

Legislative Toolbox



Capitol Information Sources Abound

by Becca Pryse and Valerie Dosland

The most valuable sources of information at the State Capitol are the personal contacts, legislators, staff and fellow lobbyists you develop as you go about your work. It's important to work hard and treat those you contact fairly. You will be surprised at what you can learn. But what if you don't or can't spend much time in residence at the Capitol? Here are a few suggestions:

Contact your personal legislators. Introduce yourself in person, by phone or by letter. Let them know your key issues and concerns — and ask them to keep you informed. Legislators have staff who can track your issue and keep you informed.

Contact your legislators' staff. Some of the most important people in the legislative process are legislative assistants and committee administrators (if the member is a committee chair). Each legislator has a legislative assistant, although an individual's services may be shared by one or two other legislators. Legislative assistants are committed to their legislators' efforts - and constituent services are always at the top of the priority list. They can solve many problems and answer countless questions for you. They know legislators' schedules and can arrange meetings and will keep you informed on items of specific interest. They will also send you bill and amendment copies, plus information regarding the legislature.

Use the Legislative Web site

(www.leg.state.mn.us). You will find an extremely well-prepared, organized and maintained Web site with links to all

branches of state government, legislative committees, hearing schedules, etc. You can also read and download copies of bills that have been introduced.

Contact the Information Offices. Call the House Information Office at (651) 296-2146 or 1-800-657-3550 and ask to be put on the mailing list so that you can receive their weekly news magazine (Session Weekly), which contains a wealth of information. If you don't know who your legislators are, tell them, give them your address and they'll be happy to provide names and phone numbers of your home legislators. Call the Senate Information Office at (651) 296-0504 or 1-888-234-1112 and ask to be put on the mailing list for their weekly news magazine (Session Briefly) which also contains a wealth of information.

Call for copies of bills. For the House of Representatives, call the Chief Clerk's Office at (651) 296-2314 and for the Senate, call the Senate Index office at (651) 296-6646. These folks will be happy to give you bill numbers, bill authors, bill status and much more information; they will also send you copies of printed bills.

Visit the Capitol. You'll find the House Chief Clerk's Office and the Secretary of the Senate on the second floor of the Capitol. Stop in and visit these people who take great pride in seeing to it that you receive every bit of information you need to make your work with the legislature as easy as possible. I guarantee you'll leave the Capitol with a sense of pride in your state government, the legislature and the people who make it all work.