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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Concerned students lobby for the environment

Summary: Morris students exercised their civic rights and traveled recently to the state capitol to lobby for environmental legislation.

(April 7, 2009)-by Ruth Hamberg '09 -- University of Minnesota, Morris students exercised their civic rights and traveled recently to the state capitol to lobby for environmental legislation.

Members of the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG) and other concerned students who went on the trip are: Ashley Gaschk '10, Tara Greiman '11, Ruth Hamberg '09, Stuart Kohl '09, Alex Murphy '09, Jess Pederson '09, Collin Sandoe '12, Jenna Sandoe '10, Angela Schiappacasse '11, and Brynn Stember '11.

Students met with State Senator Bill Ingebrigtsen and Representative Torrey Westrom, both legislators for the west central region where the Morris campus is located, as well as representatives from their hometown districts.

Jamison Tessneer, organizing director for MPIRG, said, "The students were articulate and to the point. They engaged the legislators on a professional level, ensuring that their voices were heard on the issues that they cared about."

For sophomore Brynn Stember of Bemidji, a first-time lobbyist, the experience was "an extremely beneficial opportunity to expand my horizons and education. Lobbying and talking with our senators and representatives is one of the greatest democratic rights that we have and I think it is important to seize it. I plan to lobby as much as I can throughout my life for issues that I am concerned and passionate about."

The bills under discussion included Safe Mines to Protect Our Water and the Clean Car Act, which encourages adoption of the state-based emissions standards recommended by Governor Pawlenty's Minnesota Climate Change Advisory Group. The legislation would reduce emissions from cars and light-duty trucks by 30 percent by 2016.

The trip was sponsored by the Morris campus chapter of MPIRG, a grassroots, non-partisan, nonprofit, student-directed organization that empowers and trains students and engages the community to take collective action in the public interest across Minnesota. The group worked with host Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP), a network of environmental and conservation organizations that strengthens the effectiveness of its members' voices. MEP provided training and support throughout the day, helping students put into words their concerns regarding the protection of Minnesota's natural resources.

MPIRG at the University of Minnesota, Morris lobbies at the capitol twice each year.

Photo by Patience Caso, Minnesota Environmental Partnership

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