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Political notebook: Legislature full of gubernatorial candidates

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ST. PAUL – Next year's Minnesota Legislature should be interesting, given that many key lawmakers want to make the jump to governor – or at least are considering it.

Rep. Marty Seifert, R-Marshall, opted to leave his job as minority leader even if he just "kicks the tires" for a gubernatorial run. He said it would not be fair to the 47 House Republicans if he were forced to split his time between leading them and running for governor.

Another House leader soon may face the same situation, but pretty much no one expects her to step out of her high-profile role. Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher, DFL-Minneapolis, is expected to enter an already crowded Democratic contest.

Seifert would not say Kelliher needs to resign as speaker if she runs for governor, but did say: "My announcement today may put some interesting pressure on her."

There are another dozen leaders and committee chairmen looking at running, a situation that often leads to more rhetoric than work in sessions. On the other hand, candidates may be eager to hit the campaign trail and not want to be in session very long, leaving Minnesota with a short session.

Most pundits probably would bet on the former.

No Pawlenty

Gov. Tim Pawlenty admits he is not well known across the country, which means he would need to do a lot of work if he were to run for president in 2012.

As if to drive that point home, a CNN poll did not even mention the Minnesota Republican.

However, since the survey showed there is no clear front runner, it leaves Pawlenty with a chance.

CNN reported that 22 percent of Republicans likely would support former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee. Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney came in at 21 percent each.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich trailed at 13 percent, with just 6 percent backing ex-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

Independence candidates?

Independence Party Chairman Jack Uldrich says that not only will Republican and Democratic-Farmer-Labor party politicians run for governor, but someone will emerge from his party as well.

Apparently considering running are former U.S. Rep. Tim Penny, former short-time U.S. Sen. Dean Barkley and Stephen Williams, who ran for the Senate last year.

Time to celebrate

Al Franken says it is time to party.

But a June 25 Minneapolis gathering is more than a celebration; it is a fund-raiser. Tickets run anywhere from \$50 to \$5,000.

The Democrat's U.S. Senate campaign says he has made it through three of the five C's – campaign, count and court. This party will be the celebration, with the final C – Capitol – left.

In a letter to supporters, Franken said he continues to need contributions: "Although I'm confident that our victory will withstand any continuing legal challenges from national Republicans, our talented legal team is still hard at work protecting our win, which means I still need your help."

Franken was locked in an expensive court battle with opponent Norm Coleman.

Money for borer

Minnesota should receive \$771,250 in federal funds to fight the emerald ash borer that is spreading across the state.

Most of that goes to keeping track of the borer's spread, with some being made available to cut infected down trees.

"With the recent discovery of emerald ash borer, it is vital that we do everything possible to stop the spread of this potentially devastating infestation," U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., said. "The quick approval of federal help is critical to our efforts to stop this fast-spreading bug."

Opening joke

They say speeches should begin with a joke, so Tim Pawlenty did just that when announcing he would not run for a third term as Minnesota governor.

"Thanks for coming to the announcement that, in light of the Brett Favre situation and its unsettling impact on the people of Minnesota, I am signing an executive order requiring St. Paul native Joe Mauer, in addition to catching for the Twins, to also play quarterback for the Vikings," Pawlenty deadpanned. "These are tough times, Joe, and everybody has to dig deep."

Observers may have walked away with at least observation: Pawlenty will not "unretire" like the famous quarterback.

Within hours, Pawlenty was in demand on the national news channel scene. But apparently no one asked him to repeat his opening joke. Most of the talk