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a joint House and Senate task force which met over the past year.

The governor's recommended education spending plan included no special education funding for 1999.

### All-day kindergarten

Kelso's bill also proposes spending an additional \$500,000 for certain schools to begin or continue all-day kindergarten programs.

The new funds would bring next year's allowance for the first-grade preparedness program up to \$5.5 million.

Lawmakers on the K-12 Education Finance Division heard testimony citing several national reports showing that attending all-day kindergarten dramatically increases students' academic and social skills.

The provision comes from a bill (HF2763) sponsored by Rep. Jean Wagenius (DFL-Mpls) that originally aimed to implement all-day kindergarten statewide by 2004. Under that plan, schools with the greatest number of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch would have been eligible for funding first.

Under the latest plan in HF2874, any district that previously offered a full-day program can apply for funding.

### In-school suspension

Lawmakers also included a plan in the omnibus education bill to fund in-school suspension programs.

The provision would give schools \$4 per day for each suspended student placed in an in-school or alternative program.

The idea was originally proposed in a separate bill (HF3664) sponsored by Rep. Andy Dawkins (DFL-St. Paul). Dawkins said he was concerned that at-risk students become further disenfranchised when they are temporarily barred from school, but that funding problems deter schools from setting up in-school alternatives.

The extra money could be used to upgrade existing programs by adding licensed teachers and incorporating academic instruction.

### Boarding schools

Although Kelso's bill doesn't financially support the governor's proposal for boarding schools for at-risk teens, an 11th-hour amendment by Rep. Alice Seagren (R-Bloomington) was approved, asserting support for the plan.

Carlson's plan was reflected in a separate bill (HF2321) sponsored by Seagren. The plan calls for \$12 million to build three year-round residential academies. That money is currently being considered for inclusion in an omnibus

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## Hugoson compares lawmaking with being MDA commissioner

By Matt Wetzel

He's been a soldier, a teacher, a farmer, a legislator, and now, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) — a job with responsibilities as diverse and varied as the career that's taken Gene Hugoson to where he is now.

"A lot comes under the job criteria, [including] speaking out to the different agriculture groups, going to Washington to testify on different agriculture issues," he said. "Being in the Legislature is like driving a car by committee. You get there at the end of the session. The system works, but it's a committee process. In this job, it's much easier for one person to have an influence."

Besides overseeing more than 500 employees, Hugoson promotes Minnesota-grown products and Minnesota farmers as actively as he can — on both the national and international levels. He also has the regulatory responsibility of any state administrative job.

With the Department of Agriculture, that includes inspection and monitoring of fertilizer plants, chemical warehouses, grain elevators, dairies, and grocery stores to make sure the department is protecting public health and safety.

While serving the House in 1995, Hugoson was approached by members of Gov. Arne Carlson's staff, who asked if the fifth-term lawmaker would be interested in taking the job as commissioner.

"Having been at the Legislature, having worked in the Agriculture Committee for the whole time, it seemed like a unique opportunity to make a difference," he said.

Hugoson, 52, is a native of Martin County in southwestern Minnesota. He still operates the family farm, a 750-acre corn and soybean operation near East Chain.

He joins his wife, Patricia, and 18-year-old son, Jon, on weekends, but Hugoson lives in the Twin Cities during the week.

He is a 1967 graduate of Augsburg College in Minneapolis with a degree in social science education, and he served in the U.S. Army for a two-year hitch, including a tour in Vietnam.

Hugoson did graduate work at Mankato

State University, and he was a school teacher in Lakefield, Minn., and St. James, Minn. Running as a Republican, he won election to the House in 1986 and was re-elected four times.

Besides the Agriculture Committee, he worked on the House Taxes Committee and House Transportation and Transit Committee. He also served four years as assistant minority leader.

A major difference between being a commissioner and a legislator is the variety, he said.

"As a legislator, you're expected to know a little about everything. You may be speaking to a veterans' group, senior citizens, or local government," he said. "Here, it's virtually all agriculture, but there's a lot of diversity [in agriculture] in Minnesota. Suddenly, you learn about wheat and barley, dairy, sugar beets, wild rice, canola.

"When I was a legislator, my constitu-



Gene Hugoson, state commissioner of agriculture, has been a teacher, a farmer, and a legislator. He said his latest job presents a new set of challenges and opportunities.

ents consisted of 33,000 people. Now I work for the governor, and beyond that, everybody in the state of Minnesota."

Hugoson does miss being in the Legislature, if only a little.

"There's a camaraderie that develops in the Legislature," he said. "There's a lot of interaction that you expect when you're in session. The camaraderie is similar to what you've got in the military — being away from your family during the week, not being around them during the session."

