

BUSINESS

9 TO 5

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Franken joins bill intended to strengthen energy efficient technologies

Senator: Bill would help grow Minnesota’s biomass, timber industries, reduce energy costs

BY FRANKEN STAFF REPORT

U.S. Sen. Al Franken says he is continuing his work to strengthen Minnesota’s energy industry this week by joining onto a bill to bolster the production of biomass fuels.

Originally introduced by Sens. Angus King, I-Maine, and Susan Collins, R-Maine, the Biomass Thermal Utilization Act would increase tax credits for fuel producers who work with biomass thermal technologies. Biomass fuels, such as wood pellets and chips or agricultural residues, can help reduce energy costs and carbon emissions.

“Minnesota is a leader in renewable energy technologies and it’s critical that we continue making key investments in this sector,” said Franken, D-Minn. “Strengthening Minne-

sota’s biomass and timber industries is good for our economy — and for our national security — because it helps reduce the cost of energy, decrease our dependency on foreign oil, and create jobs.”

Franken has long been a champion of increasing investments in energy efficiency technologies. In addition to joining onto the biomass bill this week, during a recent hearing on increasing investments in clean energy technologies, Franken talked about the need to overcome financial barriers for investing in clean energy.

In the hearing, he pushed for the passage of his legislation that would help industry, universities, hospitals, and communities reduce their energy costs by giving them tools to help capture and use the

energy that is otherwise wasted.

In the United States, up to 35 percent of the total energy consumed is now being lost from power plants, industrial facilities, and other buildings in the form of “waste heat,” according to a Franken news release. Franken has introduced the Local Energy Supply and Resiliency Act to help businesses, communities, and nonprofits capture that “waste heat” for use in heating, cooling, and power generation.

Last month, Franken focused his first hearing as the Chairman of the Energy and Natural Resource Committee’s Energy Subcommittee on energy efficiency.



Al Franken

Government program leads to growth

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Members of the business community met last week to learn more about a federal program that could stimulate economic growth in Koochiching County.

The Historically Underutilized Business Zone program identifies certain small businesses in rural and urban areas and helps them gain access to federal contract opportunities. The HUBZone program gives preferences in federal government contract bids to small businesses that are located in and hire from HUBZone areas like Koochiching County.

Eleven community members attended the hour-long meeting, said Jenny Herman of the Special Business Development Center. Randall Czaia from the Small Business Administration in Minneapolis explained how businesses qualify for the program, how to apply for the program, and the benefits of membership in the pro-

gram.

“I would say it was a successful meeting,” Herman said. “It’s good to get the information out to the businesses that will contract with the federal government.”

There aren’t many businesses in the area that do government contracting, Herman said, but there are billions of dollars available in government contracts to those that do. The biggest industry that does business with government contracts are construction contractors, she said.

“The biggest is commercial and institutional building construction, which would be the businesses in this area who this would appeal to,” she said.

Mayor Bob Anderson attended the meeting, and said one of the challenges with the HUBZone program is the lack of government contracts and projects in the area.

“Generally those are down more towards Duluth or going further west towards Fargo, you’d find more of those federal projects,” he said.

Now that Koochiching County’s status as a HUBZone is secure for a while longer, Anderson said it’s up to local contractors to retain their certification for when federal contracts come their way.

“We’re hoping to do a project at the terminal building at the airport if the financing comes through — that would be a federal project,” he said. “Sixty percent of that project would be federal money.”

The two biggest mistakes businesses make when they apply for HUBZone certification are the requirements that 35 percent of their employees live in the HUBZone and the principal office is located in the HUBZone as well, Herman said.

Federal contracts can stimulate a business and promote growth. But for now, local businesses will have to wait for those contracts to come down the pipe.

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