



Jim Winkel, his wife, Susan, and daughter, Tracy, left to right, listen as members of the House Crime Prevention Committee discuss a bill Feb. 18 that would require law enforcement officers to receive training in high-speed pursuit driving every two years. Winkel testified about the day his son, Jeff, was killed when his pickup truck was hit by a Minneapolis squad car in high-speed pursuit of a burglary suspect.

"That's not a choice we think prosecutors should have to make," he said.

The bill would expand the law to allow offenders to be convicted and sentenced for both charges.

Although statewide data is not yet available for 1998, the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension does have records for 1997. According to the agency, there were 956 police pursuits in Minnesota in that year. Of those pursuits, 44 percent resulted in property damage to the squad car, the offender's vehicle, or other property. A little over half of the pursuits were initiated because of traffic violations. There were two chase-related fatalities in 1997.

Some critics of police pursuits have argued that because the risk to the public is high, pursuits should only be initiated for felony level offenders, or only for offenders who are dangerous to the public.

Although the bill was being heard in a policy committee rather than a finance committee, several members asked Stanek about the fiscal impact, especially funding for training.

As approved, the bill would also provide a yet-to-be decided amount to reimburse local law enforcement agencies for the cost of the additional training.

Reporting from the floor of the House



It's a Fact!

You won't find many newspaper editors serving in the House these days, but earlier this century, it wasn't all that uncommon.

Editors at small rural weekly papers were often the owners, business managers, ad salesmen, typesetters, photographers, and janitors. And given the trend for newspapers to be voices of one political party, involvement in government came naturally for some.

Gunnar B. Bjornson owned and operated the *Minneota Mascot* from 1900 to 1944. He was elected to the House terms beginning in 1913 and 1915, representing a district in southeastern Minnesota.

It soon became apparent that one benefit of having a newspaper editor as a legislator was the quality of his communication, in both editorials and personal letters. Reams of such Bjornson papers have been catalogued by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Bjornson, a Republican, took moderate to conservative stands on most issues. He supported the creation of a public utilities commission in the state in 1914, noting the need to protect individual citizens, and he warned about concentrating power in the hands of large cities. He also supported requiring public approval for counties to bond for road projects, decrying a state law that allowed bonding through a simple majority vote of the board of commissioners.

But he was an opponent of the nonpartisan primary, adopted by the state in 1913.

"It plays havoc with all party organization," said Bjornson, who was later to serve as the chair of the Republican State Central Committee. He noted that campaigning began in January for elections in June, then

began again and continued well into the fall.

"This makes for a whole year of campaigning, which is by no means desirable either for the public or the man who has to run for office," he wrote.

Bjornson treaded lightly on legislative issues dealing with newspapers. To the chagrin of staunch First Amendment advocates, he supported a bill that would have regulated newspaper activity in political campaigns.

Specifically, the bill would have made it impossible for newspapers to publish anonymous letters "attacking men running for office."

He termed the proposal "quite proper" and expressed hope that it would eliminate "communications of a spurious nature tending to influence elections."

He supported but would not allow his name to be connected to another bill that would have required publication of personal property tax lists, noting that it promised considerable revenue for some newspapers and created a conflict of interest for him.

Bjornson was known as a stickler for details and despised

typographical errors, both as a lawmaker and editor. On one occasion, he printed in the *Mascot* that a certain Ingibjorg Augustine Hurdal had arrived in the community from Winnipeg, Canada. He inadvertently published the incorrect courtesy title, "Mrs."

He apologized profusely in a subsequent edition, and when he later married Miss Hurdal, some said it was to make good on the error.

Bjornson died in 1959. His passing was memorialized by newspapers around the state, which heralded his contribution to both the political scene and the newspaper world.



Gunnar B. Bjornson

Some members expressed concerns about the state paying for training that should be handled by the local government.

Given the tone of the questions in the policy committee, this training provision may raise eyebrows when the bill is heard next in the House Judiciary Finance Committee.

Delmont said the Legislature should provide some assistance for the statewide initiative. "We are asking the Legislature to require this," he said. "We are also asking the Legislature to pay for it." 