, I encourage citizen input and involvement in the legislative process. There are many ways to do this, and I would like to suggest a few to you.

*Contact the Senate Information Office (1-888-234-1112) or House Information Office (1-800-657-3550) with any questions related to legislation or state government. Both offices provide weekly publications highlighting each body's actions. The Senate Briefly is available online at www.senate.leg.state.mn.us, and the House's Session Weekly is available by mail. Call the House Information Office to subscribe.

*Go to www.leg.state.mn for a wealth of information pertaining to the Minnesota legislature.

Week in Review

In the past I have attached a review of senate activity that covers all of the committees and floor sessions. However, since this is usually a fairly large attachment, some people have had a hard time opening it or the email takes up too much mailbox space. I will no longer be sending this as an attachment; instead, it will be posted on my senate web page under "Reports" <http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/senators/65Pappas/reports/>. This is a new section of my web page that I will be adding to over the next few months. I welcome your feedback!

*Visits to the Capitol are also encouraged. To set up a Capitol tour, call (651) 296-2881. A day at the Capitol during session can also include watching floor sessions in the Senate and House galleries. Daily schedules are available on the legislative website.

*Schedule a coffee party! Call my office for details.

*I always look forward to hearing from citizens. Please feel free to send your comments, questions and ideas to me by mail at: 120 State Capitol

75 Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

St. Paul, MN 55155,
or by email at sen.sandy.pappas@senate.mn, or by phone at (651) 296-1802.

I am pleased to see such a great response to these electronic updates, and I appreciate all your comments and input.

Best regards until next time,

Sandy Pappas

If you do not wish to receive future updates, please reply to this email and type "remove from list" in the subject line. Thank you!

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