

Monday
2/7/05

With four weeks left, the heavy lifting starts

PIERRE — The Legislature hits the half-way point of its 2005 session today. Lawmakers have introduced the smallest number of bills, 488, in at least a decade.

One-third of the legislators, 36 of the 195, sponsored no bills or one. Among those three dozen, 21 are new to the Legislature this year.

The flip side is that a handful of others with more experience have taken on very large loads.

Sen. Dave Knudson, R-Sioux Falls, is prime sponsor of the most bills this session, with 11.



MERCER

As he wrapped up work at his desk in the near-empty Senate chamber Thursday evening, preparing for a busy Friday morning when he would have two bills up for hearing at the same time while he also was to preside as chairman of the Senate Taxation Committee, he mused about whether he had taken on too much.

Not long after Knudson left for the night, Sen. Frank Kloucek made a quick stop at his desk across the chamber, taking a planned detour en route between two of the nightly official social events held for the Legislature throughout the session.

Kloucek, D-Scotland, is prime sponsor of 13 bills. Both he and Knudson typically introduce a hefty number. Knudson's legislation tends to win approval and become law, while Kloucek's almost never does.

As he put things in order for the next day, Kloucek remarked about how his bills didn't seem to be getting scheduled promptly for committee hearings this session. He talked about how in the past he's had to scramble from room to room when as many as four of his bills had hearings on the same morning.

Another lawmaker who is very busy, again, this year is Sen. Lee Schoenbeck, R-Watertown. He is prime sponsor of 11 bills and also serves as Senate president pro tem, the No. 2 presiding officer for the chamber, behind Lt. Gov. Dennis Daugaard, the Senate president.

Last session Knudson and

ON DAKOTA

EDITOR'S NOTE: Bob Mercer is *The Daily Republic's* Capitol Bureau correspondent in Pierre. He covers state government and S.D. politics.

the same fashion is Sen. Ed Olson, R-Mitchell. While he is prime sponsor of six bills, he's the Senate lead on 14 House bills.

Last session, Olson statistically was the most effective in the Senate or the House at passing bills. He was prime sponsor of seven, and all seven became law.

LIGHT LOADS: Meanwhile other lawmakers have no bills left that they have to directly handle.

Sen. Jim Hundstad, D-Bath, was prime sponsor of one bill, which would have required public schools to switch to a four-day week for classes. It was killed at its first hearing. He hasn't signed onto any House bills as the lead Senate sponsor, so he's free of further responsibility in that respect.

An unofficial count shows six legislators introduced no legislation of their own and aren't lead sponsors of legislation that starts in the other chamber. Five are brand new this session and still learning their way in the intricate process.

Nineteen of the true freshmen introduced no bills or one.

A FEW TO WATCH: The frontrunner for rookie of the year at this point must be Rep. Deb Peters, R-Hartford.

She gamely agreed to be prime sponsor of complex legislation that aims to fix some of the problems troubling the unemployment insurance trust fund. The changes just might be enough to keep the rapidly-falling fund balance from dropping too low and triggering an automatic surtax on employers in 2007.

David Owen, president for the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry, hopes so. He asked Peters to handle the legislation, despite her state-house inexperience, because of her knowledge on the issue as a certified public accountant. Owen brought the legislation because the Rounds administration was politically reluctant to take the lead. It's the only bill on which Peters is prime sponsor.

Rep. Elizabeth Kraus, R-Rapid