Visiting the State Capitol During Legislative Session

SOUTH DAKOTA LEGISLATURE
LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COUNCIL

If you, or your class at school, plan to visit the Capitol this winter during the annual legislative session, here are some suggestions to make your visit more educational and fun:

PLAN YOUR VISIT

Review the legislative schedule for the day of your visit. Use the Legislative Research Council web site to review what will be taking place during the time you spend at the Capitol: www.sdlegislature.gov. To find committee agendas, look at the Schedule on the main page or click on the "Session" tab, then click on "Chambers/Committees". From there, you can select the committee of interest to you. The committee "Details" page will allow you to see information such as where and when the committee meets. Click on "Agenda" to find the list of bills that will be heard at a particular meeting. Agendas are generally posted 48 hours in advance of the meeting.

Legislative committees meet in the mornings. Most committee meetings begin at either 7:45 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. and last for two hours. The Senators and Representatives convene in their respective chambers at 2 p.m. most afternoons for their daily sessions. If your visit brings you to the Capitol in the afternoon, click on "Chambers/Committee" and then choose either "Senate" or "House" and click on "Calendar." The calendar will display the bills that will be heard in that particular chamber on that afternoon. Calendars are only posted one day in advance, following the previous day's session, so you will want to look at that the night before your visit.

Let your local legislators know that you are coming. Legislators like to know when people from their districts are coming to the Capitol for a visit. If it is at all possible, they want to greet you; give them a chance to do so. They can be reached by phone or by e-mail, or you can call the House lobby or the Senate lobby and leave a message for them.

KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

Visitors will enter through the north doors and time should be allowed for passing through the security checkpoint.

The Capitol is a busy place during legislative sessions. Parking is at a premium. There is a large parking area on the north side of the Capitol, but it fills up quickly. You are likely to end up parking along one of the side streets and walking a few blocks to the Capitol. The halls are often congested. If you arrive in a large group, try not to block hallways, doorways, or stairways; always leave a path for legislators and others who must get past you.

Inside the Capitol. The Legislature does its work on the third and fourth floors of the Capitol. Most of the committee rooms and the chamber galleries are located on fourth floor. The House and Senate chambers and the Legislative Research Council office are located on the third floor. Several stairways and elevators are available for your use. Once you pass through the Capitol Security office you can find a map of the building and other information. The Governor's Office is located in the west wing of the second floor, and the Supreme Court occupies the east wing of the second floor. There is a café in the basement of the Capitol that serves breakfast and lunch items along with pop and snacks.

Maintain proper decorum. Be quiet and respectful in the hallways, committee rooms, and galleries of the chambers. Loud talking, hand clapping, and disturbing those busy at work in other ways are not appropriate behaviors. Cell phones should be on silent at all times, and no food or drink is allowed.

Thursdays are generally not the best days to visit. Thursdays are often the last day of the legislative week, and in order to allow time to travel home for the weekend, the legislators may conclude their work early or reschedule the debate of certain bills for the following week. So, you may not want to visit on a Thursday unless you only plan to spend time here in the morning. The Legislature is not in session on most Fridays or federal holidays. Please be sure to check the legislative calendar before scheduling your visit.

Further Information

If you need further information about visiting the Capitol, you may call the Legislative Research Council office in Pierre at (605) 773-3251. You can also contact the local legislators in your area.