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LOBBYING

Marilyn Morem

Lobbying Dollars in St. Paul

As you read the *Capitol Letter™*, have you ever wondered how much money is spent on lobbying our legislators at our state capitol?

The Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board has an interesting web site at http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/LobPrincipalExpend_Current.html that can answer that question. According to the *Lobbyist Principal Expenditures* report on their web site, 927 entities (industries, businesses, organizations, associations, etc.) had \$54,678,362.71 in lobbying expenditures at the state capitol in 2005! That averages out to \$276,153.35 per legislator!

Of the 927 entities, 100 spent 50% of that \$54.6 million or \$27,501,113; and 56 spent 35% of the \$54.6 million, over \$200,000 each, for a total of \$21,023,549.97. Fifty-eight entities spent between \$100,000 and \$200,000, 156 between \$50,000 and \$100,000, 177 between \$25,000 and \$50,000, and 477 under \$25,000.

The biggest spender on the list is the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce at \$1,165,000, followed by Education Minnesota at \$760,000 and the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities at \$760,000. The state's three largest energy companies also spent a significant amount for a combined

total of \$1,520,000 (Xcel Energy Service, Inc. - \$760,000, CenterPoint Energy Resources Corp. - \$440,000, and Great River Energy - \$320,000).

The report also shows the expenditures that the entities had in 2004, 2003, and 2002. Some spend about the same amount of money each year while for others the amount varies, depending on what is on the agenda at the capitol.

According to the *Lobbyist Quick Reference Guide* on this web site, some of the expenditures that must be recorded and tracked are preparing and distributing lobbying materials; media advertising; telephone and all other communication services; postage and distribution costs associated with lobbying activities; and entertainment; food and beverages. This is not an inclusive list so more details are at: http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/handbook/hb_lobbyist.pdf

In an Opinion Exchange article in the Star Tribune on May 18, 2006, Rep. Steve Simon (DFL – St. Louis Park) wrote that “Constituent contact really counts.” He added, “People have tremendous power to influence their legislators by simply making themselves heard . . . For most legislators, constituent contact is more persuasive than any lobbyist sales pitch.”

Rep. Simon's words remind us of the importance of urging our fellow citizens to get informed, get

The on-line version of the Capitol Letter™ at www.lwvmn.org contains links to the elected officials and bills listed here. For contact information for elected officials see the following websites.

MN State Senators:

www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/members/member_list.php?sort=a#header

MN State Representatives:

www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/housemembers.asp

Elected officials for your address:

geo.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/districts/start.html

involved, and speak out. One on the ways to do this is to share the Action Committee's Alerts with our family and friends and encourage them to take action on those issues. Active citizens can create a powerful voice to be heard at the capitol – and that is why our Local LWVs are so important in promoting our positions in St. Paul.

EDUCATION/EARLY CHILDHOOD

LWVMN Position: All Minnesota children should have equal access to a good public education. State funding for education should be at a level that makes programs of comparable substance and quality available to all. A student's access to a good education should not depend on the wealth of his or her school district.

Kay Kessel, lobbyist, 612-926-1387

The end of the 2006 Session took place late Sunday, May 21; below is a summary of the Education outcomes.

First, we must express our appreciation for two retiring legislators: Rep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior), chair of the House Education Finance Committee, worked tirelessly to hear from educators and the community as her committee considered education finance issues; and Sen. John Hottinger (DFL-St. Peter), chair of the Senate Early Childhood Policy and Budget Division, was relentless in his efforts to break the gridlock on early care and education legislation and was finally successful as legislators came together to pass a bipartisan bill that restores some cuts in child care.

The Legislature provides the blue print and the regulations for Minnesota public school students.

Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Jordan), Sen. Steve Kelley (DFL-Hopkins) and Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Thief River Falls) carried the Education Policy bills in their respective houses (HF3179/SF2994). These bills include provisions on General Education, Education Excellence, Special Education, Early Childhood, Accounting, Self Sufficiency and Life long Learning and Pupil Transportation. The Supplemental Budget Bill, carried by Rep. Jim Knoblach (R-St. Cloud) and Sen. Richard Cohen (DFL-St. Paul), had additional education finance provisions.

Highlights from the K-12 Education Policy Bill and the Supplemental Budget Bill follow.

In the end, the legislature decided to spend \$21.5 million on K-12 and \$39 million on Early Care and Early Childhood Education. Thanks to Mary Cecconi, Parents United for Public Schools, for this information.

Early Childhood and K-12 Education Policy

- The bill outlines review process for academic standards in each subject area. Technology and information literacy standards will be embedded in the state's academic standards and graduation requirements.
- The Department of Education (DoE) must provide districts with a crisis-management policy to include strategies for lock downs, tornado drills and fire drills.
- The DoE will implement a new accounting system for school districts.
- Agricultural science will satisfy academic standards science requirements.
- Districts that receive funding for Pre-K programs must use the money for that purpose, unless the school board votes to spend it in other ways.

- Special Education costs for Fiscal year 2006 are estimated to be \$640 million. If the forecast is off Minnesota will lose all federal money. The bill provides that if a small budget amount remains after all special education costs are paid, it will go the special education account as a cushion.
- Head Start changed from grant program to appropriated program to conform to federal guidelines.
- Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is expanded to include other relatives.

Supplemental Budget Bill

The following moneys are provided:

- One-time Energy Assistance of \$3.67 per student I to help districts pay for heating fuel and other energy costs
- \$250,000 to develop a k-12 Chinese curriculum for Minnesota schools
- \$1 million for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs
- One-Time Emergency Aid: Red Lake and Rocori to help schools recover costs of shootings at these schools; \$524,000 for Red Lake and \$137,000 for Rocori
- A half cent per student increase added to school lunch programs to help schools defray costs of providing food to students
- The Northwest Online College in High Schools Program is eligible for \$50,000 for professional development to develop web-based technology
- \$25,000 for continued funding for the Scholars of Distinction Program – public, private or home schooled students can earn the distinction.
- \$36,000 to the DoE to pay for lost aid due to a miscalculation of health and safety revenue to the Waseca School District

- 1.5 million to fund a character development pilot program - districts may use the money to purchase character-development curriculum.
- TIMSS participation: \$500,000 for the Commissioner of Education to contract to have Minnesota 4th and 8th graders participate in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.
- \$2.7 million for an ECFE funding increase (\$112 per child, up from \$96 in 2005 and \$104 in 2006). Restores cuts made in 2003 Session.
- \$287,000 for the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and Intervention Program. \$143,000 for health and developmental screening aids. The bill promotes early screening of children prior to the start of kindergarten. \$400,000 for Early Childhood Part C eligibility to conform to federal law.
- \$80,000 for the Educate Parents Partnership to provide resources and information to new parents on child care and early education.
- \$2.3 million for self-sufficiency and lifelong learning includes an increase in funding for Adult Basic Education and funding for an intensive English program for refugees.
- \$250,000 to create a Legislative Commission to End Poverty by 2020.

Bonding funds appropriated:

Nett Lake	\$10, 700.000
Libraries	1,000,000
Macphail	5,000,000
Early Childhood	500,000,000
State Academies in Faribault	5,043,000
Perpich Arts School	1,051,000

These above facilities are state-wide schools with the exception of Nett Lake.

The Parent Leadership Summit on May 15th heard from Mary Brainerd, President and CEO, Health Partners and Founding CEO of the Itasca Project. She spoke on “Mind the Gap - Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities”. The disparities of race, class, and place are the opening challenges for next year’s Legislative Education Finance Agenda.

At lunch Mary Cecconi spoke about how “Great Schools Begin at the Ballot Box.” LWVMN is considered a partner with Parents United for we actively monitor voting rights and we help new citizens and long-time citizens register to vote so they can influence our state government in providing adequate funding for our public schools.

Look for complete summaries of the Legislative session from the websites of the Minnesota School Board Association and the Minnesota Department of Education. A thank you to Grace Schwab, who coordinates the lobby line daily updates for Minnesota School Board Association members. 1-800-864-6722

HEALTH CARE

LWVUS Position: The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost should be available to all US residents. Other US health care policy goals should include the equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology and a reasonable total national expenditure level for health care. LWVUS favors

a national health insurance plan financed through general taxes in place of individual insurance premiums... [and] is opposed to a strictly private market-based model of financing the health care system.... (1993)

Mary Lou Hill, Lobbyist, 612-374-4218

Jean Wagy, Lobbyist, 952-475-2077

Minnesota Universal Health Care Coalition (MUHCC)

This legislative session the coalition worked very hard on two pieces of legislation in its quest to establish Single Payer Health Care in Minnesota.

One bill was a bulk purchasing bill (SF2725) which would enable Minnesota, in coordination with other states, to directly negotiate with the pharmaceutical companies on behalf of all Minnesota residents to lower drug prices. Authored by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Minneapolis) the bill cleared the Senate Health and Family Security Committee and was heard in the Senate Finance Committee. It had no House companion and did not progress.

The second bill (HF3097/SF3417) would have returned the administration of our state health programs to the Department of Health and Human Services, saving the enormous overhead costs of Health Maintenance Organization administration, while at the same time, setting up a "mini-single payer" example in our own state. Recall that HMOs have 20% in overhead charges. In spite of help from Rep. Matt Entenza (DFL-St. Paul) and authors Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Minneapolis) and Sen. Leo Foley (DFL-Coon Rapids) this bill did not receive a hearing in either body.

MUHCC has set a meeting at the end of June to review the past year and to

focus on strategy for the next session in 2007. Clearly, there is much to do on this issue.

Seniors and Workers

Regarding the issues the Seniors and Workers Coalition was following, there are several things to report. The case mix situation, dealt with in a bill authored by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Minneapolis), will be improved and consumers will begin to have the benefits of connecting their actual care needs to their billing. Another plus is that nursing homes will be spared the rate cuts in HF 4162, authored by Rep. Jim Knoblach (R-St. Cloud). In addition, the Department of Human Services is mandated to recommend increasing payments for behavioral care prior to the 2007 legislative session.

The Omnibus Supplemental Budget Bills' spending provisions include partial funding for the Alternative Care grant shortfall for certain individual nursing homes in the St. Cloud area, and substantial funding for Veterans Homes. Improved funding for staffing in Veterans Homes should provide a precedent for the work of the Seniors and Workers Coalition in years to come.

The Assisted Living initiative is also included in the Omnibus Bill. This allows assisted living services to be provided only in registered housing with services established. It establishes consumer protection and consumer information requirements and unifies licensure categories for home care services. The Omnibus bill is on its way to the Governor for signature.

MENTAL HEALTH

LWVMN Position: Support of a comprehensive and coordinated system of programs and services for

mentally ill adults and emotionally disturbed children and adolescents (hereafter referred to as "persons with mental illness"). Priority should be given to persons with serious and persistent mental illness and/or acute mental illness. Minnesota public policy and funding should sustain an array of community-based services, which are available and accessible to persons with mental illness. Administration of that policy should provide clients with appropriate and adequate services.

*Barbara Flanigan, lobbyist,
612-928-8033*

It appears as we go to print that the Governor's Mental Health Initiative did not pass as a whole. Recall that the main thrust of this proposal would have transferred the major responsibility for mental health services for people receiving Medical Assistance, Minnesota Care and General Assistance Medical Care from the government to private health plans.

The League opposed part of this legislation during the 2006 session because we believed that the necessary intensive wraparound services for people with serious and persistent mental illness—including case management, community support programs, help with housing and vocational services—were not assured under the new scheme. The bill was vague on a number of points, particularly on the division of funding and responsibility between the counties and the health plans.

The provisions of the bill which we supported were the additional funds, the extension of full mental health services to people on Minnesota Care and General Assistance Medical Care, and increases in payment for psychiatrists. The provisions which passed included a higher compensation rate for psychiatrists,

psychiatric nurses and mental health centers.

We hope to work with other advocates to improve this legislation before it is introduced in the 2007 session.

REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

LWVUS Position: Protect the constitutional right of the individual to make reproductive choices.

*Anne Salisbury, Action Co-Chair,
651-430-1091*

The 2006 legislative session ended with gladness and sadness on reproductive choice issues. From May 15 through May 20 pro-choice lobbyists and sympathizing volunteers participated in a vigil outside the Senate chamber, encouraging Senators who believe in women's privacy right to make decisions affecting their own bodies and their families. One threat was that the Abortion Regulation Act (HF3258), which easily passed in the House (81-50), would be amended to the Senate Health and Human Services Spending Bill. Our presence also reminded the other side that the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL) may not have all the answers and that there is a mighty constituency that stands up for choice. Efforts did pay off, as the Abortion Regulation Act was not tacked onto other legislation and slipped into law, but it cost us a number of health-related bills which were not considered on the Senate floor because of the MCCL threat.

Unfortunately, the desired comprehensive family life and sexuality education program did not make it into the Education policy bill. So Minnesota schools are still allowed to teach abstinence only sexual education. This means that

young people may not be properly informed how to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies should they enter into sexual activity before marriage. The bogus argument that sexual education encourages sexual activity scarcely holds water when one considers repeated studies which show just the opposite.

Another unfortunate circumstance is that there was no restoration of family planning funds which Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Minneapolis) had worked so hard to achieve in the Senate.

Early Saturday morning, May 20, modifications to the Women's Right to Know Act were made. This amendment allows a woman whose pregnancy shows a fetal anomaly to go through the abortion procedure without being subject to the criteria required of a woman who voluntarily elects an abortion for personal reasons. The woman pregnant with a fetal anomaly is also to be offered perinatal hospice care as an alternative to abortion.

The route to passage was curious. The amendment was tucked into SF367 which earlier in the session started out as the School districts competitive high school diving pools use notice requirement expansion bill, authored by Sen. Sheila Kiscaden (DFL-Rochester). Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka) had everything about pools removed from it so that the bill begins "A bill for an act relating to health; implementing health care cost-containment measures;" etc. In short the bill became one of health care issues. It passed overwhelmingly with no opposition.

ENVIRONMENT

LWVUS Position: Natural resources should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem and to protect public health.

Water: LWVUS supports measures to reduce water pollution from direct point-source discharges and from indirect non-point sources; and policies to achieve quality essential for maintaining species populations and diversity, including measures to protect lakes, estuaries, wetlands and in-stream flows.

LWVMN Position – Natural Resources: Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest by recognizing the interrelationships of air quality, energy, land-use, waste management and water resources.

Solid Waste: Support of measures to reduce generation of solid waste and ensure safe treatment, storage and disposal of all wastes.

*Allene Moesler, lobbyist,
507-263-0726*

Marilyn Morem, lobbyist, 507-289-7831

The 2006 Minnesota legislature ended with the environment winning on several of the issues followed by LWVMN:

Governor Pawlenty signed a bill that will require Minnesota's largest coal burning power plants, which are responsible for 70 percent of the mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants, to reduce mercury emissions by 90% by 2014.

The bonding bill provides significant investments for Wildlife Management Area land acquisition and forest land conservation easements. Unfortunately, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), which provides incentives for landowners to protect sensitive lands, was not funded this year.

The Clean Water Legacy (CWL) Act was passed, creating a Clean Water Council. However, start-up funding of \$24.9 million in one-time funding is far from adequate to clean up Minnesota's many polluted rivers, lakes and streams. In addition, final numbers for the bonding bill had \$6 million for Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) wastewater treatment grants, \$3.31 million for CWL phosphorus reduction and small community, septic grants, and \$1 million for stream bank restoration. This makes \$10.31 million in capital investments bill.

Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP) had been promised by leadership in both parties \$40 million for start-up funding. We will need \$80-\$100 million annually to implement the programs necessary to clean up and maintain Minnesota's waters.

Both the House and Senate passed bills to create a dedicated funding stream for the environment, and perhaps the arts, by adding a constitutional amendment that would direct a certain percentage of sales tax revenue to these areas. Differences in the bills proved irreconcilable. The Senate wanted to add a small amount to the existing sales tax rates, but the House wanted to take it out of existing sales taxes. Differences also existed on what areas the dedicated funds should cover. LWVMN opposed all versions of this proposed constitutional amendment, as the

Legislature has the power to fund all proposed areas through legislation.

Other items:

Threats to local zoning controls were successfully fended off, but are expected to return in 2007.

Time ran out for the House to pass SF1298, which would have set up a recycling system for certain electronic devices. The heavy metals and other toxins in this equipment make it poisonous in landfills. There was strong lobbying against this measure from manufacturers, who preferred a "voluntary" recycling plan.

Under pressure from the 160 utilities lobbyists plus the Chamber of Commerce, House Speaker Rep. Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) refused to allow action on the Omnibus Energy Bill. It had passed the Senate by a 53-13 vote! Even when the controversial Renewable Energy Standard (RES) had been removed from the bill, fossil fuel lobbyists convinced House Leadership to kill the entire Omnibus Energy bill in the House. They would not allow Rep. Torrey Westrom (R-Elbow Lake) to move adoption of the bill that had numerous important non-controversial energy policy provisions. These provisions would have helped consumers reduce energy costs, helped small businesses develop smart and innovative energy projects and prevented elderly and low-income residents from having their heat shut off in winter. Despite agreements by all parties and all key energy policy leaders in the legislature, the utility lobby and the Chamber of Commerce persisted in demanding that the Speaker kill the entire energy bill, apparently out of fear that the immensely popular renewable electricity standard might come up. Thanks to Rep. Westrom and Sen. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul) for their tireless efforts to

prepare a conference committee report that a majority could support.

Finally, on RES, it is clear that the Senators and many of their colleagues in the House of Representatives recognize that it is imperative to require utilities to increase new renewable electricity to 20 percent. Look for action on this issue in 2007.

Thanks to MEP and ME3 for some of the information in this report.

ENVIRONMENT/TRAILS AND OHVS

LWVUS Position: Natural resources should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem and to protect public health.

Gwen Myers, lobbyist, 952-545-8696

The Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Coalition's* successes this session were both negative.

The effort by Rep. Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar) and Sen. Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook) to open the North Shore State Trail (NSST) to ATVs did not become law, though there is little doubt that it will be back in 2007.

The second offering from the Sen. Bakk/Rep. Hackbarth team would have increased the allocation of gas tax revenue for ATVs from 0.15% to 0.27% of one percent. Recall that gas taxes paid by people riding OHVs are removed from the Highway Trust Fund and put into a special fund to develop and maintain OHV trails in state forests, in spite of the fact that only 15% of ATV riders use those

trails. This bill was part of the Omnibus Transportation bill and this bill was not passed, so the gas tax shift remains at 0.15% of one percent.

Sen. Carrie Ruud (R-Breezy Point), Rep. Larry Howes (R-Walker) and Rep. Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji) gave us a burst of hope in the last few days of the session by offering an amendment to the Game and Fish bill in their respective houses which stated that:

"Off-road vehicle [4x4 truck] trails may not be established on county forest or state forest lands administered by the [DNR] commissioner except: (1) on state and county forest roads; and (2) off-road vehicle use areas as provided by section 84.915."

The Jack Pine Coalition was responsible for urging Sen. Ruud, Rep. Howes and Rep. Moe to offer this amendment, as they have seen incredible destruction in Central Minnesota, much of it caused by these off-road mudder trucks.

The amendment passed in the Senate 46-13; the roll-call is available at www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/journals/2005-2006/51906110.pdf#Page6. It passed the House 67-62; the roll-call is available at ww3.house.leg.state.mn.us/cc/journals/2005-06/J0517108.htm#7802. Depending on how your legislators voted, you may want to thank or question them.

Unfortunately, a conference committee was necessary to reconcile the House and Senate Game and Fish bill, and the conferees were not friendly to this important provision. House conferees were Rep. Denny McNamara (R-Hastings), Rep. Hackbarth, and Rep. David Dill (DFL-Crane Lake); Senate conferees were Sen. Tom Saxhaug (DFL-

Grand Rapids), Sen. Gary Kubly (DFL-Granite Falls), and Sen. Michael Jungbauer (R-East Bethel).

This conference committee met from 9-11:30 p.m. on Friday, May 19, and they did not include either the Senate or House language related to prohibiting 4x4 truck trails in state forests. In fact, it was clear that the co-chairs Sen. Saxhaug and Rep. McNamara were simply going to ignore this provision, passed in two recorded floor votes, but Rep. Moe talked to committee members during the brief recess just before the end. Senators Kubly and Jungbauer, thus prompted, did raise the issue and Rep. Moe testified for the provision. Susan Solterman of Audubon Minnesota also testified in favor.

Just FYI, also in this bill is a lovely provision allowing counties to place bounties on coyotes. Years ago I thought we had established that bounties are not an effective method of controlling the numbers of wild animals, but this committee thought it was a good idea. Rep. Dill joked that he'd like to add the gray wolf to the section; many laughed – a good joke.

A final note on this conference committee behavior, which is typical, at least in environmental conferences: Rep. Moe rose in opposition to the Game and Fish conference committee report on the House floor on May 20, questioning how the conferees could ignore a provision that had already passed in both houses. Rep. Bev Scalze (DFL-Little Canada) joined his protest, asking why House members bothered to waste their time considering and voting on issues when conferees could simply cast them aside. Rep. Moe said he was hoping to be back next session and, after this experience, he promised to know the rules a little better. One can only hope that this will help.

*The OHV Coalition includes MN Environmental Partnership, Audubon MN, Audubon Minneapolis, the Jack Pine Coalition, the Isaac Walton League, the Sierra Club, North Star Chapter and LWVMN.

ELECTION LAW

LWVUS Position: Voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed.

LWVMN Position: Support of improvements in election laws regulating election procedures, voting and school district elections.

Gwen Myers, lobbyist, 952-545-8696

Elections Omnibus Bill: Along with many other important bills, the Elections Omnibus bill was finally passed on Saturday, May 20, after frantic behind-the-scenes negotiating in the previous three days.

SF2743, authored by Sen. John Hottinger (DFL-St. Peter), passed the Senate 63-0 on May 11, and was scheduled for House action on Wednesday, May 17. Careful negotiations among House and Senate members and the Secretary of State's office seemed to assure an easy route to passage.

The evening of May 16 Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano) announced that he would amend SF2743 with his bill requiring a photo ID in order to vote. Sen. Hottinger and House principle Rep. Bill Hilty (DFL-Finlayson) stated that they would pull the bill rather than have this language included. The Secretary of State's office was extremely agitated, since Secretary Kiffmeyer (R) needs a bill passed setting the rules for the 2006 election.

Wednesday morning, about the time we received word that Rep. Emmer would not offer his amendment, we learned that House leadership

objected to a provision all had accepted: the provision allowing tenants to exercise their first amendment rights and display campaign signs in their windows. The landlord lobbyists had been busy.

That ended any possibility of House action on Wednesday and began another series of negotiations. House leadership was adamant, but Voting Rights Coalition* chair and chief lobbyist Beth Fraser, in consultation with Sen. Hottinger, refused to give up on that issue without getting something else we wanted.

Passage was thus delayed until the last business day of the session. Among other things, the Elections Omnibus bill includes the following:

- Intentionally deceiving others about the time, date, place or eligibility criteria for an election is prohibited.
- Cell phone bills are valid utility bills for same-day registration purposes.
- IDs issued by Tribal governments may be used for same-day registration, in combination with a utility bill.
- An address confidentiality program will be created for battered women.
- A post-election audit will be required to verify that electronic ballot counters worked accurately.

In sum, the VR Coalition is pleased to have helped pass the omnibus elections bill and to have helped defeat the proposal requiring proof of citizenship in order to register and a photo ID in order to vote. Our particular thanks to our chair, Beth Fraser, for her wisdom, energy and tenacity in pursuing our fundamental goal of assuring all citizens the right to vote.

An election lawsuit from Florida

(from Time): In a federal lawsuit filed in Miami on Thursday, 5/18, against the Florida Secretary of State and Division of Elections, LWV Florida stated that it had recently ceased efforts to register voters because of what it calls the law's draconian fines against organizations (other than political parties) for submitting registration forms late. LWV Florida joined several other public interest and labor groups, including the Florida AFL-CIO, in challenging the constitutionality of the law, which went into effect January 1. They are asking the US District Court to immediately suspend the fines - which the groups say could bankrupt their voter registration budgets.

According to the lawsuit, "the challenged law imposes civil fines of \$250 for each voter registration application submitted more than 10 days after it is collected, \$500 for each application submitted after any voter registration deadline, and \$5,000 for each application [that for whatever reason doesn't end up being] submitted. Plaintiffs are strictly liable for these fines, even if their inability to meet the statutory deadlines results from events beyond their control, such as the destruction of applications in a hurricane."

Clearly, there is more than one way to shut down voter registration drives and deny citizens the right to vote.

*The Voting Rights Coalition includes MN Council of Nonprofits, Education MN, Take Action MN, AFL-CIO, League of Cities, SEIU, MN Trial Lawyers, the Disability Law Center, and LWVMN, among others, and is chaired by Beth Fraser and C. Scott Cooper.

IMMIGRATION

LWVMN Position: Support incorporating immigrants into our communities by providing access to education, by endorsing the development of secure identification documents, and by respecting the right of law enforcement personnel to perform their duties without the burden of interpreting federal immigration policies. All Minnesota residents, regardless of their immigration status, should be eligible for in-state tuition at state colleges and universities under the same conditions, such as one year's state residency or graduation from a Minnesota high school. Oppose residents with legal immigrant status running for local office.

Judy Stuthman, lobbyist, 651-644-8588

As this is being written the 2006 Legislative Session is in its final day. There is good news and bad news about the many immigration related bills that were introduced during the early days of the session. The good news is the many punishing bills have faded from the scene. The bad news is the positive bills have also faded from the scene – including my personal favorite, the DREAM Act. The 400 to 500 high school graduates of undocumented status will have to wait at least another year before MN legislators recognize the value of allowing these young students, who have spent most of their lives in Minnesota, the opportunity to gain a public college education at the in-state tuition rate.

On the plus side, police, hospital workers, local and county government workers and others who have contact with immigrants will not be required to check and report on immigration status. In addition, expectant mothers who are undocumented will receive prenatal care helping to ensure healthy American citizen babies. On the

other hand, ten states have passed their DREAM Acts; unfortunately Minnesota will not join them. It is also unfortunate that improved funding for Adult Basic Education classes, essential for all immigrants, will not happen.

Many of the negative bills were introduced with the reminder of the need for homeland security. We ALL are concerned about national security! But, we should not allow it to become our sole motivation for all immigrant legislation. Immigration is a federal policy, but much of the proposed punitive state and federal legislation would shift the costs from the federal level to the states. Patching the broken immigration system will not work. Comprehensive immigration reform is needed, reform that takes a sincere look at what will meet the U.S. workforce needs, what will keep us secure and what will be fair and just to the immigrants involved. We are not the only country that is addressing this issue – but we could be a leader in reform.

A few days ago, I made my way to the Capitol for a DREAM Act rally. Most of us knew by that time that chances for its passage were slim, but the optimism was boundless! As we were leaving, I glanced up and there on the wall, with a beautiful gold background, were the engraved words of Edward Everett, U.S. clergyman, educator, orator and politician, 1794-1865, "Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army." Oh, the irony of it all.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

LWVMN Position - Family violence: Support for improved procedures for agencies dealing with family violence. Support for improved services for the victims.

This includes more advocates to protect the interests of victims of family violence, more shelters for battered women, and provision for immediate legal remedies for victims of family violence, among other things.

Patricia Hoehn, intern lobbyist, 763-424-8192

Joan Gendreau, intern lobbyist, 763-425-1462

Bills That Passed

The Bonding Bill provides \$2 million for Transitional Housing for battered women and \$17.5 million for permanent supportive housing. This money also helps homeless veterans, prostituted women, mentally ill, and chemically dependent families in Minnesota.

The Public Safety Omnibus Bill includes Minnesota Council for Battered Women's tribal and foreign Orders for Protection (OFP's) which says orders from other states and from Indian Tribes must be enforced in Minnesota. The domestic abuse no-contact order violations were enhanced to a gross misdemeanor. Also included in the bill was the provision that a prosecutor shall make every reasonable effort to notify a victim of domestic assault, of a criminal sexual conduct offense or of harassment that the prosecutor has decided to decline prosecution.

The ACP (Address Confidentiality Program) was included in the Elections Omnibus bill, however no funding was allocated at this time. It is supposed to begin in 2007. Known as the "Safe at Home" program for victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking, it allows mail to be forwarded to a "safe" location known only to the Secretary of State's office. This would allow an individual to keep her address

confidential while voting or applying for state, county or local services.

The Supplemental Budget Bill contains a \$298,000 appropriation to fund human trafficking programs: \$98,000 to fund the Sexual Exploitation of Youth in Ramsey County pilot project, \$75,000 to develop a statewide plan to address human trafficking, \$60,000 to reopen three free legal clinics in Hennepin County (where victims of trafficking are identified and offered services), and \$65,000 to set up and operate a human trafficking tip line and services hotline.

FIREARMS SAFETY

LWVUS Position: Protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons, and support the allocation of resources to better regulate and monitor gun dealers.

LWVMN Position: Action to support restrictions on the sale, possession and use of firearms by private parties in the state of Minnesota.

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Background

For the past seventeen years, local Leagues, LWVMN and LWVUS have worked to strengthen our gun laws. Proactive work on behalf of public safety has included passage of the Brady Bill (waiting period for proper background checks) and passage of the National Assault Weapons Ban.

During the past few years, the Brady Law has been weakened. In addition, law enforcement personnel can no longer retain gun sales

information for more than 24 hours. After Congress and the President let the Assault Weapons Ban sunset, police chiefs and sheriffs testify that they are now finding more assault weapons at crime scenes here in Minnesota. One year after the Conceal and Carry Weapons (CCW) Law became legal in Minnesota, violent felonies were up 2.2 percent in 2004. (Mankato Free Press, Editorial, May 7, 2006)

Today, crime in general is down in Minnesota, but crimes committed with guns are on the rise. Recently passed gun laws continue to weaken the ability of law enforcement officers to protect themselves, much less the rest of us. That is why the mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul asked for citizens' help at a recent press conference. That is why their two police chiefs were on hand. They came to address illegal gun trafficking in our state. They voiced their concerns and described efforts to stop the straw purchases of guns that become the arsenals for violent gangs. They reiterated that they can't do it alone.

Another event we worked on was the "Peace on the Northside for Summer 2006." It was a beautiful night for the huge neighborhood party. Little kids drew with sidewalk chalk. Medium sized kids skipped rope. Big kids took center stage to sing and dance for peace in their neighborhood.

After the event, on our way down Lowry Avenue, we heard sirens. Two police cars whizzed by us, followed by a North Memorial ambulance. "I'll bet another kid was shot," said one of my passengers. And the following day it was confirmed in the newspapers---next to the other small articles about gun deaths in the section about what's happening in Minnesota's communities.

And what is happening in the state Legislature? On May 4, 2006, Rep. Tony Cornish (R-Good Thunder) and thirteen co-authors introduced HF4189, a bill “clarifying and extending... the authorized use of deadly force in self defense,” otherwise known as a “shoot-first law.” In fact, we already have laws that allow us to protect ourselves, our families and our property with a firearm (section 609.065). HF4189 was joined on May 8 by SF3800, authored by Sen. Pat Pariseau (R-Farmington) and four others. It was, of course, far too late for the bill to have normal committee consideration, but it was drafted and ready to be amended to any convenient bill, had the opportunity presented itself. The NRA never

rests. Look for this legislation to reappear in the 2007 session.

We can live in fear and make the gun merchants rich. Or we can reclaim our right to peace in our neighborhoods, schools and workplaces. These are tough times, times that require us to ask tough questions of those who would represent us at the Minnesota Legislature or in Congress. When talking with candidates in this election season, here are a few questions you might ask:

- "Why on Earth do we need a 'shoot first law' when we already have laws that allow us to protect ourselves with a firearm?"
- "How will 'shoot first' improve our quality of life in Minnesota?"
- "What does this 'shoot first law' tell our children?"
- "How do we explain the purpose of 'cop killer bullets' and the 'sniper rifle' to our kids? To our law enforcement officers who put their lives on the line for us?"
- "What are/will you be doing about gun trafficking, record keeping on gun sales, assault weapons, background checks, gun show checks, child safety locks, carrying concealed weapons in public places, background checks for secondary private sales, juvenile possession, safety standards---safety for all of us?"

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