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Senator visits NRRI

By Wade Petrich
Editor

U.S Senator Al Franken (D-Minn.) made his first official visit to Hermantown Thursday when he toured the Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI). He was impressed.

"This is an unbelievable place," Franken said during a follow up press conference at the facility.

Albeit short, Franken was given an extensive tour of the facility and had a chance to meet with many of the staff to discuss the projects they were working on at the moment. In many cases the department heads

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were waiting outside to speak with the senator and give him an abbreviated summary of their project.

Franken said the NRRI, part of the University of Minnesota system, located on Highway 53, was a great return on taxpayers' investments. He mentioned the work being done with ethanol, taconite pellets and studies on the moose population with its relationship to global warming as being some areas that stood out during his tour.

"I was interested in almost everything I saw," he said.

The NRRI was hoping to put on a good show since public funding is important for continuation of its work. It receives approximately 25 percent of its budget from the state. The total year budget has fluctuated from $16.5 million to $13.3 million over the last five years.

NRRI Director Michael Lalich said the rest of the money is generated from other sources, including grants and some private dollars.

There is $470 million in federal funds available for environmental research of the Great Lakes. He said based on what he learned, NRRI should be considered for some of that fund.

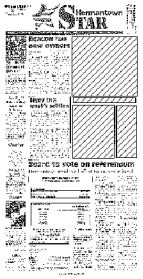
The NRRI and its three other locations in northern Minnesota employ around 200 people, some of whom are students.

Stating the U.S. Senate was on recess, Franken said this was a chance for him to tour the state and learn more about what people are working on in Minnesota.

While the senator did absorb a considerable amount of information, he did break up the tour with injecting a little bit of humor from time to time.

Franken has only been in office a short time after a recount dragged out until the summer before a ruling was made that he defeated incumbent Norm Coleman.

Franken makes first official stop in Hermantown after being sworn in to office this summer



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Star Photos by Wade Petrich

Sen. Al Franken takes a look at a chess piece he received from NRRI. Top, Don Fosnacht and Mike Lalich show off some of the things they can do at the Hermantown facility.

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