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What a rough week for the GOP... and a look at the 2012 session

By Sam Walseth, MREA Lobbyist

Sen. Amy Koch resigned as Senate Majority Leader after being confronted by her colleagues about an inappropriate relationship she's alleged to have had with a senate staffer. According to the Senate GOP's operating rules they must elect a new leader within two weeks. Sources indicate they will meet a day or two before New Year's to hold the election. Former Senate GOP minority leader Dave Senjem (Rochester) has publicly indicated an interest in the position. Sen. Koch played an instrumental role in getting the Senate GOP into the majority for the first time in 38 years. Her decision to resign and not run again leaves the Senate GOP without their key election champion as they head into a very contentious 2012 campaign season with all of their seats up for re-election.

In other news, House Speaker Kurt Zellers announced the schedule for the 2012 session which begins on Tuesday, January 24th. The legislature will take a break from Thursday, February 2 through Tuesday, February 7th so members can fully participate in their precinct caucuses (Tuesday the 7th). They will work through February and March and then take an extended break starting on Friday, April 5th (Good Friday) through Sunday, April 15th. They will adjourn "sine die" on April 30th which is about three weeks earlier than normal. They want members to get back to their newly drawn legislative districts (will be released on February 21) early this year to start work on what promises to be an arduous campaign season.

The 2012 session should run a little smoother this year since there won't be a major budget fight given the state's projected balanced budget through the remainder of the biennium. Instead, the battle will be over the scope and size of the bonding bill (GOP says \$500 million, Dayton says \$750 million) and a host of policy reforms and constitutional amendments. The GOP policy reforms will be their leverage against the Governor's request for a larger bonding bill. As for the constitutional amendments, the Governor doesn't have any authority as to whether or not they go on the ballot next November. The GOP majorities have to decide if and what they want on the ballot in addition to the question defining marriage. Other amendments could be 1) requiring photo ID to vote, 2) require a supermajority in the legislature to raise taxes and 3) an anti-union measure known as "right to work."

MDE Task Forces and Greater MN Reps

The Legislature, Governor, and MDE all establish Task Forces and Working Groups on knotty issues. I expect this trend to continue in the current highly partisan, divided government. Task Forces are a way to influence policy, but only if advocates for your situation are present. Greater Minnesota has not been well represented on these in large part because it is a sacrifice to attend due to travel time and distance.

The Teacher Evaluation Task Force is the exception with eight of the 34 members coming from outside the seven county metropolitan area. Otherwise Greater Minnesota's representation has been one or two of task forces numbering into the 20's. Here are the 2011-12 Task Forces and their Greater Minnesota members. Thank you to all and especially those from MREA member districts.

MREA needs persons willing to represent Greater Minnesota on Task Forces and standing committees for agencies. If you are willing, please email Fred Nolan, Executive Director. He will alert you when openings come available. The turnaround time for appointments is usually too short to send out a general call for volunteers.

- **NCLB waiver process:**
Fred Nolan MREA Exec Director; Jerry Reshetar, Superintendent Grand Meadow, Glenville-Evans
- **Integration Task Force:**
Betty McAllister, Retired Middle School Principal, Worthington
- **Principal Evaluation Task Force:**
David Krenz, Superintendent, Austin; Trish Perry, Principal, New London-Spicer Middle School; Charlie Plumadore, Secondary teacher, Milaca
- **Teacher Evaluation Task Force:**
Beth Anderson, teacher, Esko; Gwen Anderson, teacher, Rocori; Shawn Andress, teacher, Park Rapids; Karrie Boser HS Principal, Pierz; Amy Galatz, Elem Principal, Deer River; Joe Hill, Sup, Sartell; Curt Rock, teacher, Foley; Jodi Sapp, board member, Mankato; Brenda Vathauer, Middle School Principal, Montevideo; Neil Witikko, teacher, Hermantown
- **Tiered Licensure Task Force:**
Allen Hoffman, Sup, Comfrey
- **Telecommunications Access:**
Matt Grosse, Deer River