

One political success begets another

2005 was a very good legislative year. Don't let anyone tell you differently.

Did we achieve every goal?

No.

Did we make every member happy?

No.

But once we toss a major disappointment or two aside, on balance we moved our agenda forward in two dramatically positive ways.

State employee pay plan

Never forget, the last Republican governor and Republican-dominated legislature once again demonstrated in 2003 utter disdain for government programs and services and demoralized state employees with an 18-month pay freeze followed by a miserable six-month pay increase of two-bits an hour.

Come 2005, the contrast could not be more remarkable. Last year we were able to work with our new Democratic governor and legislators to increase state employee pay the greater of 3.5 percent or \$1,005 in Fiscal Year 2006 and 4.0 percent or \$1,118 in Fiscal Year 2007.

In addition, the 2005 Legislature passed our bill (Senate Bill 299) that requires state government to show significant gain and follow a deliberative process in order to privatize state programs and services.

And the legislature passed our bill (House Bill 418) to redefine who really is a supervisor and not a management-designated pretender.

The issues these two bills raise are profound. Not everyone is in agreement as to what they mean or do. But we believe they provide state employee unions more traction when it comes to battling privatization and arbitrary management attempts to redefine bargaining units. As 2006 rolls by, we will be testing the impact of these bills.

K-12 school funding

And then there is school funding.

After a dozen years of blatantly cynical Republican neglect of public schools, our new governor and 2005 Legislature assertively responded to our lawsuit and public relations campaign.

We now have a statutory definition of a basic system of free quality public schools and a new funding formula that should—with proper political attention in the next legislature and beyond—serve us well for years to come.

So, now what?

Our first order of business in 2006 is to achieve similar success in the 2007 Legislature, only 11 short months away.

In order to do so, we must help elect and reelect legislators determined to do the best they can for quality public programs and services.

Candor, honesty, straight talk compel me to underscore that Democrats stand taller with more conviction on our issues than do Republicans. Recent voting records prove this point. Visit www.me-mft.org/05votingrecord.htm. Check out the 2005 regular and special session voting records on our issues.

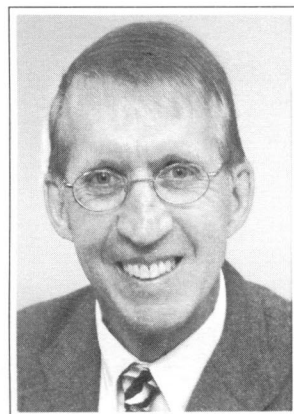
Fortunately, you will find a handful of Republican legislators who do pretty well. They include senators Sam Kitzenberg, John Cobb, and Dave Lewis and representatives Bernie Olson, Alan Olson, and Mark Noennig.

In addition to electing state legislators who believe in government and public schools, we have an absolute union obligation to promote and pass a long-delayed increase in the minimum wage. Who would have thought when the minimum wage crept up to \$5.15 an hour a decade ago, that it would then just freeze there in place?

Imagine trying to live on \$5.15 an hour! Paid work could not be more economically devastating and socially demeaning.

We are committed to Raise Montana, the ballot issue campaign to increase the Montana minimum wage \$1 effective January 1, 2007 and to provide an annual inflationary increase every year thereafter.

And should the more radically right wing legislators in the Republican Party launch, as they have promised, a ballot issue campaign to cap state expenditures whether revenues are available or not, we will do what it takes to once again turn back, as we have many times before, their anti-government, anti-public school crusade. ■



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