

Legislative Toolbox



In the Good Old Summertime

by Becca Pryse and Valerie Dosland

You are given your greatest opportunity to become an effective advocate between legislative sessions. This is particularly true this year, when a completely new House and Senate will be elected this November. Many legislators have already announced they will not seek re-election, and others are expected to join them; still more will not survive the election. This means there will be a host of new legislators to work with next session. Incumbents and candidates alike are campaigning throughout your community, and most are eager to learn about the issues that matter most to voters. Here are a few tips to make the most of this opportunity.

1. First and foremost thank your legislators for their hard work and support of your issues this past session. This also gives you an opportunity to update them on what's been happening in your community or profession.
2. Use this time to become more familiar with the legislative process. Call the House Information Office at (651) 296-2146 and the Senate Information Office at (651) 296-0504 and ask them for information on the process. While you are at it, place your name on their mailing list — the information you will receive on a weekly basis during the session will be invaluable. Information is also available at or visit www.leg.state.mn.us.
3. Develop a tentative list of legislative issues. You never know when you will run into legislators or candidates and, when you do, it would not be unusual for them to ask, “So,

what issues are you concerned about?” Being prepared is a good thing, because this opportunity could happen anytime — at a parade, on your own front step or on the phone.

4. Get involved in a campaign. If you have a favorite candidate, offer to assist in that person's campaign. Any candidate is thrilled to have volunteers, and the relationships made through this kind of effort are good ones.
5. Contribute to a candidate. Everyone hears about political action committee (PAC) fund contributions but some candidates do not take PAC money. Most often, candidates rely on personal contributions from supporters and constituents. Minnesota law not only makes it easy, but free: you can give up to \$50 (\$100 for a married couple) to a qualified candidate and receive it all back by sending a form, available from the candidate, to the Minnesota Department of Revenue. Campaigns are expensive, and the very best way for candidates to raise needed dollars is from supporters in their community — do not pass up the opportunity to contribute with free dollars.
6. Attend community events, debates and town meetings. This is a good opportunity to hear the views of legislators and their opponents. It also is an excellent opportunity for you to ask questions about a candidate's views on issues in the community and those you support.