



MINNESOTA'S LEGISLATURE: A SESSION PRIMER



ARRM's guide to how the state legislature works

Putting a human face on an issue is a critical component of effective grassroots advocacy. In order to be an effective grassroots advocate, it's important to understand how the state legislature works. This primer will give you a solid foundation on how Minnesota's state government operates.

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE

Who can become a legislator?

To run for election, legislators must be qualified voters of the state, be 21 years of age, and have lived in Minnesota for one year. They must also reside in the district they are running for six months prior to the election.

Once elected, a legislator's salary is \$31,140 per year. They are also allowed to collect per diem for living and travel expenses seven days a week during the regular legislative session. In Minnesota, members of the legislature are "citizen legislators" and must have jobs outside the legislature. These jobs include business owners, farmers, lawyers and teachers. A member of the legislature must be allowed to resume his or her old job and cannot be fired for time spent in legislative service, nor can they be fired for statements or beliefs held in his or her capacity as a legislator.

When does the legislature meet?

The Minnesota Legislature convenes in regular session each odd numbered year on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January. In the even-numbered years, it convenes on a date set by joint agreement of both bodies.

The session continues the second year of the biennium for a total of 120 legislative days. In addition, the Legislature may not meet in regular session after the first Monday following the third Saturday in May. During this time, the House or the Senate may not adjourn for more than three days without the consent of the other body.

A legislative day is defined as one of which the House or Senate is in session. Committee meetings alone do not make up a legislative day. A legislative day begins at 7 a.m. and continues until 7 a.m. of the following calendar day.

What are the types of sessions?

There are three kinds of session. First is the biennial session that begins on the first Tuesday after the first

Monday of January in an odd-numbered year and ends no later than the first Monday after the third Saturday in May of the even-numbered year.

The next definition of a session is the yearly session. The first year of the biennium (odd calendar years) is called the "long year," and lasts from January to mid-May. The second year (even calendar years) is called the "short year," and typically runs from February through April.

Finally, a special session is one called by the governor at a time other than a regularly scheduled session. The legislature, though, determines the length and purpose of any such session.

The first year of a biennial session is known as the budget session. The second year is known as the bonding session – a capital bonding bill is typically passed to fund construction projects throughout the state. Leftover items from the budget session and emergency items are also considered.

How can I watch the Legislature?

Public galleries are accessible from the third floor of the Capitol for both the Senate and the House floor sessions. No passes are required except for the opening day and when the Legislature meets in joint session.

In addition, House Television Services and Senate Media Services provide unedited broadcasts of legislative committee and floor proceedings on Twin Cities Public Television Channel 17 and various cable systems in greater Minnesota. Daily television coverage schedules are available online for the House and Senate.

Live coverage of floor sessions and selected committee hearings is available via the Internet. For more information on internet streaming see the House television Web schedule and Senate media coverage page.

MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE'S POWER STRUCTURE

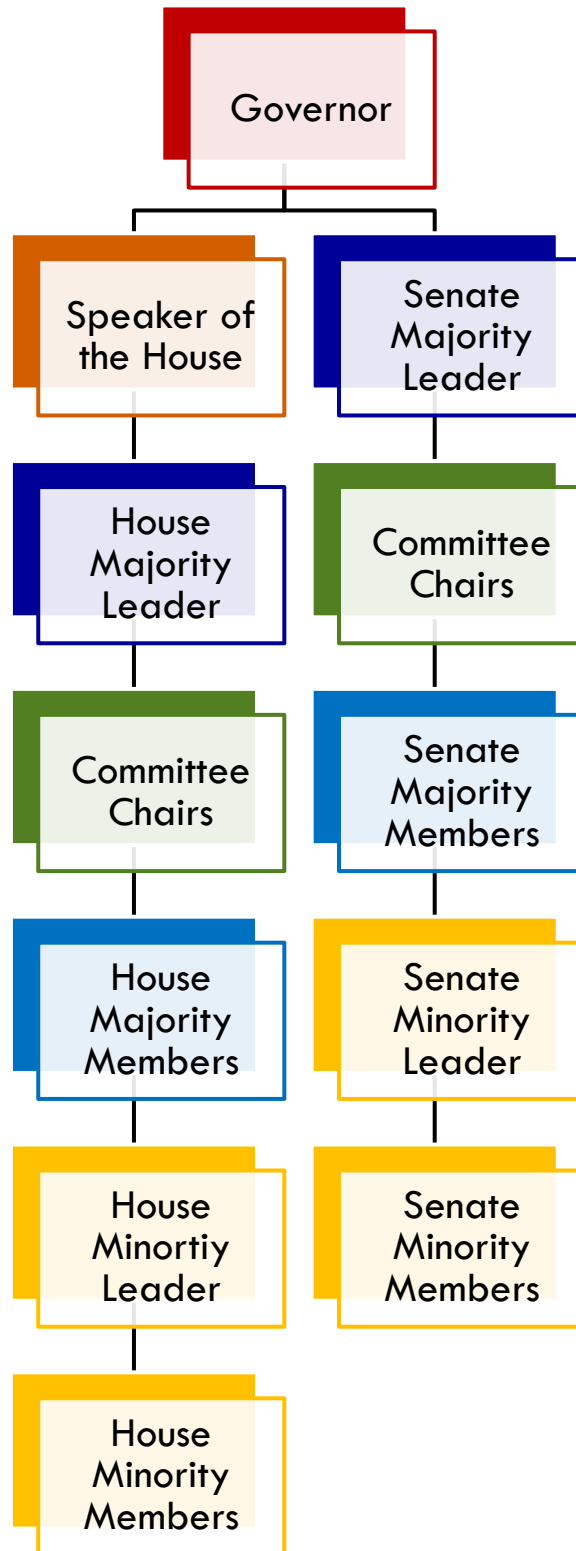
Who makes up the legislature?

The legislative branch is responsible for the enactment and revision of laws. The United States Congress forms the laws at the national level, and the Minnesota Legislature is the lawmaking body for the State of Minnesota.

Both Congress and the Minnesota Legislature consist of two bodies: a Senate and a House of Representatives. This two-body system is referred to as a bicameral system.

- The Minnesota Legislature has 201 members.
- The State of Minnesota is divided into 67 senate districts, with about 79,163 people in each district.
- Voters elect one senator from their district. Each Senate district is divided into "A" and "B" house districts of about 39,582 people each.
- Voters elect one House member, or representative, from each district, making a total of 134 representatives.

Senators are elected for a four-year term and representatives are elected for a two-year term. However, in election years ending in 0, such as 2000 or 1990, Senators serve for a two-year term in order to provide for the redistricting process done in conjunction with the United States census



AN OVERVIEW OF COMMITTEES

What does a legislative committee do?

It is the job of each committee to hold public hearings on bills, to put each bill into its best form, and to recommend to the full body only those bills that the committee feels merit further consideration. The committee takes testimony from the public, bill sponsors, and experts in the areas the bill affects.

Committees may amend a bill, combine two or more bills under one file number, refer more detailed or complex bills to a subcommittee for further examination, recommend a bill to pass as introduced or as amended, send it to another committee with or without recommendation to pass, or kill the bill by voting it down, tabling it, delaying action, ignoring it, or returning it to its author.

What is a conference committee?

A conference committee is made up of members from each body appointed to reconcile the differences between two versions of a bill that have been passed by both bodies. Each conference committee has either three or five members from both the House and the Senate.

Eight important things to know about committee meetings:

1. Committee chairs are historically senior members of the majority caucus, in the Senate they are chosen by an organizational committee, in the House, the Speaker appoints them.
2. In the House, committees range in size from 10 to 25 members, the Senate ranges from nine to 35.
3. The committee chair has complete power on whether or not to grant a hearing for a particular bill. If a chair agrees to hold a hearing, the committee can amend the bill, send it to the floor for debate, vote the bill down or send the bill to another committee.
4. A quorum is necessary when making any decisions in a committee meeting. A quorum is usually 50% of the membership.
5. There are three different ways a committee can vote on a bill. The first is voting by voice and how each individual votes is not recorded, the second is voting by division which is a show of hands and is also not officially recorded, and the third is voting by roll call, this is the only type of voting that records each individual members votes.
6. There are typically three deadlines for committee work. The first usually occurs before the Easter holiday and is a date set that committees must act on a bill, the second, just after the Easter holiday is a deadline that committees must act on a bill that has met the first deadline. The third deadline is by which a committee must act on major appropriations and finance bills.
7. If a bill passes all of its assigned committees, it is referred by the committee to the House or Senate floor for a vote by full body, and possible passage into law.
8. All committee meetings are open to the public, a schedule for upcoming meetings can be found on the House and Senate web sites.

BILL BASICS

What is a bill?

A bill is a proposal for a new law, a change in current law, repeal of a current law, or for a constitutional amendment. It consists of a title, enacting clause and body (text), which is examined and approved in its form by the Office of the Revisor of Statutes. In the Senate, bills are called Senate Files. Bills are referred to as House Files in the House of Representatives.

What is a resolution?

Resolutions are formal actions of the Legislature which express intent on the part of one or both bodies, but are not codified into Minnesota statutes upon passage. Each body can pass a separate resolution to express individual intent. They can also pass resolutions jointly or concurrently. A simple search of "HR*" or "SR*" in the bill number field will generate a complete list of simple resolutions for the biennium.

Who can draft a bill?

Anyone can draft a bill: legislators, staff members, state or local agency employees, private groups or individual people. For more information on drafting, see Amendment Form: A Basic Guide for Citizens. However, only a legislator can introduce a bill or a resolution after the Revisor of Statutes has approved its form.

In addition, many Senators and Representatives approach staff members to help them draft a bill. House Research, Senate Counsel and Research, the Office of the Revisor of Statutes, and caucus staff members are often called upon to help.

How can I learn the status of a bill?

You can search for House bills or Senate bills by topic from 1995 to the present from the Legislation and Bill Status page. Click on the link for the House or for the Senate for a search form. The keyword option allows you to search with keywords or phrases. You can also search by topics assigned to each bill from the House Bill Information--Topic

Search page or from the Senate Bill Information--Topic Search page.

If you do not have Internet access, there are public terminals in the Legislative Reference Library on the sixth floor of the State Office Building; however, because you cannot reach the sixth floor from the elevators, you will need to go to the fifth floor and walk up some stairs.

The House and Senate Index Offices also track the status of current bills. They can help you find a particular piece of legislation. Call House Index at (651) 296-6646 or Senate Index at (651) 296-2887. To receive a copy of the bill once you locate it, call the Chief Clerk's Office in the House at (651) 296-6646 or Senate Information at (651) 296-0504.

Are there any legislative calendar deadlines?

There is no yearly deadline for the introduction of bills. However, each year the Legislature establishes deadlines for committee action on bills. The Legislature shall establish by concurrent resolution deadlines for each regular session. The deadlines do not apply to the House committees on Capital Investment, Ways and Means, Taxes, or Rules and Legislative Administration, nor to the Senate committees on Capital Investment, Finance, Taxes, or Rules and Administration.

Committee deadlines are announced during the first half of a session in order to winnow the list of topics to be dealt with that year.

- The first deadline is for committees to act favorably on bills in the house of origin.
- The second deadline is for committees to act favorably on bills, or companions of bills, that met the first deadline in the other house.

A committee has until the second deadline to act favorably on a bill, or the companion of a bill, that by the first deadline was referred to a finance committee. The major appropriation bills are exempt from the first two deadlines.

- The third deadline is for committees to act favorably on major appropriation and finance bills.

When a committee in either house acts favorably on a bill after a deadline established in the concurrent resolution, the bill must be referred in the Senate to the Committee on Rules and Administration and in the House of Representatives to the Committee on Rules and Legislative Administration for disposition. Either rules committee, when reporting a bill referred to the committee under this rule, may waive application of the rule to subsequent actions on that bill by other committees.

What is an omnibus bill?

The terms "omnibus bill" or "garbage bill" are used when a bill contains what some people feel are unrelated subjects.

Many complaints of multiple-subject bills center on large appropriations and tax bills. An omnibus tax bill may cover various changes in several areas of tax law, such as income tax law, corporate tax law,

and sales tax law. Amendments some people consider non-germane to the bill are sometimes included during conference committees, when time is running out during the session and compromises are made quickly. However, typically, those amendments have passed one of the bodies.

When a bill is being amended in committee, the committee chair rules whether an amendment is germane; on the House floor, the Speaker of the House makes those decisions. In the Senate, the committee chair makes the same rulings, and such decisions are left up to the President of the Senate on the floor.

How did my legislator vote on an issue?

If you want to know how a legislator voted on a specific bill, the House Index Office (651) 296-6646 or the Senate Index Office (651) 296-0504 can help you

When do new laws go into effect?

Most new laws go into effect Aug 1st following a legislative session unless a bill specifies another date.



HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



DISABILITY ACCESS AT THE CAPITOL

The entire Capitol complex is accessible to people with disabilities

Entrances and Parking

The circle drive that leads to the historic porte cochere entrance under the front steps of the Capitol building is accessible for drop-off and pick-up. A ramp provides access from the street level, and a dock accepts wheelchair lifts. To enter the building, push the security button on the left side of the door. The entrance is also accessible for busses with passengers; there is sufficient clearance for Metro Mobility Vehicles.

Inside the Capitol

Wheelchairs are available at the first floor Information Desk of the Capitol building to use free of charge. To use a wheelchair, an I.D. card must be left at the Information Desk. Wheelchair access areas

include: Governor's Reception Room/Anteroom, First and Second Floor Rotunda, House of Representatives Gallery, Senate Gallery, Supreme Court and the Rathskeller Cafeteria. In order to get from the Capitol to the State Office Building with a wheel chair, there is a tunnel available. To access the tunnel you will need to go the ground floor of the State Office Building or the Basement of the Capitol Building.

Restrooms

In the Capitol Building, restrooms can be located for women on the ground floor, for men they are located on the first floor. The State Office Building has wheel chair accessible restrooms on every floor, just off the elevator banks.

Are there specific services for people who are blind or visually impaired?

Signs

Raised numbers identify legislative offices and rooms in the State Office Building and Capitol. In addition, Braille signs have also been installed throughout the Capitol Building and the State Office Building to assist those who are visually impaired. The elevators in both buildings are also equipped with control signs in Braille.

Large print

Some of the printed material handed out in committees may be enlarged on the copying machines used by the House and Senate. Contact personnel in the Senate Information Office, Room 231 State Capitol or in House Public Information Services, Room 175 State Office Building for assistance.

Readers

Senate and House Information Office staff will be happy to arrange for readers for printed materials. Again, advance notice is necessary to insure timely assistance. Please call (651) 296-0504 for Senate

Information or (651) 296-2146 for House Public Information.

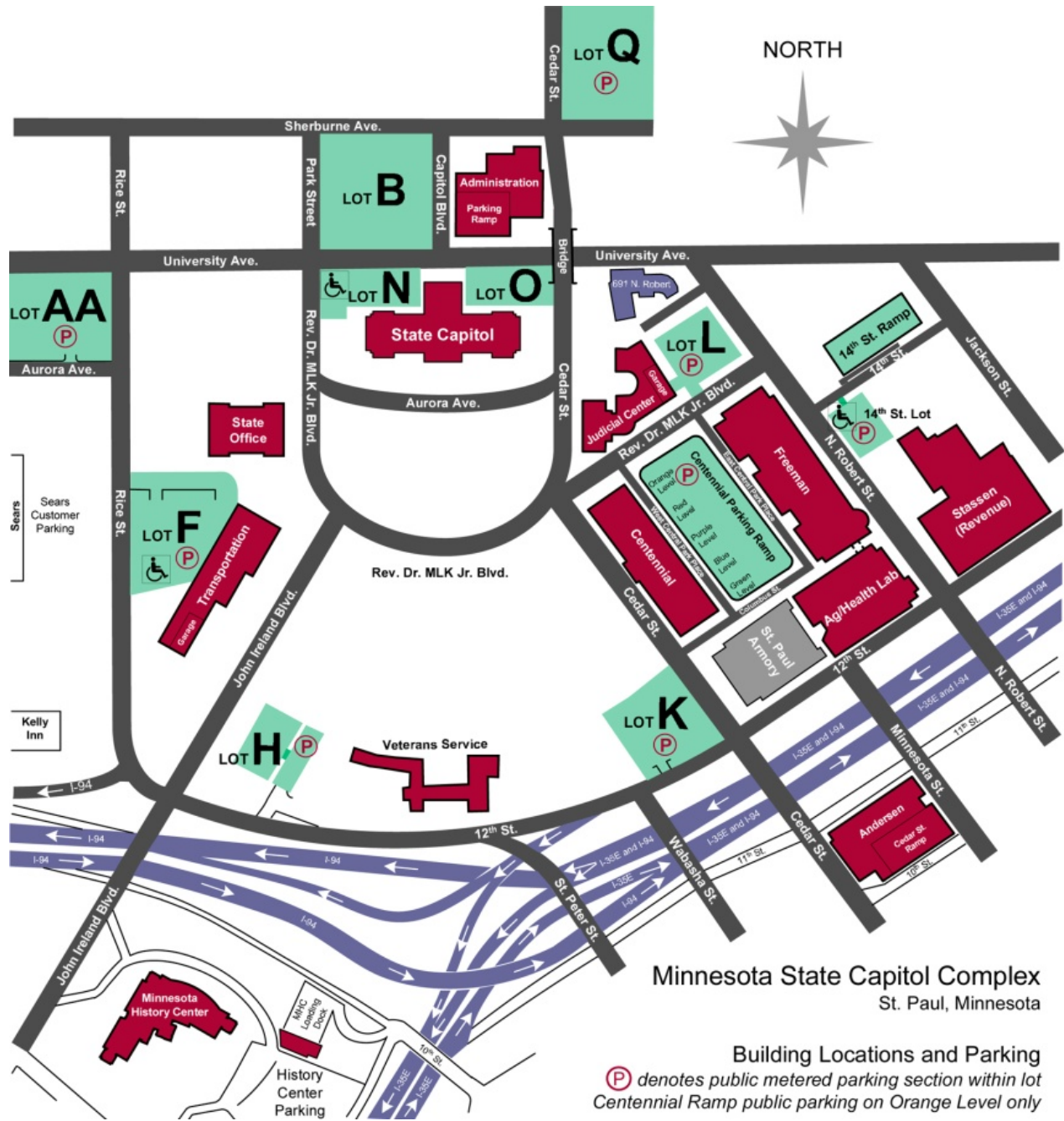
Cassette tapes

Every committee, commission meeting, and floor session is tape recorded. For cassette copies of a particular meeting or floor session contact the Legislative Reference Library. Cassette tapes are made available at a price sufficient to cover the costs of duplicating the tape. If an individual wishes to simply listen to the tape of a committee meeting or floor session, the Legislative Reference Library maintains a facility for listening to the tapes. It is located in Room 71 on the ground floor of the State Office Building. Contact the Legislative Reference Tape Library at (651) 296-0767. For digital recordings you can visit the House or Senate Audio and Video Archives located on their websites.

Documents in Adobe PDF format

Some documents provided by the Minnesota Legislative Information Service are in Adobe PDF format.

MAP OF THE CAPITOL COMPLEX



TEN TIPS TO REMEMBER WHEN VISITING THE CAPITOL

Your visit to the Capitol will go smoothly if you follow these tips:

1. **Parking can be tricky, so be prepared.** Public metered parking and public street parking is available; there are also ramps nearby. Bottom line: remember to bring quarters.
2. **You can purchase and eat food at the Capitol.** If you are going to be there for a while and will need to eat lunch there are many options within the Capitol complex. The Transportation and Centennial building both have cafeterias on the ground floor. The Capitol cafeteria is in the basement of the Capitol building and is closed when the legislature is not in session, and the Veterans Service building's cafeteria is on the fifth floor.
3. **Floor sessions are open to the public.** Galleries for viewing are accessible from the third floor of the Capitol and no passes are required, except for opening day and when the legislature meets in joint session.
4. **Know where the House Offices are located.** If you are meeting with a member of the House of Representatives, their offices are located on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th floors of the State Office Building. When facing the Capitol building, the State Office Building (SOB) will be on your left.
5. **Know where the Senate Offices are located.** If you are meeting with a member of the Senate, their offices are located in two different buildings. Members of the majority party have offices located in the Capitol building; members of the minority party have offices on the 1st floor of the State Office Building.
6. **If the weather's bad, you can get around underground.** If you are visiting on a cold day there is a tunnel that can take you around the Capitol complex. The tunnel is over a mile long and runs in a complete circle from building to building. To access the tunnel from the SOB go to the ground floor, to access the tunnel from the Capitol you will need to go to the basement.
7. **If you would like more information about your legislators** when visiting the Capitol you can visit House Public Information, located in room 175 of the State Office Building and the Senate Information Office, located in room 231 of the State Capitol. Here you can pick up green books, which contain photos, biographical information, committee assignments and contact information for all 201 legislators.
8. **Always arrive five to ten minutes early for your meeting.** Before meeting with your State Representative or State Senator, remember to check in with their legislative assistant.
9. **The entire Capitol complex is handicap accessible.** You can find more information on the Minnesota's Legislative website, or in this session primer.
10. **Know where the bathrooms are located.** You will find bathrooms on every floor on either side of the elevator banks.

DIRECT LOBBYING VS. GRASSROOTS ... WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Lobbying and grassroots advocacy, while very different, are both integral components in ARRM's strategy of influencing legislators and legislation.

Below are some key differences between a lobbyist and a grassroots advocate.



A lobbyist is an individual engaged for pay or of more than \$3,000 or the official action of a metropolitan governmental unit, by communicating or urging others to communicate with public or local officials in order to influence legislation or administrative action.

A lobbyist is not a public official, an employee of the state, an elected official, a news medium or its employees, a paid expert witness, an individual who provides administrative support to a lobbyist.

A lobbyist role in lawmaking is to offer expert testimony on a bill or a bill's possible implications. Legislators pass judgment on hundreds of topics each legislative session, which is why lobbyists are a valuable resource-, particularly ones who have provided reliable information in the past.



A grassroots advocate is an individual who volunteers personal time to work without pay or other consideration on a lobbying campaign.

Effective grassroots organizing requires compelling issues, messages and people.

How you can become a grassroots advocate: Write a letter to your legislator, attend a town hall meeting, call your legislator, invite your legislator at a program site, attend ARRM's Day at the Capitol, and talk to others about getting involved.

A grassroots advocate's role in lawmaking is to advocate to your legislators on issues that are of importance to you and your community. Members of the general public are also encouraged to testify at committee meetings, though testimony must be arranged prior to the hearing, citizen input is highly important to legislators.

GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

Amend: The action a legislator takes to change or propose a change in a bill, motion, report, or even another amendment by adding, omitting, or altering language.

Biennium: The two-year period by which the state budget is set. The two-year legislative term begins in January of an odd-numbered year and ends in December of an even numbered year.

Bill: A proposal calling for a new law, a change in current law, the repeal of a current law, or a constitutional amendment. It consists of a title, enacting clause and body.

Capitol Building: Where members of the senate's majority party offices are located and where the house and senate have their legislative chambers.

Caucus: 1) a group of House members or the same political party of faction such as the "DFL Caucus," the "Republican Caucus," the "Majority" or the "Minority Caucus," 2) a meeting of such a group.

Committee: A group made up of representatives or senators that meet on a regular basis to discuss and hear testimony pertaining to specific areas of interest such as education or health and human services.

Conference Committee: A group of 6 or 10 members, with equal representation from the House and Senate, who are appointed to reach a compromise between the House and Senate version of a bill.

Constituent: A resident of the district that a legislator has been elected to represent.

District: A geographic area within the state represented by a single member of the State Senate or House of Representatives.

Fiscal Note: Puts a price tag on proposed legislation, a fiscal note should be an objective opinion on the change in expenditures and revenues that will result from a bill.

Floor Session: The part of the legislator's work day that takes place when full House or Senate meets in

its chambers to conduct business.

Grassroots: Ordinary people influencing outcomes including public policy and resource allocation decisions that directly affect people's lives.

Legislative Assistant: Administrative assistant to a senator or representative that handles their day to day schedules and communications.

Lobbyist: A person acting individually for an interest group who tries to influence legislation.

Majority Leader: The leader of the party that has the most members in a legislative chamber.

Majority Whip: A legislator selected by the majority party to help the majority leader.

Minority Leader: The leader of the party that has the fewest members in a legislative chamber.

Omnibus: A term used to describe tax, education, appropriations, and other bills that contain many different proposals.

President of the Senate: A senator selected by the majority party to preside over Senate proceedings.

Representative: A member of the state house of representatives representing a house district.

Senator: A member of the state senate representing a senate district.

Speaker of the House: A representative selected by the majority party to preside over House proceedings.

State Office Building: Where all representatives' offices are located and where members of the senate minority party have their offices.

Town Hall Meeting: A public meeting hosted by a representative, senator, or special interest group, to address topics important to the community.

Veto: The constitutional power of the governor to refuse to sign a bill thus preventing it from becoming law unless it is passed again (with a two-thirds majority) by both houses of the legislature

USEFUL LINKS

Minnesota House of Representatives

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/>

100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155
(651) 296-2146
(800) 657-3550

Minnesota Senate

<http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/>

75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155
(651) 296-0504
(888) 234-1112

Who represents you?

<http://www.gis.leg.mn/OpenLayers/districts/>

ARRM's online resources

www.rrm.org

www.rrm.org/advocacy

House audio and video archives

Provides digital recordings of floor sessions, committee meetings, press conferences and informational meetings for the House of Representatives

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/audio/default.asp>

Senate media services

Provides digital recordings of floor sessions, committee meetings, press conferences and informational meetings for the Senate

<http://www.senate.mn/media/index.php?ls=&type=audio>

Bill search and status

Search House and Senate bills to find summaries, authors and status. This site will also allow you to track bills and fiscal notes as well as offer you guides on how to follow a bill.

<http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis.aspx>

The Revisor of Statutes bill drafting manual

Has a chapter that discusses the different types of resolutions and how to find a resolution.

https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pubs/bill_drafting_manual/Chapter%206.htm