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PIONEER

BEMIDJI, MN

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**Goggleye shares
Leech Lake concerns
with GOP lawmakers**

FRONT PAGE

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

CASS LAKE — A stake in a metro-area casino could give the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe the resources it needs to battle growing pains, say tribal leaders.

A casino in partnership with three northern Minnesota Chippewa bands and the state could swing \$20 million to \$40 million a year to Leech Lake, "which are resources badly needed here," Tribal Chairman George Goggleye Jr. said Wednesday.

"We have housing problems, crime, a history of corruption,

but this Tribal Council does what it can to steer away from that and to the positive for the needs of tribal people," Goggleye said.

The Leech Lake Tribal Council met Wednesday morning with state Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and state Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, whose districts include the reservation. They later took a van tour of tribal facilities in the Cass Lake area, and had lunch at the tribe's Northern Lights Casino near Walker.

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Pioneer Photo by Brad Swenson

Interim Leech Lake Tribal College President Leah Carpenter, left foreground, briefs state Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and state Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, both at right, about the college's building project during a tour Wednesday of Leech Lake Reservation facilities. Next to Carpenter is Leech Lake Tribal Executive Director Sally Morrison.

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Goggleye, tribal chairman for about two months after a recall election embroiled the reservation in turnover which now includes its secretary-treasurer, wants to move the reservation in a different direction.

First, the tribe has dropped its opposition to the Red Lake and White Earth bands' proposal to join with the state in a Twin Cities-area casino and has actually joined with them as the third tribe. The Minnesota Indian Gaming Equity Act would allow the state's three most populous tribes access to the lucrative Twin Cities gaming market.

It's a message he gave Wednesday to Ruud and Fuller, and one he also gave on Saturday to U.S. Sen. Mark Dayton, DFL-Minn., and to Frank Moe, Fuller's DFL opponent in the Nov. 2 election.

Fuller has supported a competing bill to allow slot machines at the privately run Canterbury Park and voted against the Red Lake/White Earth proposal. But that was before Leech Lake joined the two tribes.

"You didn't support this before because the (Leech Lake) tribe didn't support it," Goggleye told Fuller. "With new leadership and things more open, we will take steps to benefit the tribe as a whole."

"Your joining the other tribes looms large and will significantly help," Fuller said. "It will help solidify a lot of things."

Supporters say the proposal would send about \$90 million to the state, while the bands would split the remaining profit, estimated at \$130 million. A northern Twin Cities suburb location is proposed, but Dayton on Saturday said the tribes should build at the Mall of America.

The three tribes make up about 85 percent of the American Indian population in Minnesota, Goggleye said.

Ruud also called the proposal significant, as it puts the Leech Lake band at the table in discussions with the state over a new direction for gaming which will benefit the largest but poorest tribes.

Build land base

Next, tribal officials want to use the financial resources to help tribal needs, such as improving substandard housing and increasing housing as more tribal members move back to the reservation.

But that also means more land is needed for housing, something which Cass and other counties are fighting because of the loss of property tax dollars when land becomes tribal and goes into trust.

Leech Lake officials plan to convince surrounding governments that a vibrant Leech Lake Reservation helps the area economy, and the tribe should be allowed to grow its land base.

"We have only 4 percent of our original land base," Goggleye said. "We can't put land in trust because counties argue that they are losing tax base, but 70 percent of our employees are non-Indian and are residents of the local counties."

Plus, Leech Lake members are shopping in places like Bemidji and Walker, adding to the local economy. "And we provide services counties do not do," Goggleye said.

The tribe is seeking 22 parcels of land, many in Cass Lake, but action to place the parcels in trust through the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs has met continual opposition from Cass County, he said. "Our people have a need for housing, but when they need the land, it is not there."

Rich Robinson, interim Leech Lake natural resources director, told Ruud and Fuller that the reservation housing authority administers about 600 homes for tribal people, and that there is a 200-family waiting list. Federal Housing and Urban Development dollars used for home-building can't be tapped unless the land is in trust, he added.

The tribe has only 40,000 acres in trust, Robinson said, while the 600,000-acre-plus Chippewa National Forest is a tax-exempt land base that is really hurting county coffers.

Fuller asked if home ownership programs can be made to work on the reservation, rather than putting land in trust, letting market dynamics work for housing.

"So much of the problem is uneducated or low-paying jobs, and people can't go to the market to get loans for homes,"

Robinson said.

The tribe in the next year hopes to add a real estate specialist to work out land issues, including lease arrangements it now has with non-Indian lakeshore owners, Goggleye said. That will give the tribe a better handle on building a land base.

"The idea of developing a real estate specialist within the tribe is good and an excellent priority," Ruud said. "Then you would know where you stand."

The tribe also has plans for a wellness clinic, with a mental health specialty, that could help all northern Minnesota tribes, Goggleye said. That proposal may eventually need some state funding.

He also said the tribe wants to develop a rural transit system, which would benefit both tribal members and non-Indians across the reservation lands, as most of the job opportunities and services are at Cass Lake or Walker.

Tapping into the Twin Cities gaming market could help bring those financial resources to Leech Lake, he said, adding that smaller tribes now control the pie while the most populous tribes need the resources.

"Being able to tackle these issues of land and jobs and getting the counties and the state to come to the table with us is just a beginning," Goggleye said. "We are making great strides, but some of our programs are just Band-Aids to cover the problem."

"The idea of a wellness center here is tremendous, as you can treat your people and their families without leaving," said Ruud, noting that the tribe at one time had looked at part of the Ah-Gwah-Ching Center campus for such a center. "Even if it is not at Ah-Gwah-Ching, we want to make it happen in this area and that is the right direction."

"We're here to build a relationship and do what we can," Fuller told the Tribal Council. "I'm thrilled at the many changes you are making and I commend you for it. It is a process that will take a long time, but it will have a long-term impact."

Ruud said the day was helpful as "it is helping to educate me so I can help you better."

After the fall election, Goggleye said it is the Tribal Council's intent to host lawmakers at Leech Lake to show them tribal conditions such as substandard housing and pitch for the casino bill.

"A lot of our problems are self-imposed, but a lot is also the way people are forced to live," he said. "We want to get support for the Minnesota Indian Gaming Equity Act. Gaming has been big for us, but it hasn't solved the problems we have."

Indian scholarships

Ruud and Fuller took a van tour if several Leech Lake areas around Cass Lake, including the St. Regis hazardous waste clean-up site in Cass Lake.

They also met with Leech Lake Tribal College Interim President Leah Carpenter, who discussed the new college now being built near The Palace Casino, and discussed the Minnesota Indian Scholarship Program which was shut down in Bemidji and moved to the state Education Department in St. Paul.

Fuller and other northern legislators have attempted to return the services to Bemidji, but the Education Department has blocked the move, saying it is more cost-effective out of St. Paul.

"They don't manage their paperwork very well and don't communicate with our students," Carpenter said. "There is a long wait for some services and it imposes a lot of hardships on our students."

Fuller said outside pressure is needed, such as a resolution of support from the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe or the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council.

"We're not saving any money by having the office down there (St. Paul)," Fuller said.

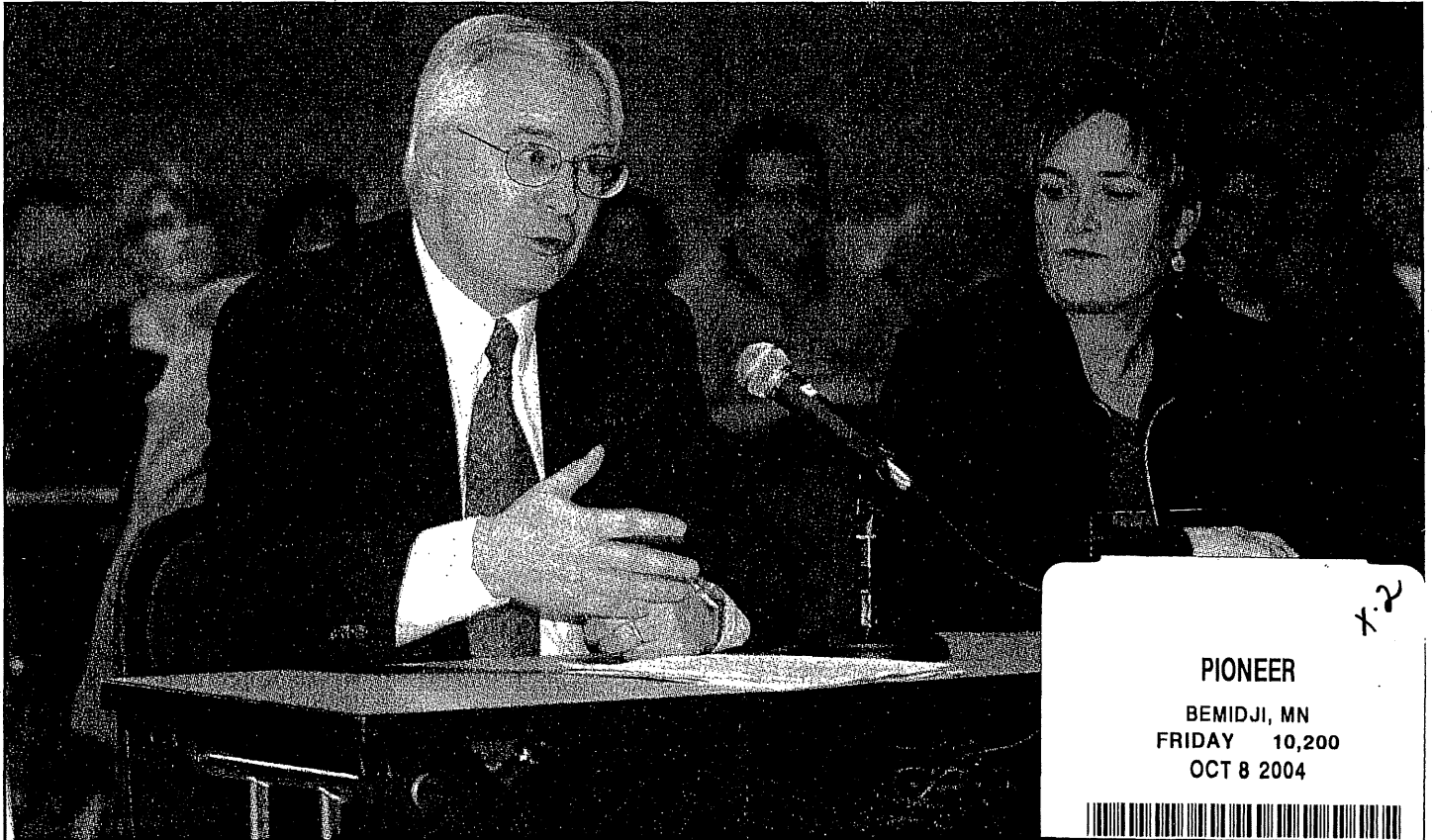
The college has about 200 students, but Carpenter said it expects to reach 500 in five years as the new facility is completed. "This place does change lives on a daily basis," she said, adding that many students are single mothers who want jobs.

"There is pride and accomplishment there, and a good start for the next generation," Ruud said.

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Testifies at higher education hearing



Pioneer Photo by Monte Draper

Vic Carder, vice president of Human Resources, Marvin Windows and Doors, and Mary Eaton, vice president of Custom Training at Northwest Technical College, testify before the Senate Higher Education Budget Division on Thursday afternoon at Bemidji State University's American Indian Center.

Funding concerns

Senate Higher Education panel holds hearing at BSU

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

Marcia Bellefy, a single mother with three kids, figures she'll owe \$40,000 in loans when she graduates next spring from Bemidji State University.

"I've had some wonderful assistance, but when you graduate you still pay for many years to come — well toward retirement," Bellefy, an education major who used to be a stay-at-home mom, said Thursday to a Minnesota

Senate panel.

"Students work hard — in their classrooms as well as in the community," said Bellefy, adding that she works two part-time jobs and has attended classes for six years while raising her family.

Some students need three or four part-time jobs to stay in college, and graduate with huge debt loads, Julie Gronquist, BSU Student Senate president, told the Senate Higher

Education Budget Division.

Others, she said, are loading up their take with 20 or more credits a semester so they can graduate earlier with a lower debt load.

"We are being taught to work until you drop, and every man for himself, rather than seeing to the education cliché that it takes a village to raise a child.

Higher education is a top priority that needs to be funded

by the state, Gronquist said. "We have only one request — to invest in us."

The higher ed panel took testimony Thursday in a 2½-hour hearing at BSU's American Indian Resource Center. Testimony focused on how the students' share of higher ed costs have increased by double-digit percentages, while the state's share has been cut.

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Education hearing / From Page A1

Testimony also focused on how the local business community depends upon a strong and vibrant higher education system — both in two-year and four-year institutions — and how those systems are also collaborating with K-12 education.

“We have gone from where the state’s share was almost 70 percent to 46 percent now,” said Sen. Rod Skoe, DFL-Clearbrook, who chaired the panel. “The difference has all fallen on tuition and fees. The challenge is how to stop that change.”

The current trend is a high financial aid, high tuition model, where theoretically the poorest students will still have access through state aid grants while most other students pay a higher share.

But while the low-income can get grants, and the wealthy can pay their own, those in the middle may be denied access to higher education, Skoe said. “The grants don’t help all. We need to make sure middle class families can also find college accessible.”

Higher education’s share of the state budget has dropped from nearly 15 percent in 1989 to 8.9 percent this year.

A legislative decision to cut off state aid after four years to students also hurts campuses with high numbers of non-traditional students who take longer than four years to complete degrees, said Bill Maki, BSU vice president for finance and administration.

Six years ago, BSU students combined for \$9.7 million in borrowing for their education, Maki said. That figure today is \$19.2 million.

For the highest need student, only \$11,838 is available in aid while costs are \$13,436 this school year at BSU, Maki said. It leaves a gap of \$1,538 for the group of students with the highest financial needs.

“That does affect access and affordability to college,” Maki said.

One solution to save state money isn’t to close institutions, said Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, who with

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, were the other two panel members joining Skoe for the hearing. Closing rural schools is on the agenda of at least one Twin Cities legislator, he said.

“There would be a very negative impact in closing colleges,” Tomassoni said. “That would be another wrong direction for the state to close rural institutions to save money.”

A major institution in a regional center means more than just classrooms, said Dennis Doeden, president of the Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce. BSU and Northwest Technical College staff also add much to the community in their expertise and leadership.

But the numbers help, too, he said, adding that BSU spends \$76 million a year and has an economic impact of \$168 million with its 500-person payroll. Also, faculty average 10 hours a week in community activities from United Way to Chamber efforts.

“The numbers are important, but the people of Bemidji State University are even more impressive,” Doeden said.

Manufacturers in outlying cities also praised collaborative efforts of BSU and Northwest Tech in supplying on-site training for their employees, something often difficult for small communities to provide by themselves.

“Viable, healthy businesses create viable, healthy communities,” said Mary Eaton, vice president of Custom Training Services for Northwest Tech. “Businesses are the economic engines.”

The program has 350 companies in 73,000 hours of training to 7,400 people the past year, Eaton said.

“Employees in the company are the company,” said Ron Ray of Arctic Cat in Thief River Falls, whose collaboration with higher education institutions has allowed 900 employees to be trained while working.

Others testified about partnerships between higher ed institutions, the public schools and North Country Regional Hospital to develop health care

and nursing programs, aiding vocational training and in training teachers.

A grant program with BSU and several local school districts will cross train teachers as reading specialists, something which will help districts with achievement gaps such as Cass Lake, said Cass Lake-Bena Superintendent Todd Chessmore.

“With three reservations nearby, BSU reaches out,” Chessmore said. “It is reaching to students not traditionally going on to higher education, and allow them to give something back to their communities. They need financial support to continue their education.”

Bemidji School Board member Ann Long Voelkner, who said she was speaking as the mother of four children, said she worried about affordability and access to higher education.

Her parents used the G.I. Bill to attend college, while her generation used scholarships, grants and a small amount of loans.

“With tuition increases, my kids will have to work through college and have huge loans,” she said. “That will create hardships will into their future. Please reverse that trend.”

“As parents, we are willing to pay more taxes,” Long Voelkner said.

The state under Govs. Ventura and Pawlenty turned a state budget surplus into a deficit, Tomassoni said, picking up on Long Voelkner’s tax call. He referred to a Republican budget with no tax increases to solve a \$4.5 billion deficit for the current budget.

“We could have undone a little of what we did,” he said of a rebate return and lowered tax rates when there was a surplus. “We should solve budget issues with what’s right for the people.”

Cutting funds to higher education is a quality of life issue, he said. “It’s wrong and we should go back and make it right. But I’m not sure that’s what we’re going to see.”

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1200DU Tourism gets boost

Pawlenty signs bill restructuring Minnesota Office of Tourism

BY BRAD SWENSON
Pioneer Political Editor

In changing times, state government must also change the way it provides services, says Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

And the state's tourism efforts are among the first out of the blocks to take that challenge, he said Tuesday morning while ceremoniously signing a bill restructuring the Minnesota Office of Tourism.

Hoisting a Paul Bunyan-sized pencil and aided by Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, Pawlenty signed the bill at the Lake Bemidji Tourist Information Center before a packed house of local people and tourism officials.

The bill creates the new Explore Minnesota Tourism as a stand-alone state agency whose primary function will be to forge public-private partnerships to promote Minnesota tourism offerings.

"This is a time of great challenge in Minnesota and in America," the Republican governor said. "We have been through a war and we're coming out of a recession. We have a great deal of economic challenge still in front of us."

But as the world changes, Pawlenty said, so must state government as demographics, technology, social changes and economics all take new directions.

"It is not a good business plan for government to stand still in the midst of great change," he said. "We have asked people who are leaders, who are innovators and entrepreneurs with-



Pioneer Photo by Monte Draper

Senator Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, helps steady the Paul Bunyan size pencil as Governor Tim Pawlenty held a ceremonial signing of a private-public tourism partnership with the Minnesota Office of Tourism on Tuesday morning inside the Bemidji Chamber of Commerce. Standing behind the governor is Rob Buntz and Tom Whelan with the Minnesota Tourism Alliance.

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► Tourism / From Page A1

in government and in our partnerships with outside entities if we can do it differently, better and quicker."

Minnesota's tourism industry "stepped to the plate," he said. "They were one of the first to raise their hands and say in terms of local leadership, industry leadership, and say they can do this better."

The move will benefit Minnesota's nearly \$10 billion tourism industry, Pawlenty said, as private and public partnerships form to promote Minnesota nationally. As a separate agency — but still under state Department of Employment and Economic Development supervision — it will be able to see matching grants and the like from private industry sources to help stretch the office's \$10 million state appropriation.

The effort began with roundtables throughout the state designed to gain input on a better way to market Minnesota, said John Edman, current Minnesota Office of Tourism director.

"We needed to do something different," he said. "What the industry told us is that we need to develop new partnerships, we need to be innovative and try something new. ... It creates a separate structure, a public-private partnership, for Minnesota's tourism. It leverages more involvement with the private sector."

The bill was authored by Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, but it was co-author Ruud who got Pawlenty's nod, along with House author Rep. Gregory Davids, R-Preston.

"The idea formed and it takes a champion," Pawlenty said. "Sen. Ruud picked the baton up in the Senate in a spectacular way, and Rep. Davids in the House. It's one of these magical moments in public policy where there is a convergence of a great idea, a need and a benefit with great leadership."

The state can't do tourism marketing alone, he said. "We are taking what was an operation within a much larger department and carving it out into a free-standing office."

Explore Minnesota Tourism "will have enhanced focus and mission and independence," he said, noting a 28-member advisory council will guide the new agency. "This free-standing entity, we believe, will be the platform for much more aggressive and robust partners in the tourism industry in Minnesota."

All will allow combined energy, more resources, more focus on tourism in Minnesota, Pawlenty said.

The GOP governor said he chose Bemidji for the ceremony — he officially signed the bill April 298 — because of Bemidji being at the hub of tourism country.

"Bemidji is such a center of tourism and outdoor activity," he told reporters. "This is a great place to sign the bill ... This is really a place where tourism is important. People look at this area as a great outdoor and recreational and tourism center, so we thought it was a good place to sign the bill."

The move was hailed by two members of the Explore Minnesota Tourism Alliance who came to Bemidji for the ceremonial bill signing.

"It poises us for growth, it poises us to take advantage of the competitive arena we have out there," said Tom Whelan, associate publisher of Minnesota Monthly magazine and alliance co-chairman.

"We've got states and provinces in all directions trying to get people out of Minnesota to their locations," he said. "We have to do the same thing for Minnesota here. I confident this group will be exactly what's needed for innovation."

Rob Buntz of Bluefin Bay on Lake Superior and also an

alliance co-chairman, said northern Minnesota has much to offer tourists.

"As we came up, we traveled through the forest, the pristine lakes, over the Mississippi River and experienced a tremendous sunset that was here (Monday night)," Buntz said. "It reminded me of the beauty of Minnesota and how important it is to bring people here to see and experience our great resources in the state."

The friendliness of the people and Minnesotans' work ethic all are assets, he said, and can be used to draw not only tourists to Minnesota but also businesses to the state.

"From the entry-level bus boy to the server who can earn \$50,000 a year in wages and tips, as they do in Bluefin Bay, to the fellow who rises from being bus boy to become general manager of the Grand View Resort or the Marriott Hotel in Minneapolis," Buntz said, "real people, real jobs. ... To do this, we need to keep on being who we are."

It takes reinventing the way things are done in state government, he said.

"We have a governor who listens," said Ruud, whose district includes Bemidji. "We have a governor who understands — he understands the economics of tourism, he understands the return of dollars that we spend on tourism, and most of all he understands that we celebrate the traditions of Minnesota through tourism."

In an interview, Ruud said that tourism encompasses jobs and community development, making a state investment wise.

"We will look at some funding options, but anytime you have the private sector and the state in partnership, it's always a good partnership because those are the people who own the businesses and understand the economics of it," Ruud said. "There input is vital to this."

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CASS COUNTY

Commissioners to ask area legislators to sponsor Ah-Gwah-Ching legislation

By MONICA LUNDQUIST
Cass County Correspondent

WALKER — The Cass County Board Tuesday voted to ask Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker, to author bills this legislative session to provide state bonding money for removal and disposal costs if the county buys Ah-Gwah-Ching in Walker.

The board is scheduled in January to consider purchasing all but the lakeshore portion of that property either for \$1 or for the appraised market value.

The latter option would give the county a choice of whether to market part of the property for private development. If purchased for \$1, the county would have to retain the prop-

erty for government use.

The proposed legislation would authorize state funding to pay to remove and dispose of any hazardous materials on the site and any underground structures the county declares surplus.

It would pay demolition and disposal costs to remove any buildings Cass County declared surplus after assuming ownership.

The state has estimated initial costs for these removals at about \$2 million.

A state-funded reuse study has been under way this year to evaluate potential future uses for Ah-Gwah-Ching if the state ceases to use the property for a state nursing care facility. Results of that study are expected to be completed this winter.

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OHV bill passed by Senate; on to House

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

FRONT PAGE

S T. PAUL — Right as the 2004 Minnesota session wraps up, state senators agreed Saturday

evening to a bill that would open up travel for off highway vehicle drivers.

In a voice vote, legislators agreed to add a provision to

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Session from A1

OHV bill is passed by Senate

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Department of Natural Resources Housekeeping bill. The amendment would protect wetlands from damage but allow travel. Lawmakers on both sides of the issue thought the provision was a good compromise.

"This has been an issue that has divided us and put us together and divided us again," Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said. "I think that this amendment does a lot to putting the pieces back together again for the state of Minnesota."

Under the bill, offered by Sen. Dennis Frederickson, R-New Ulm, a person could not operate an OHV to "upset the natural and ecological balance of a wetland." If a driver was found guilty, they would be ticketed by a DNR conservation officer.

"I greatly appreciate his (Frederickson's) efforts in trying to bring some kind of fairness to individual people who have wetlands on their property and need to have an opportunity to get to the other side, so to speak," Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, said.

Considering there are many acres of wetlands in northern Minnesota, local lawmakers said that last year's restrictions have become a real problem. The Legislature prohibited travel on certain wetlands located on public and private land. Because of the law, some Northerners haven't had been able use OHVs

for enjoyment, hunting, or work tasks.

While most agreed with the compromise, Sen. Paul Koering, R-Brainerd, didn't like the amendment, "but I am not going to make a big fuss." He added that he would continue to work on this issue during the remaining two years of this term. "I will be committed to bringing back people's rights on their own private property."

The amendment passed on a voice vote and the bill passed 61-2, Koering voted against it. Since the version was slightly different than the House's bill passed Thursday, it was sent back to the House for another vote.

While the bill hadn't been up in the House before print, Rep. David Dill, DFL-Crane Lake, said it would most likely pass. If it does, the legislation will go to the governor's desk for a signature.

"The bill is a good working document," Dill said. "It's a reasonable compromise."

□
Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.

Legislation written to propose Ah-Gwah-Ching as regional jail

By **Monica • Larry Howes and
Lundquist • Steve Fuller concern-
County Correspon- ing county-related
dent** **4**

WALKER -- Cass County Administrator Robert Yochum reported Tuesday, April 6, on a recent meeting the county board held in St. Paul with state Sen. Carrie Ruud and Reps.

Larry Howes and Steve Fuller concerning county-related issues.

The board was in St. Paul for an Association of Minnesota Counties meeting.

At legislators' request, the county board authorized authors of state legislation proposed to help fund a regional jail under the state bonding bill to amend that legislation to make the regional jail site-specific to the Ah-Gwah-Ching property.

Yochum said other legislators than those who represent Cass districts suggested the project would receive

wider legislative support if the jail would be located at Ah-Gwah-Ching.

Cass commissioners also decided Tuesday to send only County Engineer David Enblom and Commissioner Dick Downham to the annual federal road funding effort in Washington, D.C., to save some commissioner travel money for possible additional state lobbying efforts for regional jail funding.

Previously, the board had planned to send a second commissioner to Washington, D.C., this year.

The board discussed a proposed agreement between the Cass County Highway Department and the state to enable the county to locate equipment for emergency snow removal use at state highway garages in Remer and Pine River if the county consolidates county garages between Remer and Longville and between Pine River and Hackensack.

That agreement also is proposed to work out a shared maintenance system whereby the county would plow sections of state highway enroute to county roads in exchange for having the state plow sections of county roads adjacent to state highways.

Yochum said this could enable all equip-

ment from both agencies to perform work as they travel all roads, whether designated state or county. The net effect is expected to save money for the county and state.

The board discussed with legislators out-of-home placement costs for Indian children and requested counties be permitted to offer input into any changes the state makes with Indian tribes for gaming and state tax collection agreements.

Board members expressed their concern over potential road project delays and costs associated with proposed state bills relating to eminent domain attorney fees. A bill proposed to require a \$25 Minnesota Pollution Control

Agency fee for septic tanks probably will not pass this session, commissioners learned.

Another proposed bill would establish a state fund to help cities and counties pay for methamphetamines lab cleanup. Currently, counties can apply for federal funds to assist with methamphetamines lab residue removal. The proposed state law seeks to clarify whether renters or landlords would be responsible for associated costs.

Association of Minnesota Counties reported there is a 50 percent recidivism rate among those convicted of methamphetamines-related crimes, Yochum reported.

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Ruud says news conference will question DFL over discrimination

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

State Senate Republican women plan to hold a news conference Monday morning to claim the DFL is discriminatory in blocking commissioner appointments.

Senate Democrats, who control that chamber, plan to block Lt. Gov. Carol Molnau as commissioner of Transportation, and stymie Cheryl Pierson Yecke as commissioner of Education.

"They are very discriminatory on who they confirm and won't confirm," Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, told Beltrami County GOP delegates Saturday at their county convention.

"It is very political and a swipe at Gov. Pawlenty," said the Senate 4 Republican. "These people are very talented and credible people."

Senate Republican women aren't the only group to play the race card.

Pawlenty charged Friday that the Senate is trying to remove Molnau and Yecke from their respective posts because they are conservative women.

"They like, in their words, to encourage strong women leaders to come forward, unless you're conservative," Pawlenty said on his weekly radio show. "If you agree with them great, but if you disagree with them that's where the line gets drawn apparently."

"It just seems to me the rule

can't be we want to encourage and promote strong women unless you're Republican," he said.

Ruud called Molnau "a fabulous person who is down to earth — she joins in our Bible study."

As both lieutenant governor and MnDOT commissioner, Molnau takes only one salary is saving the state "a six-figure salary every year," Ruud said. "It makes no sense not to confirm her for this job."

The Senate Transportation Committee last week refused to recommend her confirmation to the MnDOT post, while Yecke's final vote before the Senate Education Committee is April 13.

Yecke has come under fire for her process in designing new social studies standards, which opponents saying they represent a point of view while ignoring other points of view.

"Any time you make changes, you are an open target," Ruud said. "And change is necessary in education."

The Senate this session is "very partisan and it is a tremendously challenging year," she said. "Republicans are not getting bills heard, and it is very mean-spirited."

Under new Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, "the Senate is an unpleasant place to work," Ruud said. With Democrats holding a slim

three-vote margin, "they can't give up any votes and that's why it is so contentious."

While not involved in the confirmation process, Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, gave his views to the 33 delegates earlier Saturday.

Fuller said added to the list is Public Safety Commissioner Rich Stanek, a former legislator and a police officer.

Molnau "is one of the best people you'd ever meet," Fuller said, adding she was chairwoman of the House Transportation Finance Committee for four years.

"She's a farmer and just an awesome person," he said. "She cares about people, even the people inside the Department of Transportation are just so happy that she's there."

Blocking confirmation of Molnau, Yecke and Stanek would be for "political reasons," Fuller said.

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Pawlenty approves tourism measure

► Tourism / From Page A1 A

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

A bill setting up tourism as a new Minnesota state agency was signed into law recently by Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

The measure, which takes effect July 1, creates a new office within the executive branch called Explore Minnesota Tourism. Tourism functions currently are administered within the state Department of Trade and Economic Development.

The bill creates a 28-member Minnesota Tourism Council with representatives from industry associations, the travel industry and four legislators, says Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy



Ruud

Point, a Senate co-author of the bill.

The agency will promote activities that support, maintain and expand the state's travel markets, she said. The agency's director will be appointed by the governor.

Authored in the Senate by Sen. Tom Bakke, DFL-Cook, the measure was sponsored in the House by Rep. Gregory Davids, R-Preston, where Rep. Loren Solberg, DFL-Grand Rapids, was also a co-author.

"Tourism is a very important

industry to the state," Ruud said in a statement last week. "I am excited that we now have a new agency to encourage its growth. This will only help Minnesota's economy — an increase in tourism benefits everybody from resort owners to shop owners to gas station owners, as well as all the people they employ."

The transfer of duties from DEED to the new agency will help "increase the awareness of tourism in Minnesota," John

Edman, deputy commissioner of the Minnesota Office of Tourism, told a House committee.

The budget would move with the office, resulting in no net fiscal impact to the state.

Edman said Minnesota is being outspent on tourism marketing by neighboring states, according to a Minnesota House report. With more people leaving the state to travel than people coming here from elsewhere, it is time to look at other funding mechanisms for pro-

moting Minnesota travel.

For every dollar the state spends, it gets \$4.60 back in taxes, Edman said. By giving Explore Minnesota Tourism the flexibility to pursue public-private partnerships, the law will make the office more effective at generating marketing dollars.

Tourism represents \$9 billion in economic activity every year and generates \$1 billion in taxes, Ruud said. It employs 230,000 people statewide.

✉ bswenson@bemidjipioneer.com

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BEMIDJI, MN

SUNDAY 10, 938

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► Tourism / Page A14 A

BRAINERD DAILY DISPATCH

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FRONT PAGE

Developing and maintaining relationships is a key to success. 'I think that is really important. Politics is all about relationships and working together.'

— Sen. Carrie Ruud
R-Breezy Point



4

Still running

After career as a mom, Ruud enjoys politics

By CANDI WALZ
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — She wore out three pairs of running shoes visiting communities and door-knocking during her election, but Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said it was worth the effort.

"I door-knocked the entire district, and more than once in some places," she said. Ruud first decided to run for the state Senate as mayor of Breezy Point.

During her time in office, Ruud was involved with proposing political redistricting options. The completed task split Crow Wing County, and left an

open seat. Ruud filed for the position.

"I thought this was a great opportunity," she said. "It doesn't happen very often."

In the primary, Ruud didn't receive the party endorsement. The lack of support didn't stop her.

"It was very good for me. It made me work hard. It made me get my message out there," she said.

Ruud said she also had great support from friends and family during her campaign. Her 88-year-old parents, from Deerwood, participated in the campaign.

See RUUD / 8A

A

RUUD / Sons are grown

She won the election and was sworn into office in January 2003.

The mother of two sons, Ruud said she spent most of her career as a mom.

As her sons grew up, Ruud worked part time so she could be involved in their lives. She served as a room mom in their classes, and supervised field trips. The trio loved the outdoors and recreational activities.

"Having two boys is wonderful. We did such fun things," Ruud said. "We just enjoyed each other and doing things together."

Her sons are now grown. The oldest son lives in Colorado and works as a ski instructor. Her youngest lives in Nisswa with his wife and two children.

Ruud also said she is close with her mother, father, two sisters and brother — all who supported her when running.

In her spare time, Ruud snowshoes, hikes, inline skates, bikes and runs marathons. Every year, she rides the Paul Bunyan Trail with U.S. Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn.

After getting a divorce, Ruud obtained her real estate license. While she was establishing herself, Ruud worked three jobs — as a waitress, in a deli and as a real estate broker.

While working with real estate, Ruud met her current husband. The couple was married last year. Together, the pair has a big family — mostly coming from his side. Ruud's husband has 15 grandchildren, varying in age from 1 to 20.

Ruud's husband managed her senatorial campaign.

This year is Ruud's second session in office. She serves on the Health, Human Services and Corrections Budget Division; Higher Education Budget Divisions; Jobs, Housing and Community Development committees. Her legislative concerns are small

business, tourism, environment and education.

Last year, Ruud voted on the Personal Protection Act, and the Women's Right to Know bill.

She also focused on ATVs, with Sen. John Marty, DFL-Roseville. "We got almost \$5 million for trails."

This year, Ruud has authored legislation that would require mandatory sentencing for sex offenders. The legislation also would create an appointed sex offender review board. If passed, the board would govern the review and release of sex offenders.

She represents Pequot Lakes, the home of Dru Sjodin. Last November, Sjodin was abducted after leaving work in Grand Forks, N.D. Alfonso Rodriguez Jr., a known Level 3 sex offender from Minnesota, was charged in December with abducting Sjodin. Ruud participated in a Pequot Lakes town meeting; she said the legislation addresses most of the issues brought up at the meeting.

Other legislation Ruud has worked on pertains to forestry and ATVs. She has authored a bill to bond \$6 million for a regional jail in Walker. Currently, Cass County has come up with the other half of the funds, \$6 million.

Ruud has requested bonds for the Paul Bunyan Trail, Central Lakes College and Bemidji State University.

She participates in a Wednesday morning Bible study at the Capitol. The study is open to everyone — senators, representatives and staffers.

"It is a wonderful way to refocus and really get back down to earth and really know what we are here to do," Ruud said.

Overall, Ruud said developing and maintaining relationships is a key to success. "I think that is really important. Politics is all about relationships and working together."

JAN 22 2004

MINNESOTA CLIPPING SERVICE

Public seeks no release, or death penalty for Level 3 sex offenders

■ 125 citizens, state legislators attend Pequot Lakes public forum

BY BETTY RYAN
Staff writer

It's been a difficult time for this community. The Dru Sjodin abduction and the unsolved murder of Rachel Anthony shattered the community's feeling of "it doesn't happen here."

A grieving community was ready to take some action and let the state know they didn't want Level 3 sexual offenders released. There is a demand for more effective ways to deal with criminal sexual offenders.

Through the efforts of former Pequot Lakes Mayor Jack Schmidt, the Pequot Lakes Chamber of Commerce, and Sen. Carrie Ruud, a public meeting about criminal sexual offenders was held Jan. 17 at the Pequot Lakes School. Present were the Commissioner of Corrections Joan Fabian, and Harley Nelson, deputy commissioner as well as area legislators. Some 125 members of the public were there to hear from the



PHOTOS BY BRYAN CLAPPER

Linda Walker, left, mother of Dru Sjodin, talks with Patty Wetterling, whose son's abduction 14 years ago led to changes in child protection laws. Sjodin has been missing since Nov. 22, when the Pequot Lakes graduate was apparently abducted from a Grand Forks, N.D. shopping mall parking lot. A Level 3 sex offender has been arrested and charged in her disappearance.

commissioner and legislators and to present their concerns.

Legislators present included Sen. Ruud, Breezy Point; Sen. Betsy Wergin, Princeton; Sen. Dave Kleis, St. Cloud, minority chairman on the crime prevention committee; Sen. Paul Koering, Fort Ripley; Rep. Dale Walz, Brainerd; Rep. Doug Fuller, Bemidji; Rep. Larry Howes,

Walker. Joanne Johnson and Jean Kraft were the moderators.

"This is a sensitive, emotional issue and we're trying to affect change in a system that's not working," Kraft said in her introductory remarks.

Sen. Ruud introduced the legislators and told the audience that they were at the meeting to listen to the public and to bring the message back to the legis-

lature.

Death penalty

From the reaction of the audience and the legislators, there seemed to be an agreement that many of those present favored the death penalty for Level 3 sex offenders.

The legislators present were in agreement that the death penalty should be brought to the public for a vote.

A continued on page 14

Public seeks no release, death penalty for Level 3's



Joan Fabian, commissioner of the Department of Corrections, explains the current sex offender registration and release laws to those in attendance at Saturday's public forum.

continued from the front

It would take a constitutional amendment to allow the death penalty in Minnesota. The legislators present preferred putting the question on the ballot rather than through a vote of the legislature.

Patty Wetterling, whose son Jacob has been missing for 14 years, said it is everyone's job to build a safer community.

"I personally can't imagine killing someone," she said. "Life imprisonment is a reasonable alternative."

She said that it costs more

to execute a person than to keep them in prison for life. A death penalty decision may drag on for 10 years or more, keeping the victim's family without closure.

Life changed for many

"We are all victims," Donna Good of Pequot Lakes said. "I think about you (Linda Walker) every day. We need to change the system."

A woman said that after Jacob Wetterling was abducted 14 years ago, her daughter couldn't sleep. She didn't ride her bike. It took away her innocence and trust.

There was a suggestion

that there be user fees for offenders. They should be paying for their treatment and housing.

A person who was a victim advocate said the victim needed to be informed of a plea bargain.

Mothers of victims among speakers

Jayne Hanson, mother of a daughter who was 15 when she was raped, said her daughter struggled just to survive and at 21 shot herself.

"That's the effect rape has on a victim," Hanson said. "There should be no plea bargaining in rape cases. I don't

know when this guy will be out."

Closing remarks

Sen. Ruud said the legislators present now had a clearer understanding of the problem and of the position of legislators. She thanked Jack Schmidt for calling the meeting.

At the close of the meeting, Linda Walker, Dru Sjodin's mother, thanked everyone for coming. Several persons spoke with Walker. A very poignant moment came when Hanson and Walker met and hugged.

BRAINERD DAILY DISPATCH

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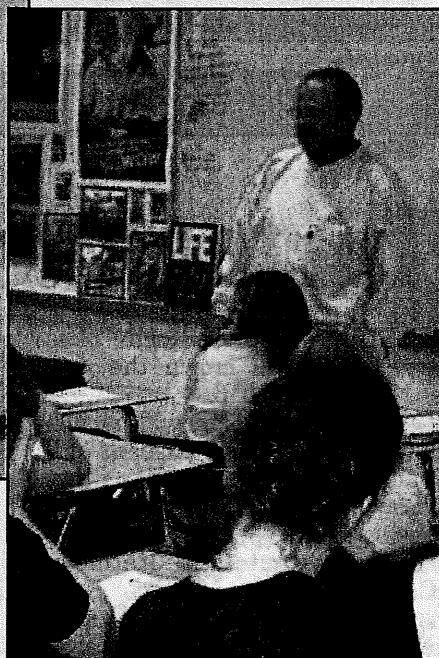
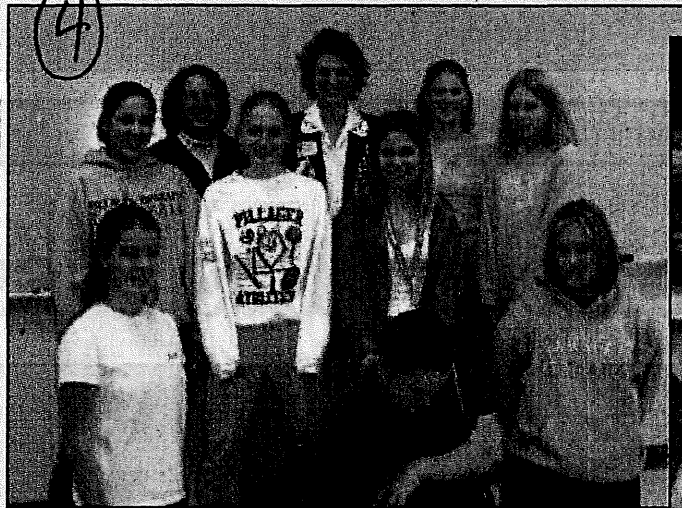
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Ruud and Demgen Visit Freshmen



By Shawn Pearson, Kara Rhett and Kayla Bement

On December 17th Pil-lager High School's Fresh-man civics class was visit-ed by State Senator Carrie Ruud. She represents Dis-trict Four and took time out of her busy schedule to come and discuss her political life and everyday business. The students were very excited to have her come and speak, and

asked many ques-tions throughout the block.

Then on January 12th, Cass County's Commissioner Jim Demgen came and talked to the class. Mr. Demgen talked to us about what commissioners do and the services they provide. Mr. Demgen kept his visit very entertaining and the stu-dents really enjoyed him.

He talked about his inter-esting life in politics and he shared his favorite and worst moments being in office. Mr. Demgen said his favorite part of being a commissioner is interact-ing and helping people with everyday problems.

Environmental coalition unveils legislative agenda

BY BRAD SWENSON

4

Pioneer Political Editor

An ambitious program to protect and clean Minnesota waters heads the legislative agenda of a wide-ranging coalition of Minnesota environmental and conservation groups.

But, they admit, the news Wednesday of a \$700 million state budget shortfall in the next biennium doesn't make their job any easier.

"We're paying more now for recreation but getting less," John Tuma, government relations associate with the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, said Wednesday.

Several members were in Bemidji for a media briefing, after having held a similar issue briefing in Pine River for Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point.

Because of past budget shortfalls, environmental program spending has been slashed while user fees boosted, many going to the state's general fund and not to dedicated uses.

"We've paid our fair share," Tuma said. Historically, about 2 cents of every state tax dollar has been spent on environmental and natural resources programs, but that slipped to 1.2 cents in recent years, he said.

And State Lottery dollars, which the public perceives going to environmental programs, sends 60 percent to the state's general fund, he said.

The Minnesota Environmental Partnership, which includes about 90 environmental and conservation groups, is pushing a five-point legislative agenda, headlined by a program to raise up to \$80 million a year to protect and clean state waters.

The funds would be levied through a \$3 a month fee to residents and a sliding fee based on water usage of \$200 to \$600 a year to businesses, Tuma said.

"Our goal is to protect our waters," he said. "We want a common-sense practical solution and investments made to clean and protect our rivers, streams, lakes and drinking water."

Tuma said the groups are awaiting a commitment from

Gov. Tim Pawlenty to pursue the program in 2005, and said it has the backing of the business community and farm organizations. They also hope to get counties on board, although they have been reluctant as they would collect the fees.

"But a lot of the money would go to rural areas to clean up impaired waters," Tuma said. The fees would either be added to municipal water bills or to rural well users' property tax bills. Provisions would be made for the poor on fixed incomes to opt out.

"It will help provide a quick start for rural residents to clean up septic systems," said Gary Botzek, MEP board member and lakes association lobbyist. "It would also offer low-interest loans for private homeowners to clean up waters."

The dedicated funding would help Minnesota fulfill enforcement of the 30-year-old Clean Water Act, Tuma said.

Another legislative priority is stricter standards for reducing mercury pollution, by establishing enforceable mercury reduction targets, especially for Minnesota coal-burning power plants, Tuma said.

Utilities are expected to fight the stricter standards, but action must be taken starting within state borders.

"Only 10 percent of our mercury comes from Minnesota, but ours is going someplace else," Botzek said, with plants in Western states contributing to mercury fish advisories in many Minnesota waters.

Other MEP legislative priorities include measures to protect community rights in decisions such as regulating feedlots, advocating responsible off-road vehicle use, and increasing funding for environment and natural resources both in state funding and bonding state projects.

"We trust our local units of government to make decisions and not have the state override them," Tuma said, adding the state should not be able to set aside local processes to enforce planning and zoning.

And MEP would seek stiffer penalties for flagrant off-highway vehicle violators, including seizure of the violator's vehicle, he said. Included will be a call for noise restrictions on machines.

"We are not trying to outlaw OHV use, but we need responsible ridership," Tuma said. "We need real tough penalties, not just fines that people consider the cost of doing recreation."

MEP would also support efforts to designate more trails for all-terrain vehicle use, although Tuma admitted various groups within MEP may have different ideas of where and how many miles of trails.

"Some groups may want to ban off-road use on public lands, but that is not reality," Botzek said.

Tuma said MEP will also seek a funding level of 2 percent of the state's general fund for conservation and environmental programs, but will not push for the constitutional amendment to dedicate a portion of state funds to such uses.

Such a provision got watered down in the last session, as arts

and humanities groups tried to join in the dedication.

"Having a constitutional amendment vote would put this off to at least 2007," Tuma said. "We need to start now. And we want legislators to do the job, as we are not a referendum state."

He called the legislative agenda a bipartisan agenda, and predicted that even with a state budget shortfall, people will support dedicated funding to such programs.

"People want impaired waters fixed, and if money goes to it, people will support something positive," Tuma said. "The message of the past election was that people want to get things done."

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■ PIONEER EDITORIAL

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Put school

Editorial

start after (4)
Labor Day

The calendar has turned the page over to September but we haven't had Labor Day, yet school — both public secondary and university — has started for most students in the region this week.

The return to school means adjustments to new schedules for most families: getting up earlier and establishing a routine for the day. No longer can one consider a day at the beach, or even a day in the yard. Instead, it's either rushing the kids to school or having to attend school. And, of course, now time has to be found for homework.

While the school start is only a few days earlier than normal, it still just doesn't seem right. Especially when considering that the temperatures are slated to be in the 80s today and Friday. And that it's still before Labor Day.

For many years, state law prohibited school districts from starting schools prior to Labor Day. And, for that matter, most colleges and universities followed that dictum also. Now, the state no longer requires schools to wait until after Labor Day to begin classes, but in 2000 the Legislature changed the law to prevent districts from starting any earlier than Sept. 1.

Preserving the after-Labor Day start has been especially important for tourism areas, as that last long three-day weekend means business to local resorts and tourism facilities for traveling families. For that reason, local legislators have tried to move the school start to no sooner than the first Tuesday after Labor Day, but the bills introduced this year were stalled.

With Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, the author in the Senate, the similar bill in the House found authors in Reps. Larry Howes, R-Walker, Loren Solberg, DFL-Grand Rapids, and Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji.

The earlier school start also affects businesses, which provide jobs for teens and now must adjust their work force to older people or seniors sooner than usual. One of the big losers is the Minnesota State Fair, which hires about 900 teens for the two-week run of the fair which now finds school starting during the fair's last week.

There are many reasons for starting school earlier, including that school then can end earlier in the spring and students can get summer jobs sooner. But the damage done to our local late summer businesses seems to outweigh any advantages to an earlier start. Simply put, starting a week earlier hurts our economy more than ending a week later in the spring.

Besides, with summer in the North County as short as it is already, we need that extra three-day holiday before buckling down to a fall agenda, and, brrrr, snow and cold.

We hope our legislators return to St. Paul in January renewed in an effort to again push for an after-Labor Day start for schools. And we're sure all the students and teachers sitting in their hot classrooms today, thinking about their lost summer days, will agree.

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**Early Childhood Caucus
forum planned in Bemidji**

Members of a legislative caucus on early childhood plan a community forum Monday in Bemidji.

The bipartisan Minnesota Legislative Early Childhood Caucus will hear from community members 6:30-8 p.m. at the Bemidji Public Library, 509 America Ave.

Nevis public schools Superintendent Doug Dewitt will moderate the forum, which is hosted by state Sens. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and John Hottinger, DFL-St. Peter, and Reps. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, and Larry Howes, R-Walker. Ruud, however, is slated to attend a Brainerd Lakes Chamber dinner and Fuller has a legislative forum on elderly issues in Bemidji at the same time.

The Early Childhood Caucus was formed in 2003 by legisla-

tors to influence and shape public policies that affect Minnesota's youngest children, their families and care givers, and seeks to educate legislators, create dialogue, build consensus and provide direction for legislative action. Currently, 86 members of the Minnesota Legislature belong to the caucus.

Founders include Reps. Nora Slawik, DFL-Maplewood, and Jim Rhodes, R-St. Louis Park, and Sens. Claire Robling, R-Jordan, and Becky Lourey, DFL-Kerrick.

A grant from the Sheltering Arms Foundation is providing organizing funds for the community forums to be held in a dozen cities across the state. Other forums in the area are planned for Grand Rapids and Thief River Falls.

— Brad Swenson

PIONEER

BEMIDJI, MN
TUESDAY 10, 2004
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Business owners support new bill

BY MOLLY MIRON (4)

Pioneer Editor

Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox will be the star witnesses at 9:30 a.m. today as Gov. Tim Pawlenty signs into law Explore Minnesota Tourism.

"It's a neat PR deal. That's the Minnesota icon," said Hampton Inn owner Richard Siegert.

The bill, co-authored in the Senate by Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, takes effect July 1 to create a new state office to deal with tourism issues. The Department of Employment and Economic Development currently administers tourism functions.

"I think it's a good idea that we have our own department of tourism. All the issues will be addressed better that way," said Dave Fallis of Finn-n-Feather resort. He is president of the Minnesota Northwoods Tourism Bureau.

Fallis said the primary issue concerning resorters is escalat-

ing property taxes. Lake property for development is in such demand that resorts have trouble staying in business.

He said the resort industry would like the new Explore Minnesota Tourism department to address include loans for upgrading septic systems and the reinstatement of the resort loan program. The loan program provides funding from the state to be matched at low interest by local banks.

"It's always been paid back. There were never any bad loans," Fallis said.

However, he said he would not be on hand at the Bemidji for the signing today.

"I'm going to be in the water putting docks in, getting ready for the opener," he said.

Eric Nelson, president of the Bemidji Innkeepers Association and manager of the soon-to-open Hampton Inn, said he is

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► Business

From Page 1 B

pleased the governor decided to hold the signing ceremony in Bemidji.

"Pawlenty is very strong on tourism all the way through," Siegert said.

"We've got a \$9 billion tourist industry and it employs a great many people," Nelson said.

He said the administration does a good job promoting tourism.

Paul Mork, member of the Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce and manager of Lake Bemidji State Park said anything that increases tourism has a positive effect.

"Whatever we can do to enhance visibility of this area, I think it's a good thing," Mork said. "We want to make people aware of the beauty of this area."

From that appreciation, he said, tourists develop an understanding of the need to preserve and protect the environmental resources that bring them here.

"It all kind of ties together," he said.

As for the governor's signing ceremony at the feet of Paul and Babe, he said, "That's a feather in our cap here in Bemidji."

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Proposed law targets push polling

X-4

St. Paul Legal Ledger

BY DAVID KNUTSON

News Editor 3-1-04

4

State Sen. Connie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, recalled one election where push polling was used against her.

The question put before voters in her north-central Minnesota district: "Would you vote for candidate X or would you vote for the *rude* Republican."

Rep. Tony Cornish, R-Good Thunder, remembered a push poll caller inadvertently telephoning him and asking questions

that cast him as a danger to the environment and as someone who would put guns in the hands of criminals. "They didn't know they were calling the candidate," Cornish said. "The anonymity here is really hard to take. This person was calling a lot of people. It was troubling to say the least."

The Senate Elections Committee on Thursday heard those and other push-poll anecdotes during testimony for legislation by Sen. Julie Rosen, R-Fairmont, that would target the practice.



A bill proposed by Sen. Julie Rosen, R-Fairmont, would require push poll callers to reveal who they work for, whether a candidate or campaign has signed off on the poll, and where to get more information on the poll.

Push Polling continued on page 12

Push Polling: Lack of disclosure would be a misdemeanor.

Continued from page 1

Rosen's legislation would require push poll callers to reveal who they work for, whether a candidate or campaign committee has signed off on the poll and where a person can get more information on the poll.

"(The bill) doesn't interfere or eliminate polling or the context of this free speech," Rosen said. "It will virtually eliminate this practice of push polling."

Rosen noted that opponents of victims of push polling aren't always responsible, but they can be unfairly blamed for the practice.

Sen. Dave Kleis, R-St. Cloud, said that was the case in a race he was in where his opponent had been the victim

of push polling, which he had nothing to do with.

"It was guilt by association," Kleis said. "I held a press conference denouncing it. It can work both ways."

Democrats had their own examples of push polling.

Sen. John Hottinger, DFL-St. Peter, said he's been the victim of it in his past three elections. In the case of former Rep. Ruth Johnson, a DFLer from St. Peter, push polling may have cost her an election, Hottinger said.

Under the bill, polling firms who don't reveal information about the poll would face a misdemeanor charge. Lawmakers must yet figure out details of who would enforce the law.

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Pawlenty to visit Bemidji

Governor to sign tourism bill today at waterfront

BY BRAD SWENSON
Pioneer Political Editor

State agency restructuring will boost tourism by allowing partnerships with the private sector, says state Employment and Economic Development Commissioner Matt Kramer. Gov. Tim Pawlenty, in a ceremonial bill signing today at the Lake Bemidji waterfront, "will be taking the first step in making the Minnesota Office of Tourism a private-public partnership," Kramer said Monday. The new Explore Minnesota

Tourism — a new office within the executive branch — "will have much more resources to go to private industry and get matching dollars and have much more leeway to do special promotions," he said. Pawlenty, who officially signed the bill April 28, will do his ceremonial signing at 9:30 a.m. in the shadows of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox at the lakefront Travel Information Center. Kramer joking that he was under Kramer's advance Republican governor's man, spoke to the Bemidji Noon

Rotary Club on economic development issues, including the tourism restructuring bill. The current Minnesota Office of Tourism is a division under Kramer's Department of Employment and Economic Development. Moving it won't change its status, Kramer said, as its employees will still be state workers and there will be no predicted budget impact. The new office will still be under Kramer's supervision, and its director appointed by the governor.

But he said, the move will free up the agency to partner with the private sector to market Minnesota, and will allow the new agency to work with communities to raise their tourism offerings to a national level. "It is going to be much more aggressive in reaching out to communities and asking them how they want to market themselves," Kramer said. "They (the state office) do some fantastic marketing, but by and large, they do it at the statewide level. This gives them the first opportunity to go to the community level and taking your community initiatives and marketing those on a national level."

The bill was authored by Sen. Tom Bakke, DFL-Cook, and Rep. Gregory Davids, R-Preston. Co-authors include Sen. Carrie Raud, R-Breezy Point, and Rep. Loren Solberg, DFL-Grand Rapids. Kramer said tourism in Minnesota directly employs 145,000 and supports another 200,000 indirectly involved in tourism.

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► Tourism

From Page 1 A

related jobs. And, tourism is a \$9.5 billion industry.

Yet, currently the Minnesota Office of Tourism operates with a \$10 million state budget used to promote the state nationally.

"In our department, and across state government, as state budgets tighten, it's a question of where do you take money from," Kramer said. "Do you take it from state services for the blind, or the Office of Tourism? Do you take it from services for homeless children, or from the Office of Tourism?"

"Of course, that's a rhetorical question and we need to take ourselves out from that cycle," he said. "A \$9.5 billion industry deserves better."

Aside from setting up an executive branch office, the bill also establishes a 28-member advisory Explore Minnesota Tourism Council whose duties including acting "to serve the broader interests of tourism in Minnesota by promoting activities that support, maintain and expand the state's domestic and international travel market, thereby generating increased visitor expenditures, tax revenue and employment."

The council includes a mix of representatives of statewide associations representing specified tourism and hospitality groups, each of four tourism marketing areas, representatives of tourism businesses, legislators and others.

While the bill takes effect — and new office created — July 1, Kramer said there would be a year's transition first. "There will be a lot of planning. The second year will see the office restructuring itself."

Kramer suspected that current field staff would remain in place, and that the public-private partnership may even expand opportunities.

For example, a private company may purchase a small kiosk into which state tourism material can be distributed, he said.

The bill also continues a requirement that the Department of Employment and Economic Development continue to provide free space for travel information centers and free maps for distribution at travel information center.

Bemidji has a unique partnership in its lakefront Travel Information Center with the city of Bemidji, Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce and state Department of Transportation as partners.

4

House OKs BSU arena

\$677.6 million bonding bill faces conference committee with Senate

BY BRAD SWENSON
Pioneer Political Editor

Bemidji State University scored with a slap shot Thursday, as the Minnesota House approved \$677.6 million in building projects that include \$30 million mostly for BSU projects.

In the mix are \$18 million for a new NCAA Division I-capable hockey arena on campus and \$10 million for the next phase of BSU/Northwest Technical College co-location. The project calls for renovating Bridgeman Hall and adding lab space at Northwest Tech.

In addition to several hun-

dred thousand dollars for planned maintenance work at BSU, the bill also includes a total of \$1.3 million for Paul Bunyan Trail improvements within the city. It provides

\$900,000 in direct funding for the trail and \$400,000 is in another Department of Natural Resources request for rip rap of the Lake Bemidji shore bordering the trail.

The House bill passed on a



Fuller

Inside

▶ Commuter rail funding drives House debate over construction package / Page A11

▶ Senate passes tax bill that returns \$60 million in state aid to local governments / Page A11

ing to make room.

Passing the bill out of the House "was a huge hurdle," said Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, who carried all the Bemidji provisions. "Now the conference committee will be a high jump. That's where our next step will be."

The Republican House bill actually borrows \$602 million for its public works, with other costs falling to the beneficiaries. It is \$80 million less than that recommended by Gov. Tim Pawlenty. The DFL-led Senate is expected to unroll its bill Tues-

▶ Bonding bill / Page A10

▶ Bonding bill / From Page A1

day, with at least \$200 million in projects than the House bill.

"We're very happy," said Carl Baer, BSU vice president for university advancement who was with Fuller in St. Paul on Thursday. "Doug has worked very, very hard and has a lot of friends down here. We're very grateful for that."

Now the attention turns to the Senate, where Baer said the measures are supported by Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and Sen. Rod Skoe, DFL-Clearbrook.

"We're very appreciative that Sen. Skoe is involved and is working for this, and I know he will do the best he can with his party in the majority," Baer said. "With Sen. Skoe, and Sen. Ruud, we have a very good chance of getting in that bill."

Key to the funding was putting the hockey arena through the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission rather than through the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, where it wasn't listed as a priority.

Fuller was able to move the BSU/Northwest Tech emerging technologies project up from 19th to 10th in committee on MnSCU's list, and got positive recommendations from two panels on the hockey arena through the MASC.

He had earlier thought any strong opposition would come

on the House floor, with lawmakers questioning why the arena was put through the Sports Commission.

"The only reference to us all day was from Rep. Paymar," Fuller said of Rep. Michael Paymar, DFL-St. Paul, who questioned funding for a hockey arena when a \$20 million initiative to combat homelessness was deleted.

Capital Investment Chairman Phil Krinkie, R-Shoreview, "answered it very up front with regard to St. Cloud funded through Amateur Sports, and the state has given money for Ritter Arena at the University of Minnesota, as well as many other projects across the state," Fuller said.

"Outside of that, we weren't mentioned," he said.

After Krinkie's response, "it was all over," said Rep. Doug Lindgren, R-Bagley, a co-sponsor on the bill. "We were just cruising after that."

But Lindgren said Fuller was ready to testify, if needed. "He's got stacks of paper — he was just ready for it, but he didn't even need it."

Lindgren said both he and Fuller worked legislators for the project, with Fuller stressing the need athletically for the arena at BSU and Lindgren noting the importance to the regional economy such an

arena would bring.

"We've never been this far before," said Baer, "and we've never had this much money before. We hope and believe this could be our year."

Splitting the BSU projects between MnSCU and MASC "was a good decision," he said. "That's something we worked out with the chancellor. ... Of course, we don't want to compete with other MnSCU projects."

St. Cloud State got \$9.5 million in 1987 from Amateur Sports for its hockey arena, Baer said, adding that it was approved by the Senate.

Baer also said it helped to bring the proposal to several House panels and in having BSU student-athletes testify — hockey players and Academic All-America members Anik Côté and Bryce Methven — as well as Glen Sonmor, whose coaching career includes the University of Minnesota Gophers, NHL's North Stars, the WHA's Minnesota Fighting Saints, and work now with the Minnesota Wild.

"We got a positive recommendation" from the committees, Baer said, "and that changed a lot of things for us in bringing people over to our side, and didn't put us in conflict."

Fuller said much of the project's credibility lies with hav-

ing many legislators seeing the current John Glas Fieldhouse facilities, as well as the committee process Krinkie set up to consider projects.

"I have both members and staff saying they want to be at the first game," Fuller said. "They know how important it is to northern Minnesota, and also for Bemidji State University."

Baer, calling the House success "a team sport," said that "the two Dougs have done their part," and is excited about the potential for success in the Senate next week.

House Speaker Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, also a co-sponsor of the hockey arena bill, said last week that Pawlenty would include the arena if it reaches his desk.

The House bill also includes \$1.3 million for a Big Bog State Recreation Area visitor's center, Lindgren said. "I'm really happy about that."

Deleted from the bill, however, was funding for new Red Lake schools, a \$22.1 million funding priority for Pawlenty.

"It's still out in the House, but I think it will be coming around," said Lindgren. Skoe is author of the measure in the Senate, where it is expected to be part of that body's bonding bill.

✉ bswenson@bemidjipioneer.com

PIONEER
BEMIDJI, MN
FRIDAY 10,200
APR 30 2004

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GOP says DFLers 'soft on crime'

4

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

FRONT PAGE

day saying Democrats are "soft on crime."

"We are here to show you what hypocrisy the DFL is playing with," Senate Minority Leader Dick Day, R-Owatonna, said.

Please see **ATTACKS A9**

ST. PAUL — In a game of political volleyball, attacks have been thrust back and forth by Democrats and Republicans. Republicans spiked Wednesday

Attacks from A1 **GOP blasts DFL on political ads**

"The Senate DFL caucus, they are like the poster children to be soft on criminals."

The volleying started yesterday. Democrats served the ball with an ad saying the governor made the state unsafe. With a close up shot of the governor's eyes, the ad states, "These eyes just watched as administrative bungling and the wrong budget priorities let rapists and sexual predators back on the streets."

Later in the day, at a press conference, the governor set the political ball and said, "Democrats, I think, are frustrated because if you look at their issue agenda it's basically 'We're going to raise your taxes. We're going to promote gay marriages and we're going to have more welfare.' That's not a real popular issue agenda so they are relegated to being an attack party."

Hits too close to home:

While the ad never specifically mentioned Dru Sjodin, **Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point**, viewed it as a personal attack on one of her constituents:

Sjodin, 22, a Pequot Lakes native was abducted Nov. 22 after leaving work in Grand Forks, N.D. Alfonso Rodriguez, of Crookston, a known level 3 sex offender — most likely to re-offend — was charged with the crime.

Wearing a Sjodin button, and holding up her photo, Ruud emotionally said, "Shame on you. Shame on you. You are using Dru Sjodin this lovely woman as a pawn in your partisan politics."

She added that Senators were invited to her district for a town meeting, "We opened our arms to ask you to help us solve this problem. And how many of you came to my community, not one."

"This is despicable," Ruud said. "You offend me and you offend my community."

Party Hypocrisy:

One of the points made by Republicans was that in the past, DFLers accused them of being too tough on crime. "Democrats are now criticizing Governor Pawlenty for not

being tough enough," Sen. Claire Robling, R-Jordan, said.

Robling introduced an amendment to "Katie's Law" in March 2000. The amendment would have increased mandatory sentences for sexual predators.

Those accused of first-degree sexual conduct would have a minimum sentence of 20 years, Second-degree offenders would have to serve 15 years.

The amendment passed narrowly in the Senate but was later removed during conference committee.

"It was really difficult for me, I really felt like we were doing the right thing and moving in the right direction," Robling said. Sen. Dave Kleis, R-St. Cloud, added, "You wouldn't even had a Rodriguez if they would have went along with some of the amendments (and bills) we have offered in the past."

One last volley:

Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, who didn't know about the ad until Tuesday morning, killed the volley in a Wednesday afternoon press conference.

He said the ad was "an attempt to showcase some of the budget cuts of last session that could involve public safety."

"The governor along with some Republicans made substantial cuts to the Department of Corrections. The Department of Corrections people tell us that they do not have the appropriate resources to look at individuals who have been incarcerated or charged with certain time."

Personally, the Leader said, "I think the politics of cooperation, the politics of being positive, the politics of less partisanship are always better. But I am only one voice amongst the rest of 201 people."

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.

MESABI DAILY NEWS

VIRGINIA, MN
THURSDAY 12,245
MAR 18 2004

DAILY JOURNAL

INTERNATIONAL FALLS, MN
THURSDAY 5,000
MAR 18 2004

BRAINERD DAILY DISPATCH

BRAINERD, MN
THURSDAY 13,830
MAR 18 2004

DAILY TRIBUNE

HIBBING, MN
THURSDAY 7,046
MAR 18 2004

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WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN
FRIDAY 16, 2004
APR 9 2004

PIONEER

BEMIDJI, MN
FRIDAY 10, 2004
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Senate takes 16 hours to pass budget

By Don Davis

Capitol Correspondent

ST. PAUL — Tempers flared on the Minnesota Senate floor as the clocked ticked past 2:20 a.m. Thursday.

It was more than 16 hours after senators first entered the chamber on Wednesday to pass their budget-balancing legislation. Inside the main budget bill, provisions increasing sex offender sentences drew out emotions.

"Alfonzo Rodriguez didn't fall through the cracks," Sen. Jane Ranum said about the man charged with kidnapping University of North Dakota student Dru Sjodin. "He was let out."

The Minneapolis Democrat said Gov. Tim Pawlenty's administration could have kept the convicted sex offender locked up.

After many comments like that, Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, was tired of hearing Republican Pawlenty blamed.

"I've just about had enough of it,"

Ruud said. "I will tell you that if anyone had the opportunity to keep Mr. Rodriguez behind bars, it is Sen. Ranum. She is a five-term senator. She has been in the majority and she has worked on the judiciary and the crime committees. So if anyone is culpable for Rodriguez being on the street and doing what he did, it is Sen. Ranum."

Rodriguez says he is innocent.

Sex offender legislation prompted the only emotional debate of the marathon session, which resulted in Democrats passing the budget bill on a party-line 35-31 vote. The vote came 13 hours after a companion bill passed 35-32.

Senators approved cutting 5 percent out of state agencies' budget, compared to a 3 percent cut favored by the House and governor. They also would eliminate 38 top Pawlenty appointees and change corporate taxes to raise \$56 million.

Senators severely restricted out-of-state travel for state workers, including

the governor. The Senate went along with the House in avoiding \$40 million in health and welfare cuts Pawlenty suggested in an effort to close a \$160 million deficit.

The measure will head to a House-Senate conference committee to work out differences.

Most of the bill's debate was dry, but it became emotional when the public safety provisions came up after midnight.

While the House voted to put first-time serious sex offenders in jail for life, without the chance of release, senators opted to limit first-time offender sentences to 60 years.

Sen. Wes Skoglund, DFL-Minneapolis, said the House bill could let people get off easier if they are convicted of murder than if convicted of criminal sexual conduct.

"Some of these creeps are going to figure this out: 'I'm safer killing them than I am keeping them alive,'" Skoglund said.

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PIONEER

BEMIDJI, MN
FRIDAY 10,200
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■ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Real resort issues left unaddressed by state

Gov. Pawlenty came to town for a press conference at our waterfront Tourist Information Center. He signed a law transferring state Office of Tourism from the Department of Employment, and Economic Development to his own office. I attended the event, and I hope it will mean greater attention to tourism, and promotion of our resort industry.

Matt Kramer, the head of DEED, said that the new Explore Minnesota Tourism department won't change the status of its employees, who will remain state workers. He added that there will be no impact on the budget. And the new office will still be under Kramer's supervision. However, the governor will gain a number of opportunities for new political appointments, including the director of tourism and 28 people to serve on an advisory council. We learned that the transition will take a year. There is no indication that a single additional dollar will be spent to promote tourism.

Tourism employs 145,000 Minnesotans directly and 200,000 indirectly. It's a \$9.5 billion industry in our state. It seems to me it deserves more than photo ops and more political appointments. A local resorter has pointed out that escalating tax on lake property, driven by development pressure, is a primary issue for the tourism industry. We need to look at the problem of constantly escalating our assessed property values. We need to resist increasing property tax rates above the cost-of-living increases.

Resorters also need help as they upgrade septic systems, and carry out other mandates that help to protect the quality of our lakes and rivers. They would like to see the resort loan program reinstated, which matched state money with low interest loans from local lenders.

Our legislators, Fuller, Lindgren and Ruud need to introduce and support legislation that addresses the real issues facing resort owners. Press conferences about moving the Tourism Office from one place to another won't help if we don't make serious efforts to improve tourism promotional support and address tax issues and capital needs of the resort industry.

JIM HELTZER

District 3 Commissioner
Beltrami County

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Mesabi
Daily News
5-5-2004

Hibbing
Daily Tribune
5-5-2004



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Northern DFLers pleased with Senate's bonding bill

Lawmakers say bill contains good provisions for NE Minnesota

By CANDI WALZ
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — More bonding in a bigger Senate package would bring more to the region.

The Senate proposal announced Tuesday would borrow \$888 million in general obligation bonds for state projects. It was significantly bigger than the governor's proposal by \$200 million and \$260 million more than the House's bill passed last Thursday.

The package quickly moved through two committees on Tuesday. The two-hour Capital

Investments Committee provided overview and clarification before passing with one opposition vote. The process was much quicker in the Finance Committee, lasting about 15 minutes.

Overall, only one technical amendment was offered and no debate was heard in either committee.

The bill now heads to the Senate for a vote.

Despite the increased funding for northern Minnesota, legislators had mixed reactions. Democrats were pleased but Republicans were concerned with the size.

"I would argue that this (size) is where we should be," Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, said. "With the interest rates at a 40-year low — we should take advantage of it."

Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon

said the balanced bill included "projects for metro areas and Greater Minnesota. It addresses the needs of Republicans and Democrats alike."

"It's a well balanced bill," Sen. Tom Saxhaug, DFL-Grand Rapids, said. "I think that everyone gets a fair shake in here."

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, disagreed. "We (Republicans) didn't have any input on this bill."

But, chairman of the Senate's Capital Investment Committee, Sen. Keith Langseth, DFL-Glyndon, said the legislation could actually have been much bigger.

"This bill represents about half of the total requests." Overall, he said senators introduced projects totaling \$1.4 billion.

While local senators disagreed on the size of the overall bill, they

found common ground on spending more in higher education. The bill funded most of the building restoration, equipment and construction requests made by the University of Minnesota and by the Minnesota State Colleges and University System.

Specific to northern Minnesota, funding for three buildings at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, an academic and student services center at Lake Superior College, restorations of Bridgeman Hall at Bemidji State University and heavy equipment and music renovations at Central Lakes Community and Technical College in Brainerd were included in the package.

Legislators were pleased.

Solon said there is "premiere education in the state. The only way to (ensure) this is to invest in

(college buildings). They are part of the state's infrastructure."

Saxhaug added that the need for educational funding "was particularly true because we cut it last year."

Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, said Tuesday the bill could come to the Senate floor Thursday.

And Minority Leader Dick Day offered to shorten the process and hear the bill today so the

Senate could adjourn this week, as suggested by Johnson Monday.

If the bill passes the Senate, it will be taken up in a conference committee where members of both chambers address the differences in their proposals. The finalized legislation would then go to the governor's desk for approval. Gov. Tim Pawlenty could line-item veto any projects.

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DAILY TRIBUNE

HIRBING, MN
WEDNESDAY 7,046
APR 14 2004

Mesabi

Daily News

4-14-2004



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Senate wants minimum wage boosted

By CANDI WALZ
FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE

ST. PAUL — The Senate voted to give Minnesota's minimum wage workers a raise.

"This is fair and part of the total Democratic program of trying to — top to bottom — help our economy out," Sen. Tom Saxhaug, DFL-Grand Rapids, said.

In a 36-30 vote on Tuesday, the Senate agreed to raise the minimum wage from the current rate of \$5.15 to \$5.90 starting July 1, 2004. The wage would increase again on July 1, 2005 to \$6.65.

Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, voted in favor of the bill, "I think that it should be higher than it is. There is no way that even two wage earners in a household, both making minimum wage, can raise a family."

During the debate, Democrats pushed their philosophy of job creation, say-

ing the bill would broaden the state's economic base. Republicans countered saying that higher wages would deter businesses.

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, voted against the bill. She said the discussion was "a show" because the House hasn't heard a companion bill. "It has no legs. It will go nowhere."

Ruud added that there are currently 150 bills awaiting hearings in the Senate. "We could have taken up any one of these" which would have been better for the state.

Saxhaug disagreed with the Republicans' claim of losing jobs, "I think it (the legislation) is job neutral."

Author of the bill, Sen. Ellen Anderson, DFL-St. Paul, encouraged bipartisan support. "Every single member in this chamber can agree that we ought to reward work."

One Republican, Sen. Michele Bachmann, R-Stillwater, heavily pushed the living wages concept. She offered an amendment to raise the minimum wage to \$9 an hour.

Bakk though said \$9 went too far, "It is a job killer. I think that businesses would find a way to hire fewer people (if the amendment was accepted)."

Ruud offered an amendment to exempt tipped employees from receiving the \$5.90 and \$6.65 increases. She argued that 43 states don't pay minimum wage to these workers, reasoning that tips make up for the decreased wage.

Ruud's amendment failed along party lines on a 32-34 vote. She also received the support of Independent Sen. Sheila Kiscaden, Rochester.

Before the bill can become law, similar legisla-

tion needs to pass House. If that body doesn't take up the companion bill, the Senate can roll the language into an omnibus bill. Items in the omnibus can be discussed by a conference committee, made up of House and Senate members. If the bill passes out of conference, it would have to meet the governor's approval with his signature before becoming law.

"Fair work deserves a fair wage," Sen. Scott Dibble, DFL-Minneapolis, said.

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for The Daily Tribune, Mesabi Daily News, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.

Local legislators: It's not that great overall

By CANDI WALZ Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — While the February forecast projected that the state's budget deficit was less than expected, two Range legislators said it's nothing to write home about.

"If you look at the long term, we are looking at a \$1 billion deficit again in 2006-07," Rep. Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, said. The budget, released Friday, put the state's deficit at \$160 million, \$25

million less than what had been predicted for months. In the coming years, the deficit was predicted to grow to as much as \$341 million in Fiscal Year '05 and \$360 million in Fiscal Year '06. Democrats said this number was not accurate.

Please see REACTION A8

BRAINERD DAILY DISPATCH

BRAINERD, MN MONDAY 13,830 MAR 1 2004

MESABI DAILY NEWS

VIRGINIA, MN SATURDAY 11,848

FEB 28 2004

DAILY TRIBUNE

HIBBING, MN DAILY 7,046

SATURDAY FEB 28 2004

Reaction from A1

Anderson questions the figures

"It doesn't factor in inflation," Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, said in a press conference Friday. "Adding in inflation would put it at a \$1.1 billion deficit in 2007."

"I am not sure we are being told the whole truth," Rep. Irv Anderson, DFL-International Falls said.

Republicans, on the other hand, thought the forecast showed a step in the right direction.

Speaker of the House Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, said, "This is very, very good news for Minnesota. The challenge that lies in front of us is a small thing compared with the challenge behind us (last year's \$4.56 billion deficit)."

"I am very pleased," Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said. "We are seeing that our hard work is turning it (the economy) around."

Sen. Paul Koering, R-Brainerd, was pleasantly surprised with the lower number. He and Ruud both thought the shortfall could be paid for with the reserve account.

"We had too many cuts last year, I think it would be ridiculous to do further cuts and put more burden on the counties and cities," Koering said.

But Senate leaders disagreed. "It is a bad idea to tap into the reserves. To take money from the reserve would be inappropriate," Johnson said.

Anderson said the problems should be addressed now with more cuts.

"We should have further budget cuts, but not in education, health care, or welfare. That would not help us."

As an alternative, Anderson thought that money could be cut from departments.

Republican House Leaders agreed. "I think you will see some agencies, departments, operation budgets reduced," Sviggum said.

Jobs:

The forecast showed that the state has had job increases in the past year, mostly during the summer months.

Dr. Tom Stinson, state economist, said, the good news is that Minnesota is outperforming the U.S. economy by adding more jobs, but the bad news is that all of the improvements came last summer.

"We gained a lot of jobs last summer, but now we are treading water," Stinson said.

Democrats said that the job increases were from minimum wage jobs, and this didn't help the state.

"We have got to have real jobs that pay real wages," Sertich said. "The only way to do that is to make sure people get the proper training by having proper investments in

higher education."

Anderson said the state also needs to hire back the police and firemen that have been laid off "and do something for the economy as a whole." He proposed using a bill authored by Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, which would add \$60 million to the Local Government Aid formula, to help fund these positions.

Central Minnesota legislators agreed the state could have more jobs.

Koering hope the Job Opportunity Building Zones, implemented last year, will help attract businesses to Minnesota.

"I don't think we can ever do enough to create jobs," Ruud said. "We want to keep our young people here in Minnesota."

Anderson, Ruud and Koering all supported Gov. Tim Pawlenty's biotechnology program which would create more higher paying jobs. The proposal included tapping into services offered by the University of Minnesota and the Mayo Clinic. The programs would be built in tax-free zones, similar to JOBZ, located in Minneapolis, St. Paul and Rochester.

Bonding:

In January, the governor projected bonding \$760 million in projects. Ruud and Koering thought that the forecast didn't change this outlook. They said projects would be funded at this rate, or a bit less.

"I think we need to stick by the governor's targeted goal," Ruud said.

Sen. Keith Langseth, DFL-Glyndon, chairman of the Capital Investment Committee disagreed. He said more should be bonded for higher education. He proposed spending about \$100 million more than what the governor proposed.

Considering everything, Sertich said the Senate, House and governor will have to work together to avoid a projected deficit in 2007.

"With the governor boxed in a corner, he is not going to raise taxes," Sertich said. "We need to start talking about this now" because there is nothing left to cut, he said.

Seven other area legislators were called for comments Friday. Travel made them unavailable at home or in their offices as most were returning home for caucuses next Tuesday.

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.



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Ban from A1

An issue of local control, also

Loren Solberg, DFL-Grand Rapids, said.

He added, "It's also an issue of local control, too." Cities and counties should be able to decide if they want to implement a local ban.

Under current law, passed in 2002, counties can opt for a local ban.

When the bill passed, Minnesota became the first state to have a phosphorous-free lawn fertilizer bill, for the seven county metro area. The law took effect this year on Jan. 1. Greater Minnesota counties were allowed to use fertilizers containing 3 percent phosphorous. Crow Wing County was one of two that chose the local ban.

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, represents a portion of Crow Wing County and said the ban is effective. She urged legislators to support a statewide restriction. "This is great legislation for the seven county metro area but its even greater legislation for greater Minnesota."

Statewide Impact:

According to researchers, blue waters also

have a financial impact on the state. Tourists are more attracted to clean water and homes on blue lakes have more value.

Ruud said, "In my district alone, tourism amounts for a half-of-billion-dollars a year. This is well worth protecting."

A Bemidji State University study found a positive correlation between property values and clear water. Property values rose on blue lakes but decreased on algae-infested waters.

"In Greater Minnesota, they need their water as clean and clear as they can possibly have it," said Anne Hunt, environmental program coordinator of Minnesota Environmental Partnership. "(This bill) is definitely a bonus for that."

The House passed this legislation two weeks ago, 88-40. The bill now heads to the governor's desk for approval. Gov. Tim Pawlenty's spokesperson said he "likely" would sign the bill into law.

"It is up to all of us to protect our natural resources," Ruud said.

PAGE

Senate bans fertilizer with phosphorous

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — The Senate vowed to keep Minnesota lakes blue in a bill passed Wednesday.

"We must find ways to preserve our water qualities for future generations to enjoy," said Sen. Dan Sparks, DFL-Austin, author of the bill.

Passing in a 64-0 vote, the legislation will ban the use of fertilizers containing phosphorous statewide. The nutrient turns Minnesota lakes green as it spurs algae

growth.

Local legislators had opposing views on the issue. All senators wanted the statewide ban. But a House Democrat thought the state should keep the current law which allows

"We must find ways to preserve our water qualities for future generations to enjoy."

Sen. Dan Sparks
DFL-Austin

greater Minnesota counties to have local control.

He also worried what a ban would do to the

farming community.

"Just to have an outright ban, there are some (farmers) that need it," Rep.

Please see **BAN A10**

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DAILY TRIBUNE

HIBBING, MN
TUESDAY 7,046
MAY 11 2004

PINE JOURNAL

CLOQUET, MN
WEEKLY 3,100
MAY 12 2004

MESABI DAILY NEWS

VIRGINIA, MN
TUESDAY 12,245
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1200DU ATV bill set aside over dispute on accepted use

By CANDI WALZ
FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE

ST. PAUL — Driving all terrain vehicles on dry, bog wetlands was highly contentious among senators Monday.

Legislation authored by Sen. Dennis Frederickson, R-New Ulm, would open up ATV use for different tasks including military, emergency, fire, farming, logging and laying pipe. It would also allow travel on frozen wetlands starting Oct. 1, 2009.

But some Range legislators said the exemptions didn't go far enough. Sen. Tom Saxhaug, DFL-Grand Rapids, offered an amendment to include travel on frozen wetlands, and drier bog areas. He also opened private land for some ATV use.

The amendment barely passed, on a 34-33 vote.

Shortly after, Frederickson tabled the bill. His legislative assistant, Wendy Haavisto, said he didn't want to open up wetlands for more travel, which he said could destroy natural habitats for wildlife. Frederickson preferred the current law over Saxhaug's revision.

The Range delegation

and North Central senators were split on the amendment.

Opponents argued it might hurt wetlands or species that live in wetlands while supporters said the amendment provided more opportunity for landowners and people of northern Minnesota, where there is a vast amount of wetlands.

Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, said, "Under the wetlands conservation act, it is against the law to destroy a wetland, to rut up a wetland ... we are not changing that. What we are allowing with the Saxhaug's amendment ... (is) to access privately owned property by a direct route."

Saxhaug added, "The assumption is made with Sen. Frederickson's bill that we are not good stewards of private land in northern Minnesota. I think that my amendment (changes) that assumption."

But Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said the amendment was "a giant step backwards" from the previous law.

Last year, the Legislature passed legislation that restricts ATV use on wetlands — including levels 3 (shallow marsh with six or



more inches of water), 4 (deep marsh, up to three feet deep), 5 (shallow open water, less than 10 feet deep) and 8 (bogs with water at or near the surface) — even if located on private property. The law also prohibits riders from crossing restricted, marked public land to get to private land.

"We do have a problem with the current ATV regulations," Bakk said. "This is a private property rights issue."

Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley, agreed and asked why members of his party were questioning the amendment. "I thought that the Republican Party was the party supportive of private property rights."

Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, said, "Quite frankly, it (last year's law) took away some rights of some private people that I

don't think it was intended to do."

Koering added that the Department of Natural Resources supported Saxhaug's amendment.

But, Sen. John Marty, DFL-Roseville, chair of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee said that the DNR has been "a little bit schizophrenic" in regards to wetlands. "They are very protective in some ways, farmers and other purposes ... and ATVs, they have allowed some of it to be trashed."

"Our job here is not to necessarily make the job of the DNR easier. Our job is to protect the wetlands ... the wildlife and the precious resources in the state," Frederickson said.

Haavisto said that Frederickson would only take up the bill again if he could obtain the votes to remove the Saxhaug amendment. Otherwise, the senator thought the current law was better than the amended version.

For the bill to be signed into law, a version would have to pass the both chambers and be signed into law by the governor. The House version has not been heard on the floor.

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BRAINERD DAILY DISPATCH

BRAINERD, MN
FRIDAY 13,830
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Party line vote holds for area lawmakers on Senate budget

By CANDI WALZ
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — While some senators liked the all-encompassing process used to pass a supplemental budget bill early Thursday morning, others thought it was absurd and unfair to the public.

Different than the House, the Senate combined all finance bills into one omnibus package. The 35-31 vote came after more than a 20-hour day at 4 a.m.

"I don't think that the process is that much different," said Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, noting bills were first heard in committees, the public could weigh in with comment and senators voted in committees.

But Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, thought the combination method was "ludicrous." She said the public should have had more input. "Minnesota deserves something better than that."

Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley, thought the process was flawed. "It was stupid. Most people were tired ... When you are tired, you aren't thinking at 100 percent. You aren't making the best possible decisions you can make."

He said this isn't good for the state.

While regional senators had opposing views on the process and their votes, commonalities existed. Area legislators agreed stricter laws were needed for sex offenders and methamphetamine users. But they had differing views on the best approach. Most also agreed with the bill's provision of opting out of the federally mandated education program, No Child Left Behind.

Many teachers and school administrators criticize the No Child Left Behind program, saying it leaves no room for local control, is underfunded and places too much emphasis on testing. Under the omnibus bill, senators said Minnesota would stick with the program for one more year, hoping it's altered. If the program hasn't improved, Minnesota would opt out July 1, 2005.

"When the federal government comes to us and holds a hammer over our head and says you need to adopt these policies or we aren't going to give you your money, that's not right," Koering said.

He said a national "blanket-approach" to education doesn't work

because each state is different. "The state of Minnesota should be able to figure out what standards we want and how we want our children to be educated."

Ruud was concerned about the financial implications. If the state pulls out of the program, it wouldn't receive federal education funding. "We know that we have problems with the program, but with No Child Left Behind comes a great deal of funding. I don't think pulling out is the best solution."

As passed, the Senate's bill would impose harsher penalties on criminals convicted of sex crimes. Repeat offenders could face life without parole. All other sex crimes could be punished up to 60 years, as ruled by a judge.

Ruud co-authored an amendment that would lock up first-time offenders for life. The amendment didn't pass. She thought the proposed legislation needed to be "stricter, tighter and stronger."

Koering agreed with Ruud. He said Republicans offered stiff amendments, but it didn't seem like there was an appetite to go far enough in the Senate. "We need to

start cracking down on these folks (sexual offenders) and make sure that we don't have law-abiding citizens afraid to walk down the street."

The Senate attempted to crack down on methamphetamine use by increasing penalties and creating new crimes for making the drug. The comprehensive legislation would provide funds for lab cleanup and educate law enforcement. The provision was a watered-down version of original legislation authored by Sen. Julie Rosen, R-Fairmont.

Koering preferred Rosen's version. He said she had worked with law enforcement agents, county attorneys and all parties concerned about this issue. Together, the group developed a comprehensive plan. "Those people know what they need, the legislation should have been mindful of what they had to say."

Ruud, too, preferred Rosen's legislation. But said she understood the problem needs to be addressed. "We are losing a whole generation of children, especially in greater Minnesota. We need to crack down since it is so easy to make and readily available."

Overall, Koering said the Senate's

action sends a message. "I think that the Legislature, at least some of us, is saying we are going to get tough on you people that are making meth. We are going to send you to jail. And people that have children present while making meth, we are going to get really tough on you."

The bill will now go before a conference committee. Speaker of the House Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, and Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, were working out negotiations Thursday on how conference committees will be held.

The House preferred splitting up the bills into many conference committees, while the Senate hoped for one conference committee to work out the whole process.

Koering said, "The Senate DFL believes it would be better to have power in a few people's hands. It would probably have a handful of people making all of the decisions. That just isn't right."

Koering added that he has an election certificate on his desk, just like everyone else. "(We) should be participating in what legislation is coming through."

7

Let lawmakers speak on gay unions, GOP says

Range DFLers see budget deficit, bonding as urgent

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — Republican leadership called on Senate Democrats to let legislators' voices be heard by discussing gay marriage.

"I just think that they (Senate DFLers) have made every effort not to bring this forward," **Sen. Carrie Ruud**, R-Breezy Point, said. "The people have really spoken. They want to vote."

Monday afternoon, Gov. Tim Pawlenty joined House Speaker Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, in signing a pledge to defend marriage. They said it was time for DFL senators to do the same.

In March, the House passed a bill which would send a constitutional question to voters this fall — "Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to provide that only the union of one man and one woman will be recognized as a marriage in Minnesota?" But senators squashed the debate in committee.

Republicans vowed the discussion needs to be heard on the Senate floor and the people have a right

to know how their elected officials feel about the issue. Democrats, however, said that the current Defense of Marriage Act goes far enough and that a debate was heard in committee.

"We are still waiting for the Senate to act on this very, very important issue, at least to bring it up for a vote," Sviggum said.

Author of the bill, Sen. Michele Bachmann, R-Stillwater, said the only response she has gotten from Senate leadership is "silence — silence on the issue of letting people vote."

But, Range senators disagreed. Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, said, "We had the debate. It didn't get out of committee."

He added that the Legislature passed a Defense of Marriage Act in 1997 that specifies marriage can only be between a man and a woman. "I voted for it and still support it today."

Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, added that the Senate has much more important business to address —

Please see **SESSION B8**



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MAY 4 2004

DAILY TRIBUNE
HIBBING, MN
TUESDAY 7,046
MAY 4 2004



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Session from A1 B GOP urges gay marriage debate

resolving the \$160 million deficit, structuring the bonding bill and conferring with the House on the tax bill. "I think that getting about the business of session should take priority. Same sex marriage is (already) against the law."

Lining up Support:

More than 30 Republicans joined Sviggum and the governor on the Capitol steps in signing a pledge which "demonstrate(s) your support for traditional marriage." A list of the supporters can be found at < www.mnmarriage.com/pledge >. Local legislators opted out of signing.

Ruud thinks the issue should go to voters but said, "I don't believe in signing petitions. You become beholden to a lobby group and I don't believe it is healthy for a legislator to do that."

Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley, also said he would support the bill but won't sign a pledge. He thought there were more important things for the Legislature to focus on, "We have a lot of work to get done. We are spending a lot of work on that."

The Need:

Republicans said that Minnesota needed to act before it was handed a decision — like in Massachusetts where a court ruled on defining marriage.

"If it hadn't come up in Massachusetts, we wouldn't have to do it," Ruud said.

The East Coast state's court ruled that "barring an individual from the protections, benefits and obligations of civil marriage solely because that person would marry a person of the same sex" violated the Massachusetts Constitution. One legislator said more people should have the right to decide.

"The question is, 'Who will vote?'" Bachmann said. "Will it be one district court

judge? ... Will it be left to 200 legislators behind us or will it be to 4.5 million Minnesotans?"

Ruud added, "I think that for the health of our families and where we are going, we don't need liberal judges to make law."

But Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, said there shouldn't be a problem with Minnesota judges. The state's law interpreters are elected and would be held more accountable than judges who are appointed, most for life.

Bakk added that the state already heard a same-sex marriage case in 1970, which was unlikely to be overturned, "Courts don't like to do that."

In the case he referred to, Baker v. Nelson, 1970, two men — Jack Baker and Michael McConnell — were denied a marriage license in Hennepin County. The couple filed a case with the Minnesota Supreme Court. But the court ruled against the partners by saying, "The institution of marriage as a union of a man and woman ... is as old as the book of Genesis." To fortify the argument, the court opinion stated that the Legislature did not intend to permit same-sex marriages which was evident with the use of words like "husband and wife" and "bride and groom" in state law.

Tomassoni added, "Constitutions are for guaranteeing people's rights and not denying people's rights."

He, too, agreed that the Senate should move on with it's work, "We shouldn't be worried about totally political issues."

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.

7

1200DU FRONT PAGE

DFLer: Fairness for rural Minnesota into the ball park with shift of taxes

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — Rural representatives stood in support of the Senate tax bill provision which provides \$60 million in Local Government Aid funding by shifting property taxes on businesses. "Probably the most important part about the Senate tax plan is that it puts Local Government Aid and

fairness for rural Minnesota into the ball park," Rep. Paul Marquart, DFL-Dilworth said at a press conference Thursday morning.

Early in the afternoon, the Senate passed its tax bill, 38-28.

Some GOP representatives argued the most important provision would shift taxes on businesses, creating \$95

Please see **LGA A12** ^C

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VIRGINIA, MN
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APR 30 2004



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LGA from A1

Shift also benefits homeowners

million in revenue. Most of that — \$60 million — would filter back to cities through LGA.

The tax shift would also benefit homeowners. Under current law, the statewide property tax rate increase by 6.5 percent but businesses decrease by 2.2 percent. The new provision would lower home rates to 4.8 percent and increase businesses to 0.8 percent.

Range legislators from the House and Senate preferred this LGA restoration.

But north central legislators were skeptical, wondering what the provision would do to Minnesota's business community.

Earlier in the week, Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, said, "Homeowners taxes shouldn't be going up (while) business taxes (are) going down, but that is what is happening. That is our current tax law under the Pawlenty administration."

"I am glad that Sen. Bakk moved that forward," Rep. David Dill, DFL-Crane Lake, said. "He is in the majority of the Senate and that is a good thing for northeastern Minnesota."

But Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, disagreed, "We are working very hard to generate new jobs and make Minnesota business friendly. The last thing that we need to do is raise taxes on businesses."

Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley, agreed. "I am concerned about shifting taxes over to businesses" which may move their headquarters out of the state.

LGA was designed by the Legislature to benefit small, poor or older cities. The funding ensured that basic services — police, sewer and water — would be provided to residents in Minnesota cities.

Last year, the LGA formula was changed, so rural cities with a higher number of traffic accidents, lower household sizes, older (pre-1940) housing and declines of population were given larger portions of aid. But, the formula was underfunded by \$150 million as part of the state's \$4.56 billion budget fix.

Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, said, "What has been going on is terrible, it hit some of the larger communities on the Range very bad."

Cities throughout the state have felt effects of the underfunded formula. Many have enacted hiring freezes, delayed purchases and cut personnel. Some have even raised property taxes.

Range cities received an extra blow — the formula used taconite tax revenues against LGA, in a four-year phase-in, starting in 2005. By 2008, LGA money will be diminished dollar-for-dollar per taconite distributions.

Tuesday, Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, said, "That was an unfair provision last year, that should have never been in the formula. It needs to be taken off."

Dill "absolutely" supported more LGA funding. "The taconite cuts are devastating to communities that receive a lot of taconite aid. Those communities cannot possibly plan ahead for those cuts."

Bakk added that Senate leadership is committed to the removal and will fight for it in conference committee.

Overall, some representatives said the Senate's action provided hope. Rep. Dan Dorman, R-Albert Lea, and author of the House companion bill, said his legislation wasn't heard.

Marquart added, "Every single effort to try to create fairness for rural Minnesota has been completely shut out in the House of Representatives."

Since the Senate passed its tax bill, the LGA provision will go to a conference committee where members of both houses will work out differences in their two bills. The House tax bill passed last Friday didn't include any sections for LGA restoration.

"We are pleased to see this provision in the Senate bill, it gives us a place to go in conference," Dorman said.

Rep. Irv Anderson, DFL-International Falls, said Bakk's proposal was a "very good idea, Obviously our local governments need help in rural Minnesota — big time."

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.



Yes:

Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook
Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm
Sen. Becky Lourey, DFL-Kerrick
Sen. Yvonne Prettner-Solon, DFL-Duluth
Sen. Tom Saxhaug, DFL-Grand Rapids

No:

Sen. Paul E. Koering, R-Brainerd
Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point

Party line vote holds for area lawmakers on Senate budget

By CANDI WALZ
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — Starting in the afternoon and working into the wee hours of the morning, the Senate passed its budget supplemental budget bill early Thursday morning.

Different than the House, the Senate combined all finance bills into one omnibus package. Some senators liked the all-encompassing process while others thought it was absurd and unfair to the public.

"I don't think that the process is that much different," Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, said. He added that bills were first heard in committees, the public could weigh in with comment, and senators voted in committees.

But Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, thought the combination method was "ludicrous." She said the public should have had more input. "Minnesota deserves something better than

Please see **BUDGET A10**

MESABI DAILY NEWS

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DAILY TRIBUNE

HIBBING, MN
FRIDAY 7,046
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Budget from A1

Region lawmakers differ on process

that."

The 35-31 vote, came after more than a 20-hour day at 4 a.m. Senators had previously passed a budget bill Wednesday, which they began debating in the morning.

Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley, thought the process was flawed, "It was stupid. Most people were tired ... When you are tired, you aren't thinking at 100 percent. You aren't making the best possible decisions you can make."

He added that this isn't good for the state.

While regional senators had opposing views on the process and their votes, commonalities existed. Local legislators agreed stricter laws were needed for sex offenders, and methamphetamine users. But they had differing views on the best approach. Most also agreed with the bill's provision of opting out of the federally mandated education program, No Child Left Behind.

Nothing Left;

Most teachers and school administrators criticize NCLB, saying it leaves no room for local control, is underfunded, and places too much emphasis on testing. Under the omnibus bill, senators said Minnesota would stick with NCLB for one more year, hoping it's altered. If the program hasn't improved, Minnesota would opt out July 1, 2005.

"It puts so many expenses on the states, so many requirements," Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, said.

He added the program discourages teachers, who constantly prepare their students to do well on the tests, "When you put more requirements on teachers, you take away their creativity."

Koering agreed, "When the federal government comes to us and holds a hammer over our head and says you need to adopt these policies, or we aren't going to give you your money, that's not right."

Koering added that a national "blanket-approach" to education doesn't work because each state is different. "The state of Minnesota should be able to figure out what standards we want and how we want our children to be educated."

Bakk liked the message being sent to the federal government — if the law is not more flexible, Minnesota will "get out completely."

He added, "It's an effort by the Senate to say to the federal government, 'you have to make changes.' I think that it is, a good message to send."

Ruud, however, was concerned about the financial implications. If the state

pulls out, it wouldn't receive federal education funding. "We know that we have problems with the program, but with No Child Left Behind comes a great deal of funding. I don't think pulling out is the best solution."

Other senators agreed funding was a concern but said the state would access the loss before opting out.

Cracking Down:

As passed, the bill would impose harsher penalties on criminals convicted of sex crimes. Repeat offenders could face life without parole. All other sex crimes could be punished up to 60 years, as ruled by a judge.

Ruud co-authored an amendment which would lock up first-time offenders for life. The amendment didn't pass. She thought the proposed legislation needed to be "stricter, tighter, and stronger."

Bakk disagreed saying Ruud's amendment went too far. Considering some murderers are eligible for parole after 30 years, he said, "Murder should be the most serious crime."

He added, "It is not good public policy to let murders out in 30 years, but keep sex offenders locked up."

Koering agreed with Ruud. He said Republicans offered some "pretty stiff amendments," but "it didn't seem like there was an appetite to go far enough" in the Senate.

He said, "We need to start cracking down on these folks (sexual offenders) and make sure that we don't have law abiding citizens afraid to walk down the street."

Tough on Meth:

The use of methamphetamines has become a problem throughout the state, particularly in rural areas, according to law enforcement. The Senate attempted to crack down on use of the drug by increasing penalties and creating new crimes for making the drug. The comprehensive legislation would also provide funds for lab cleanup funds, and educate law enforcement.

The provision was a watered-down version of original legislation authored by Sen. Julie Rosen, R-Fairmont.

Koering preferred Rosen's version. He said she had worked with law enforcement agents, county attorneys, and "all parties concerned about this issue." Together, the group developed a comprehensive plan. "Those people know what they need, the legislation should have been mindful of what they had to say."

"I really want to credit Sen. Rosen for her work on this. She did an incredible job," Ruud said. "I want to commend

her for bringing it forward."

Ruud, too, preferred Rosen's legislation. But said she understood that the problem needs to be addressed. "We are losing whole generation of children, especially in greater Minnesota." We need to crack down since it is "so easy to make and readily available."

Bakk agreed that the Legislature needed to "try to get our arms around this problem." He said, "We are all concerned about the increasing use. There is a lot of it going on."

But Bakk cautioned that the Republican proposals of locking up sex offenders and meth users would have long-term effects. By 2020, he said it would require 3,200 new beds and cost the state \$70 million. Bakk would have rather see this money used for services — providing health care, and funding nursing homes and hospitals.

Tomassoni agreed there was a major problem. "I think that it's escalating and its very serious." He thought the legislation was a good first-time approach, but may need more work after the state learns more.

Overall, Koering said the Senate's action sends a message. "I think that the Legislature, at least some of us, are saying we are going to get tough on you people that are making meth. We are going to send you to jail. And people that have children present while making meth, we are going to get really tough on you."

The bill will now go before a conference committee. Speaker of the House Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, and Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, were working out negotiations Thursday on how conference committees will be held.

The House preferred splitting up the bills into many conference committees, while the Senate hoped for one conference committee to work out the whole process.

Bakk said the benefit of the latter option would be having money in different areas that could be shifted around.

But, Republican senators agreed with the House proposal.

Koering said, "The Senate DFL believes it would be better to have power in a few people's hands. It would probably have a handful of people making all of the decisions. That just isn't right."

Koering added that he has an election certificate on his desk, just like everyone else. "(We) should be participating in what legislation is coming through."

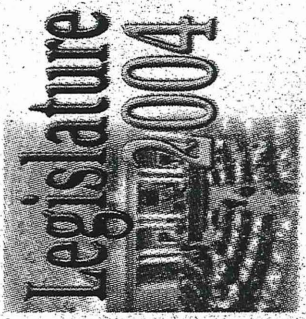


2004

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Lawmakers wear
FRONT PAGE
ribbons backing
Molnau, Yecke

By CANDI WALZ
FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE



ST. PAUL — Wearing red, white and blue ribbons, Republican women stood together Monday to support two women commissioners — Lt. Gov. and Transportation Commissioner Carol Molnau and Education Commissioner Cheri Pierson Yecke — that haven't yet received confirmation from the Senate.

"Timeliness is in order," Senate Assistant Minority Leader Gen. Olson, R-Minnetrista, said. One of the more powerful women in the House, Speaker Pro Tempore Rep. Lynda Boudreau, R-Faribault, added that confirmations should not be about character assassination, job reviews, the differences in political policies or

"the political hot shots of a popular governor." Instead, approval should be based on the commissioner's qualifications for the position. The comments came a week after Senate DFL-dominated committees held hearings for both Molnau and Yecke. Last Tuesday, the DFL-controlled Senate Transportation Committee voted down Molnau, along party lines. The

See • Support / Page A6 B

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Support: Lawmakers wear ribbons backing Molnau, Yecke

Continued from A1 B

Senate Education Committee heard testimony Thursday from 10 Yecke supporters and 10 opponents. The committee votes on Yecke's appointment April 13.

State Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, attended the press conference. In an interview last Friday, Ruud said, the delayed confirmation "is political. It is a real slap against women."

Monday's message on the capitol steps was careful not to label DFLers as sexist. But, Olson said, "I think they (DFLers) have a hard time dealing with strong, confi-

dent, conservative women." Majority Leader Sen. Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, disagreed that delayed confirmations were gender-based. Last Friday, he said that female Senate Transportation Committee members Sen. Mee Moua, DFL-St. Paul, and Sen. Sharon Marko, DFL-Cottage Grove, offered the most scrutiny to Molnau.

Part of the concern surrounding Molnau is the way she unevenly split transportation funding between rural and metro communities, giving more to metro areas. DFLers would also like her to add more funding to transportation for bridges, roads,

and buses. Personally, Molnau against the controversial Northstar commuter rail, which will provide fast travel from the cities to Big Lake.

Surrounding Yecke are issues of localized control, and standards in education. Many claim she has taken over the local control of schools, and applied unfair rankings, with a star system. Others dislike the graduation standards she has developed, deeming they were "politicized."

Female Republicans were quick to come to the aid of the commissioners, listing their credentials.

Member of the Transporta-

tion Committee, Sen. Claire Robling, R-Jordan, said Molnau has inspired her personally to run for office, "I knew that she was the right person to pursue changes in MN/DOT (Minnesota Department of Transportation). She is qualified and has great experience."

Molnau was elected to the House in 1992 and served as the Transportation Committee Chair from 1999 to 2001. She is also a CEO member of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and an executive member of the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of

Minnesota.

Robling said, "It was very shocking to me when I sat in the Senate Transportation Committee last week and she was denied confirmation by that committee."

State auditor Patricia Anderson added, "The state has witnessed a lot of positive changes since these two women took office. The DFLers shouldn't play any more games with these highly competent commissioners."

Rep. Laura Brod, R-New Prague, introduced legislation to confirm commissioners in a timely manner. Her bill states that if the Senate

doesn't take action within one session after appointment, a commissioner would be approved.

"Inaction is essentially an action," Brod said. "The confirmations ought to be made on qualifications, skills and abilities, not on politics."

Despite committee recommendations, the full Senate votes to confirm or deny both commissioners. If denied, the commissioner(s) would be removed from her/their position(s).

Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer said, "Get this show moving on the road. It is about time to end the abuse and move on."

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**Bakk: State
has to
share some
of the pain**

FRONT PAGE

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — Senate Democrats, in their budget proposal released Friday, say no to gambling and raiding the 21st Century Minerals Fund, but yes to plugging loopholes and reducing state government.

"The state government is going to have to share some of this pain," Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, said.

The Democratic plan would solve the state's \$160 million deficit and adds \$30.65 million. Gained money would include \$58 million from closing corporate tax loopholes and \$30.2 million from state agency reductions. The Senate also went along with Gov. Tim Pawlenty's proposals of \$35.6 million from up front sales tax on car leases, and \$10.5 million received from requiring wholesalers to pay cigarette taxes that way.

Republicans were pleased to see a released proposal, since their budget was completed two weeks ago, but they didn't agree with the Democrats' tactics and terminology.

"I have to tell you,

Reaction from A1 A
Proposal is on track

where is the leadership?" **Sen. Carrie Ruud**, R-Breezy Point, said. "They come out with their proposal a month later than the governor, the House Republicans and Senate minority? I don't see leadership there, it's smoke in the mirrors."

House Minority Leader Rep. Eric Paulsen, R-Eden Prairie, questioned how DFLers could close tax loopholes, especially since their emphasis is jobs. "You can't be for jobs and kill the job providers."

Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, disagreed. He thought that the proposal was on track. "When you don't close loopholes and you allow the state to out source jobs, you lose jobs. The (President George W.) Bush administration has proven that tremendously. Over three million jobs have gone overseas under the Bush administration."

Agency Cuts:

DFLers called for a 5 percent cut in state agencies, this added 2 percent to the governor's proposed 3 percent cut. Senate leadership planned to remove assistant commissioners and some deputy commissioner positions.

Bakk said, "The Senate is putting it back in his court, saying okay governor, you won't give us any money, you figure out how you can run a smaller state government."

Ruud thought the cuts were "purely political," especially following the Democrats' resistance in committee of confirming two of Gov. Pawlenty's appointees — Department of Transportation Commissioner Carol Molnau and Education Commissioner Cheri Pearson-Yecke.

Bakk disagreed. "It is about priorities — is it more important to make sure that our state agencies are funded, or is it more important to make sure we maintain revenue going to hospitals and nursing homes? I fall on the side of making sure that we continue to provide health care."

Avoiding Racino:

Senate Democrats didn't use state

gambling funds to balance the budget, but the House did. Republican leadership in both bodies said that they would approve a state casino and add slot machines to the Canterbury Park racetrack in Shakopee.

"The House Republicans think that it generates \$36 million, the Senate Republicans think it generates \$100 million. I think we have a problem figuring out what it is," Tomassoni said.

Ruud, too, questioned the practice. "Gambling as a whole to balance the state budget, is that really what we want to do? I think we need to get control of government size and control spending."

Back in the Black:

Overall, Senators agreed that the state should seek to get out of the deficit and prevent further structural deficit, caused by a lack of revenue to the state.

Tomassoni foresaw creating more jobs as part of the recovery. "The bottom line is the state of Minnesota better start generating and creating new jobs. If we don't, we are going to be in a huge deficit in the near future."

Tomassoni added that Republicans have the wrong idea. "I think their approach is a race down to minimum wage."

He said the state can create more jobs with the bonding proposal, and by keeping jobs in the United States. The Senate recently passed a bill that would prohibit state agencies from sending work overseas.

"We need to come up with a solution that actually works," Tomassoni said.

Bakk agreed, saying programs have been cut enough already. "I can't imagine them absorbing any more. We are going to have to find some revenue around here."

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.



Submitted Photo

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, left, visits with Candy Thompson and the Rev. Steve Thompson of Mt. Zion Church in Bemidji, during the 44th annual Minnesota Prayer Breakfast Wednesday in Minneapolis.

► Net of the North / From Page A1

tor Thompson inviting me down I was just thrilled," Ruud said. Ruud said she was excited to involve church and state through the support offered by the blessing and prayers.

Two women from Mount Zion Church, who were seated either side of Ruud, said they were both impressed by her faith and by how approachable she is.

Candy Thompson, whose husband is the pastor of Mount Zion, said, "It was fun sitting next to her she is a really nice lady."

Pawlenty, interviewed later, said people need to recognize our country was founded by people of faith.

"That doesn't mean that we are not tolerant and understanding and appreciative and respectful of other people's beliefs, but it doesn't mean we have to run or hide from our beliefs either," he said. "I think it's appropriate that people of faith to step forward and be willing to stand with it and stand behind it."

Pawlenty in his public address had emphasized the need to pray for our troops, "whatever you think about the decisions that put them there."

His request was made particularly poignant by the news released later the same day of yet another Minnesotan soldier killed in Iraq. The military were represented at the breakfast by the University of Minnesota ROTC Color Guard.

Carson who is director of pediatric surgery at Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore, spoke both of success and failure: how his own failure

in math at school, where has was nicknamed "dummy," had inspired his mother, who was at that time a single parent, to pray and receive instructions concerning the education of her boys. The instruction to reduce the boy's time in front of the TV, compulsory reading and the writing of two book reports every month changed his life according to Carson.

That Carson has gone on to become world famous for his work in separating co-joined twins is all the more poignant when Carson recalls that his mother could not read those book reports at the time she ordered them. Carson also spoke of his passion to inspire learning through a scholarship program that he sponsors with his wife and hopes to extend to Minnesota.

Arlo Feiock, pastor of Bethany Free Lutheran Church in Bemidji, who left his home at 2:40 a.m. in order to make the 6:30 a.m. registration said, "It was more than worth it, it was inspiring."

John Werlein, pastor of Becida Community Church, said it was very exciting to see 1,600 people come together, "because they want God to be head over Minnesota."

Dave Myers of Ridgewood Baptist Church described the atmosphere as, "Wonderful," he particularly enjoyed hearing the governor read from the scriptures.

As 14-year-old rising star Meaghan Markert sang "God Bless America" in conclusion. The guests stood to their feet and joined in heartily.

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MINNESOTA CLIPPING SERVICE



PIONEER
BEMIDJI, MN
FRIDAY 10,200
APR 9 2004

Prayer breakfast inspires Bemidji visitors

FRONT PAGE

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BY JOHN PARSONS
Special to the Pioneer
A Bemidji pastors' network, Net of the North, invited state legislators to join their table at the 44th annual Minnesota Prayer Breakfast in the Grand Ballroom at the Hilton Hotel in downtown Minneapolis. About 1,600 people filled the

luxurious third floor ballroom before 7 a.m. Wednesday for a program that included scripture readings from Gov. Tim Pawlenty and a keynote address by world renowned neurosurgeon Dr. Benjamin Carson.

The call to prayer brought legislators, businessmen, pas-
tors and lay people together to ask the blessing of the Almighty upon the state of Minnesota.

Net of the North booked two tables and made the \$20 tickets available locally. Six pastors from Bemidji attended, along with wives and others, to make up a party of 11 from Bemidji.

Businessmen and friends from Elk River and Minneapolis joined the Bemidji party as well as Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point. Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, was invited, but was unable to make it.
"When I got the call from Pas-
► Net of the North / Page A6

1200040 Ruud, Howes prepare for 2004 session

BY LU ANN HURD-LOF
THE ENTERPRISE



Larry Howes



Carrie Ruud

Sen. Carrie Ruud (R-Breezy Point) and Rep. Larry Howes (R-Walker), who both represent the eastern half of Hubbard County, have some expectations for the 2004 session that convenes Feb. 2.

In separate interviews, the legislators said they are hoping for \$250,000 to bridge

the divide of 11th Crow Wing Lake, currently bisected by a culvert below state Highway 64.

4 Thursday Howes said he had just learned the bridge money may not be able to come out of the bonding bill, but that he will look for a different way to come up with the \$250,000 needed to move the project forward.

The legislators also are committed to helping Walker with money for a new community center. They're seeking \$200,000 in

money from the bonding bill for the \$3.4 million project.

"The governor says there will be no local projects included," Howes said, explaining Tim Pawlenty's philosophy is that bonding money should only go for state projects, such as buildings on college campuses or state campgrounds.

However, over the last 20 years, bonding money has

gone to projects in legislators' districts, Howes said optimistically.

"We're both committed to it," said Ruud.

Also at the top of Ruud's priority list for 2004 is legislation relating to sentencing guidelines and conditions of release for sex offenders. Ruud's district includes Pequot Lakes, the home of Dru Sjodin, the Grand Forks college student who is

believed to have been abducted Nov. 22 and still hasn't been found.

Both legislators are eyeing the potential for Ah-Gwah-Ching as a regional jail facility, perhaps with space for incarcerating serious sexual offenders since the existing facility already houses some of them and has adequate security.

A See **SESSION**. Page A11.

Session: *Death penalty could be reviewed*

from Page A1 A

Ruud said although she expects the death penalty will come up she currently is in favor of letting voters decide if that is appropriate. "It is such an emotional issue," she said. Ruud said she believes the question would best be addressed by proposing a constitutional amendment.

Thursday Ruud was heading to a meeting with state Sen. John Marty (D-Roseville) on proposed legislation related to off-highway vehicles, especially ATVs.

While last year's legislation had some unintended consequences, Ruud is perturbed that last-minute changes were made in the Senate bill.

"We had countless hours of debate and the House didn't," she said.

Now Rep. Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar) has proposed a bill that would strip away the measures that did emerge from last year's session, Ruud said.

One of the unintended consequences of last year's legislation is that it appears to prohibit use of ATVs on wetlands on private property. But, according to Ruud, Hackbarth's bill would roll back all wetland protection, private and public.

"It also reintroduces the concept of an 'anywhere forest' and would allow anyone over age 18 to carry a passenger," Ruud said. "It is really horrific."

Hackbarth chairs the House Natural Resources Policy Committee. "I am willing to work with anyone," Ruud said, adding Hackbarth's bill goes so far in the other direction she fears last year's "good progress" could go for naught.

"It's really disheartening to have someone in that position who won't work with us," she said.

Howes said he isn't familiar yet with the bill Hackbarth has introduced but has committed to a different one introduced by Rep. David Dill

(DFL-Crane Lake) and supported by the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association. This bill would expand ATV use during hunting season, Howes said.

The issue "will get contentious," Howes assured.

Also on Ruud's agenda is continuing discussion on establishing forestry councils through a Vital Forests, Vital Communities initiative. Grand Rapids and Bemidji have forestry councils and one is being formed in Brainerd, Ruud said.

"We don't want to be like California," where wildfires came out of unmanaged forest lands, she said.

"It takes all of us. We can't lose that industry," Ruud said.

Howes said he is working on legislation related to a new .08 law that would represent a compromise.

Lowering the alcohol concentration from .10 to .08 would bring federal money for

the state's transportation system.

While the governor and Speaker of the House Steve

Sviggum are advocates of .08 legislation, Howes said his idea represents a different perspective in that it wouldn't go into effect until Aug. 1, 2007 and would not require chemical assessments for first-time offenders who register between .08 and .10.

Howes' idea also is to allow a greater portion of fines to go to counties and cities rather than the state.

"And it still would save lives, because of the awareness it would bring to the public," Howes said.

Even though past attempts to prevent schools statewide from starting classes before Labor Day have failed, both Ruud and Howes say they will try to get such a measure passed in 2004.

PARK RAPIDS ENTERPRISE

PARK RAPIDS, MN
2-TIMES/WEEK 6,100

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DNR shifts gears, backs truck course

A proposal for a state forest has some riled.

STAR TRIBUNE DEC 29 '04
By Tom Meersman
Star Tribune Staff Writer

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, which says it opposes aggressive off-road truck use in state forests, is planning to build a route through Paul Bunyan State Forest on which four-wheel-drive vehicles can be driven over boulders and logs.

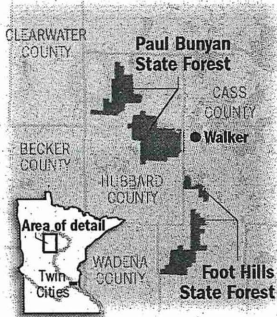
In a policy shift that has angered conservationists and some nearby residents, the DNR is considering an 8-mile truck trail with three loops featuring a small hill, tight turns and natural obstacles in the forest near Walker, Minn.

The proposal has drawn criticism because a 2002 DNR policy stated that "challenge areas, mud holes and scramble areas" for trucks, dirt bikes and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) were inappropriate on state forest land.

TRUCK continues on A12

Off-road for trucks

Drivers would have a designated place to drive four-wheel-drive trucks in Paul Bunyan State Forest under a proposal being considered by the Department of Natural Resources. A challenge area for aggressive driving was closed in Foot Hills State Forest.



INSIDE: What's the difference between a technical area and a challenge trail? **A12**

TRUCK from A1

State collects funds from truck owners for trails

That policy was adopted after extensive rutting and erosion occurred at a former "truck challenge" area in Foothills State Forest. The state-approved site, which consisted of a steep hill climb strewn with boulders and logs; was closed this year.

Trucks and other vehicles can drive on hundreds of miles of roads in forests, but some truck enthusiasts also want to drive on back-country trails that test the mettle of their four-wheel-drive vehicles, some of which are modified to clear taller obstacles.

Critics of the Paul Bunyan proposal say that the DNR has backtracked on its off-road policy. They say aggressive truck driving should be limited to places such as a park built on former mining land near Gilbert, Minn., for aggressive, off-road driving.

"We thought we had gained a lot of ground with DNR," said Barry Babcock, an environmentalist in the area who monitors off-road driving and policy.

Craig Engwall, special assistant to the DNR commissioner, said the 2002 policy on trucks has changed. "I'm sure some folks view it as a reversal," he said. "To me it seems more like a clarification."

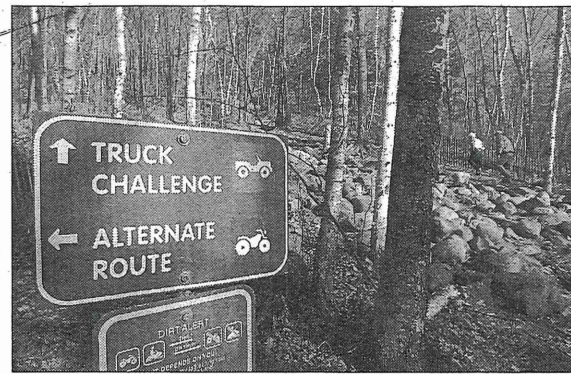
Engwall said state forests should not allow drivers of modified trucks to climb steep hills or slosh through mud holes. But drivers of factory-equipped four-wheel-drive trucks, SUVs and Jeeps should be able to test their driving skills on special, low-speed routes in state forests, he said.

These routes have been called technical trails, rather than challenge areas.

Orders from above

State officials originally planned to have no special trails for trucks in Paul Bunyan State Forest.

A planning team of area DNR and Hubbard County officials in April recommended trails for ATVs and dirt-bike motorcycles only, and said that hilly terrain



Brian Peterson/Star Tribune

A "truck challenge" area was created at the Spider Lake Recreation Area near Poplar, Minn., but was subsequently closed. The DNR is considering an area for truck driving near Walker, Minn.

Terminology

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources officials now say technical truck trails, but not challenge areas, will be allowed in state forests.

What will be allowed:

Truck Technical Trail: A narrow corridor, usually under 2 miles long, covered by dead trees, rocks and other debris. It can be driven at speeds of up to 5 miles per hour using unmodified four-wheel-drive trucks. Hills and tight turns increase the driving challenge.

Still not allowed

Truck Challenge Area: A slope or hill strewn with boulders, logs and other obstacles designed for the most challenging off-road driving. It tests the driver's skill and the vehicle's limits. A steep, rocky grade may increase the difficulty. Attractive to owners of modified four-wheel-drive trucks with raised suspensions.

Tom Meersman

Public comment

A proposal for truck, ATV and dirt-bike trails in Paul Bunyan State Forest is open for public comment until Jan. 28.

Full report: To read the proposal, go to <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us>. Click on "State Forest OHV Trail Proposals and Maps" and choose the one for Paul Bunyan.

Comments: Can be mailed to Helen Cozzetto, DNR planner, 6603 Bemidji Av. N., Bemidji, MN 56601, or sent by e-mail to helen.cozzetto@state.mn.us

Public meeting: 6-9 p.m. Jan. 12, Park Rapids High School, 401 Huntsinger Av., Park Rapids, Minn.

Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

and soils there are unsuitable for truck trails.

DNR officials in St. Paul, including some from the commissioner's office, had a different idea. They quickly rejected the proposal and ordered planners to include trails for trucks. It would be designed to challenge drivers, but it would not require specially modified "mudder" trucks.

Mark Carlstrom is the area DNR forester who served on

the planning team that originally recommended no truck trails and later revised the proposal to include them. When asked what he thought of the new plan, Carlstrom replied: "I think it would be inappropriate to give my real opinion. We're good employees, we do what we're told, and we've come up with a reasonable compromise."

Engwall said the commissioner's office ordered changes because the state collects mon-

ey from gasoline taxes and off-road truck registration fees. The money goes into a fund to pay for driver education efforts, trails and other off-road programs.

After adding trucks to the Paul Bunyan proposal, the DNR in June spelled out the broader policy in a memo to agency planners. "It is imperative that we find recreational opportunities" for trucks, the memo said.

Turning point

The fate of the Paul Bunyan truck-trail proposal, now open for public comment, could be a turning point for truck use in state forests.

Sen. Marrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, whose district includes the forest, said that the state should purchase abandoned gravel pits, mining areas or other lands for people who want special driving challenges. Providing truck trails in state forests is "inviting disaster," she said.

Matt Norton, a lobbyist and off-road policy researcher for the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, said he and others support recreational truck driving on forest roads, but not on trails. "One truck can do a heck of a lot of damage, a lot more than one ATV even driven in the most aggressive manner," he said.

The DNR's off-road vehicle recreation area near Gilbert offers mud holes, hill climbs and other challenges.

"Everyone thinks we're all mud trucks who want to go ripping up the swamp," said Lois Campbell, legislative director for the Minnesota Four Wheel Drive Association. Many drivers prefer to follow trails in the woods, she said.

She also said it's a misconception that trucks do more damage than do ATVs and dirt bikes. "It depends on how you operate the vehicle, and how the trail systems are designed and planned," she said.

Scott Reiling, president of the association, said that ATV drivers are getting hundreds of miles of trails in state forests, and that trucks have received almost none. The DNR should be able to find some trails that will resist erosion and will be environmentally suitable for truck driving, he said. "A ride through the woods shouldn't be just on a gravel road," said Reiling. "It's not the same as a trail ride."

Tom Meersman is at meersman@startribune.com.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

FORUM / Howes cites failings

Ruud said the DOC stopped referring sex offenders for civil commitments because there was such a high bar to prove a commitment was needed, a problem she said has been corrected.

Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker, agreed with Hatch's appraisal of the system and said he is in the early stages of drafting a bill that would make civil commitments after the release of sex offenders the responsibility of the state attorney general's office rather than of the county attorneys.

"I think the state shirked its responsibility," Howes said.

And while he doesn't believe it was the DOC's fault that sex offenders were committed to a nursing home, he said there is a problem in that the state doesn't know how many sex offenders may be in nursing homes. He put the blame on the Department of Health and Human Services.

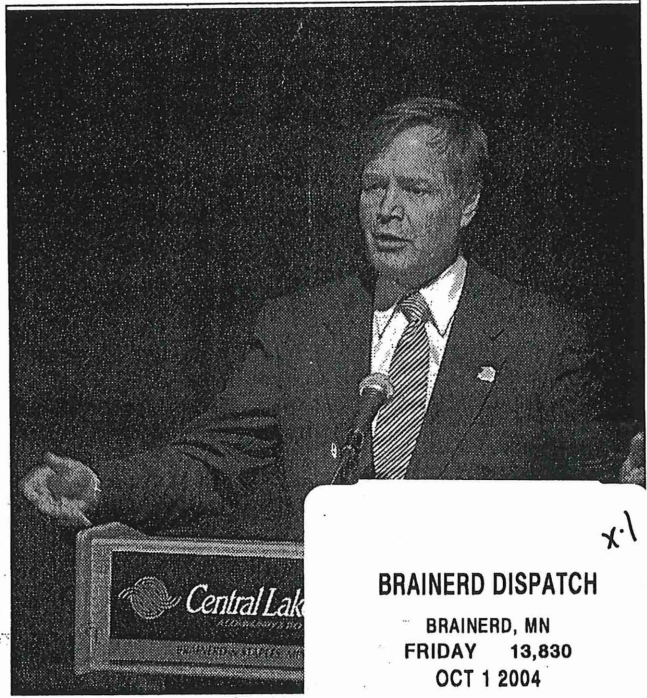
Howes said what people fear is sex offenders falling through the cracks upon release from prison, that they go back into a community without the community's knowledge. Like Hatch, he suggested state hospitals, which already have security in place, be used for commitments.

"I don't look at civil commitment as treatment. I look at it as keeping (dangerous) people off the street," Howes said.

Other panelists shed light on local issues.

Rocky Wells, assistant Crow Wing County attorney, and David Hermerding, managing attorney for the Crow Wing County public defender's office in Brainerd, said sex offenses represent the minority of cases handled in the county district court. Wells noted predatory sex offenders represent a small number of all sex offenses. Several on the panel agreed that there needed to be changes in sentencing guidelines.

"We have a lot of sex



BRAINERD DISPATCH
BRAINERD, MN
FRIDAY 13,830
OCT 1 2004

Brainerd Dispatch/Clint Wood
Speaking before a crowd of about 50 people Thursday in Chaiberg Theatre at Central Lakes College in Brainerd, Minnesota Attorney General Mike Hatch said the state's sex offender program lacks effectiveness. Hatch and several other state and county officials were invited to CLC by the Gordon Rosenmeier Center for State and Local Government.

offenders in the community, leading productive lives," Wells said. "Just because someone comes in on a sex offense, we don't throw away the key."

Hermerding noted the system is broken in that there aren't enough resources to adequately represent criminal offenders, including sex offenders.

Frank Webber, a psychologist, said the system isn't working because taxpayer money is being wasted on treatment for sex offenders who refuse to change. Webber said the state also is punishing juvenile offenders, many of whom come from abusive backgrounds or broken homes, instead of properly treating them.

Debi Backdahl, Crow Wing County sheriff's chief deputy, and Todd Strange, Crow Wing County probation

officer, noted the need for collaboration between departments, both state and local, in dealing with sex offenders because once they are released from prison they are the responsibility of county agencies.

Strange, who works almost exclusively with sex offenders, said the recidivism rate is 1.3 percent. He said what's in place is working.

"If you choose to, you can pick apart any system and find the flaws but I don't agree our system is broken," Strange said.

The sex offender forum was sponsored by the Gordon Rosenmeier Center for State and Local Government.

MATT ERICKSON can be reached at matt.erickson@brainerddispatch.com or 855-5857.

By MATT ERICKSON FRONT PAGE Staff Writer
Is Minnesota's Sex Offender Program broken? Depends upon who you ask. Names like Alfonso Rodriguez Jr. and places like Concordia Care Center have made "sex offender" household words in the past year.
For that reason about 50 people gathered at Chaiberg Theatre at Central Lakes College to listen to state, county and local officials sound off on the topic. Rodriguez, accused of the Nov. 22 abduction and murder of Dru Sjodin, has past convictions for sexual offenses. It was learned earlier this year that

three sex offenders were committed to Concordia Care Center, a nursing home. The keynote speaker Thursday, Minnesota Attorney General Mike Hatch, blamed the Minnesota Department of Corrections for not properly handling sex offenders once they are released from prison and serving probation.
Hatch said instead of doing as obligated by state statute, the DOC has been leaving it to county attorneys to make recommendations of civil commitments to treatment centers for sexual offenders.
"The programs works, it just hasn't been handled properly," said Hatch. He

said the county attorneys are asked to make so many recommendations on sex offenders a few fall through the cracks. Hatch also pointed a finger at state budget cuts. He said instead of trying to close regional treatment facilities, such as in Brainerd in Walker, the facilities should be used to house sex offenders who are determined to be a danger.
"Use the hospital there, don't stick these people in nursing homes with our parents," said Hatch, alluding to the discovery earlier this year that sex offenders had been placed at the Concordia Care Center nursing home in Minneapolis.
Sen. Carrie Rutilid, R-Breezy Point,

was one of seven local officials asked to be on a panel to discuss the sex offender issue after Hatch's speech. She took issue with several of Hatch's comments. Round said the DOC acted responsibly in putting three sex offenders in the nursing home. She said one of the sex offenders had the mentality of a 4-year-old, one was bound to a wheelchair and one had a sex offender rating of 1. She also noted that the average age of the patients at the nursing home was 36.
"We did not put sexual predators in with grandpa and grandpa," Round said.

See FORUM, Page 4A

Hatch would house sex offenders in treatment centers

Death penalty question stirs state Rep. Lindgren

Lawmaker relates tragedy from August 1975

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BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

His voice choked with emotion, Rep. Doug Lindgren related the details of a tragedy in August 1975 that claimed the life of a 21-year-old Bagley woman.

"We were readying for a wedding, and got a call that a member of the family had been raped and beaten with a baseball bat to the point where her brother-in-law had a hard time knowing who it was," Lindgren, R-Bagley, said Thursday night.

"Her body had been thrown into the Mississippi River at Blaine and had floated past their house," he said of those involved in the wedding. "Her naked body was found against a bridge pier."

Now visibly shaken, Lindgren told about 30 people at Bemidji City Hall that they didn't "have to go any further to see where I go" involving the death penalty. The woman's attacker remains unknown to this day, he said.

"I do support the death penalty, because we simply have the resources now such as DNA to have this done correctly," Lindgren said. "I'd flip the switch — this is how hard I feel about this."

"No one in the free state of Minnesota should have to fear stuff like that," said Lindgren, to a round of muted applause.

Lindgren, and three other local lawmakers, were asked their position on the death penalty as part of a Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce legislative forum, with the 2004 session starting Feb. 2.

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said she would author a bill to bring the death penalty before the public in a constitutional amendment ballot question.

The issue comes after Gov. Tim Pawlenty proposed reinstating the death penalty in Minnesota after the Nov. 22 disappearance of Dru Sjodin, a University of North Dakota student, who is believed to have been abducted. A Crookston man who is a convicted high-risk sex offender is being held in the case.

"It is the people of Minnesota who should decide," Ruud said. "It is a very personal issue."

Ruud said her family is acquainted with Sjodin's family — with Dru Sjodin a bridesmaid in her son's wedding.

"I would like someday to look at a photo of my son's wedding without a lump in my throat," Ruud said.

Ruud is holding a sex offender town hall meeting 2-4 p.m. Saturday at Pequot Lakes High School with a panel of legislators and state officials to talk about stiffer penalties for such

offenders.

Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, said he supported the death penalty but agreed with Ruud that Minnesotans should vote on the issue through a constitutional ballot question.

"It's not a very easy debate, but the feds can do it now in Minnesota" with certain federal court convictions, Fuller said. "The voters should have the choice."

More than 90 percent of sex offenders re-offend, he said, and stricter laws are needed such as the use of civil commitment. Unfortunately, no new law can be made retroactive to those offenders who now have served their time and are free, he said.

Sen. Rod Skoe of Clearbrook, the lone Democrat on Thursday's panel, spoke against the death penalty, saying it's too easy to make mistakes that can't be corrected.

"There are moves toward lengthening sentences," he said. "But in using the death penalty, there are some instances where mistakes are made and there is no recourse. We have to understand those things."

Skoe agreed that the civil commitment process needs to be strengthened, in which high-risk criminals can be held in state hospitals after fulfilling their criminal jail sentences.

The legislators for two hours were asked a host of questions as a tune-up to the current session, and a few lingering questions about last year's session that solved a \$4.5 billion state budget deficit without raising state taxes.

Spilling over from that were state aid cuts to cities, of which Bemidji lost \$502,238 or 12.7 percent of its Local Government Aid in 2003 and will lose \$846,906 or 20.7 percent of LGA this year.

Both Fuller and Lindgren went against their caucus in not supporting the tax measure that cut LGA.

The Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities, a lobbying group of rural cities to which Bemidji is a member, had advocated a different plan which also cut market value credit and transit aids, which affect metro suburbs that don't receive LGA.

But apparently Ruud has banned the CGMC from her office, and Fuller is equally upset with the lobbying group.

"The Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities is not welcome in my office," said Ruud. "There are lobbyists I trust who bring me both sides of the issue. But I found the coalition not up front or honest. It's the city's choice to pay them, but it's my choice

not to deal with people who are not honest."

Fuller said he has good relations with city of Bemidji officials but that the coalition "burned several bridges last session."

Fuller accused the group of putting out "misinformation" and "lost a lot of credibility" last session. "I don't have to listen to them, but I will meet with the city and I have a great relationship with them."

Cities "took a big hit, including Bemidji," said Skoe, adding that his door is open to everyone. "The coalition had an alternative that it was aggressively promoting in which the pain would have been shared among municipalities more fairly."

Lindgren also said he had no problems with CGMC and that his door is also open with one exception, which he defined only as a "taxpayer" group.

Among other comments:

■ All agreed in proposals to improve impaired state waters, but were cool to proposals to levy a fee on households and businesses to pay for it.

■ "The highest income Minnesotans are paying a lesser percentage of their income to provide services and lower income Minnesotans have been paying a higher percentage," said Skoe. "This is not the direction we should be going."

■ Fuller defended the \$1,750 bonuses a House panel gave House staff members by saying the money came from health care savings from those employees and should go back to them. When Skoe pointed out that state employees, who settled for no pay increase, had their health benefit savings sent to the state general fund, Fuller said House employees were non union and didn't get step or longevity increases union state workers still got.

■ Asked about annexation, Fuller said the day will come when surrounding townships will need to consolidate with the city of Bemidji. "The city doesn't have room for growing its tax base, and people in the townships come to the city for shopping and services. At some point, when does Bemidji and Northern townships consolidate into the city? They have to talk as a community of where it wants to be in 20 years."

■ Asked about putting more low-income Minnesotans into the state's health insurance program, MinnesotaCare, Ruud said the time has come to cut back health care plans, that the state can't afford "Cadillac policies." Better, she said, that major medical savings accounts be allowed.

✉ bswenson@bemidjipioneer.com

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FRIDAY
JAN 16 2004

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LCMR to recommend city get \$400,000 for trail connection

BY MICHELLE RUCKDASCHEL
Pioneer Staff Writer

The Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) will recommend state legislators give \$400,000 to Bemidji next year for a Paul Bunyan State Trail connection within the city.

The money would come from a portion of lottery proceeds designated for the state's Envi-

ronmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The funds will be distributed to approved projects in July 2005.

The Bemidji project was one of 74 proposals that the LCMR will recommend for funding totaling more than \$37 million next year at state Legislature. The LCMR received 221 proposals requesting a total of more than \$240 million.

Submitted by City Manager David Minke, Bemidji's proposal requested \$5.2 million to acquire necessary property to connect and complete the Paul Bunyan State Trail within the city, including construction of trail improvements and a crossing at State Highway 197.

"Bemidji was fortunate to receive the \$400,000 although it is a small portion of the needs

for this project," Mayor Richard Lehmann said. "It's a start. It helps us keep the project on track."

Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, said that for Bemidji to get the \$400,000 recommendation is a huge success. Both he and Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, are LCMR members, as well as Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker.

"It still has to go through the

normal Legislative process," Fuller said.

Although there is always the chance state Legislature could make changes to the LCMR's recommendation next spring, Fuller said it has been good at honoring past recommendations by the commission.

Fuller said he, along with

► Trail / Page 3

Ruud and Howes, worked hard to get an LCMR hearing in St. Paul for the Bemidji bid.

Ruud agreed. "That was really important because they were up for bonding," she said.

The city requested \$5.2 million in bonding for a Paul Bunyan State Trail connection. While portions of the request bill this spring, state Legislature adjourned without approving the bill.

"We knew how important the project is to the whole area," Ruud said, referring to herself and the two other legislators.

In June, Lehmann traveled to St. Paul with Councilor Jerry Downs and City Engineer Brian Freeberg to testify at the hearing. The city officials presented the city's position on the state trail connection and the needs to complete such a trail.

"It's a state project that the city has invested a tremendous amount of resources and effort in," Lehmann said.

The mayor, along with Ruud and Fuller, agreed that securing the recommendation of LCMR is a competitive process.

"It was a tough competition this year," Fuller said.

He added that there were a lot of good projects seeking LCMR funds, ranging from energy projects to water projects.

"Money is scarce so any we can get is appreciated," Ruud added. "I think that we just have to keep working on it and finding as many funding sources as we can."

A Paul Bunyan Trail connection through Bemidji would bring in tourism dollars and a greater focus to the area, Ruud said. And, she added, completing the connection will encourage people to get outside and do more healthy activities.

In other trail news, the city closed on the purchase of an abandoned Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad corridor on June 28. The strip runs from Mississippi Avenue through a "Y" section at State Highway 197. City Finance Director Ron Eischens said the city paid about \$505,000 for the corridor.

The corridor will be renovated into a multi-purpose recreation trail for snowmobiling, bicycling, walking, running and inline skating, with portions becoming part of the Paul Bunyan State Trail. The "Y" section is needed to construct a trail crossing at the highway for the

state trail.

The state trail will span 110 miles between the Brainerd/Baxter area and Bemidji when completed, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. It is primarily located on a former Burlington Northern railroad grade.

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'We want bonding bill'

PIONEER
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House DFLers discuss legislative session

BY BRAD SWENSON
Pioneer Political Editor

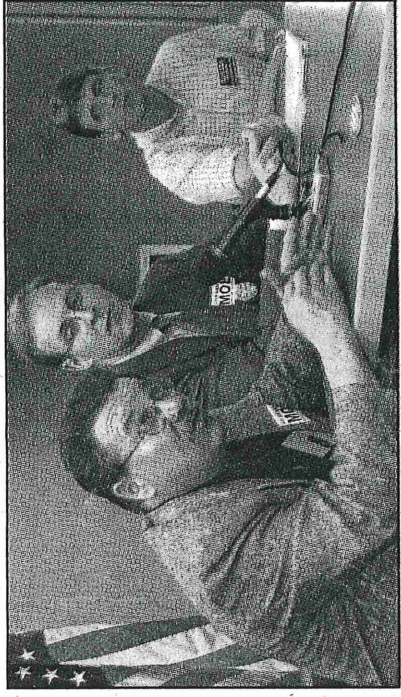
this bill would have created throughout the state — not the minimum-wage McJobs that we are seeing in the so-called recovery.”

Legislators need to agree on a state projects bill and to restore some state aid to rural cities in order to hold a special session, House DFLers said Thursday.

And the bonding bill should also spread projects throughout Minnesota, not just in the metro area, said House Minority Leader Matt Entenza, DFL-St. Paul.

“The bonding bill is about two things: updating our state colleges and other facilities, and creating good-paying jobs in a climate where we desperately need them,” Entenza said during a news conference at the Bemidji-Beltrami County Airport.

“When the Republicans chose to play games with this bill, they were playing with people’s lives,” he said of Senate Republican efforts which blocked passage of a bonding bill in that chamber. “Our families and communities need the kind of good-paying jobs



Pioneer Photo by Monte Draper
Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, answers a question about the recently ended legislative session during news conference Thursday at the Bemidji-Beltrami County Airport. Next to him are House Minority Leader Matt Entenza, DFL-St. Paul, and House 4A DFL candidate Frank Moe of Bemidji.

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► House DFL / From Page A1A

who accompanied Entenza. The Iron Ranger noted the roomful of DFL supporters which included a number of representatives from the building trades.

“We need some of those construction projects up here,” he said.

“We want the bonding bill — as long as it’s balanced for all parts of the state, and these projects for Bemidji are very important,” Entenza said. That’s why DFLers supported the House measure, even though it wasn’t as large as they wanted.

“There’s a recognition that we need to have a bonding bill,” he said. “We’ll have a cooling off period for the next couple of weeks, and then there will have to be some compromises. The test of leadership will be to see who is prepared to compromise.”

But the problem has been a Republican style of leadership that is “my way or the highway,” he said. “This time, the Democrats said we won’t give up. Republicans learned that the Democrats will hang tough, and we’ll have some hard negotiations.”

Other Bemidji projects included co-location of BSU and Northwest Technical College, Paul Bunyan Trail in the city and BSU maintenance work.

The BSU hockey arena “is one of the issues that is in play,” Entenza said. “We’re going to have to have some compromises, and some of the programs in the Twin Cities where the economy is doing much better are going to have to be cut. And then people in the region here will have to weigh in on those other issues.”

“The problem is that Sen. Ruud and the Senate Republicans killed the entire bonding bill,” Entenza said, referring to Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point. “Sen. Ruud voted against it. If Sen. Ruud and just one other Republican had voted for the bill, it would have at least gone to a conference committee and had some compromises.”

Rukavina said that if he were Sen. Ruud, with \$30 million of bonding for a city in his district, “I’d cut my left arm off just to use my right one to vote green. The fact that she couldn’t understand that ... just shows you there is no direction down there of how the process works.”

Both DFLers said that the special session should also include restoring some Local Government Aid to cities. Bemidji, in the biennium, is losing \$800,000 while suburban cities which don’t receive LGA didn’t

see cuts. And whatever aid was cut, will be restored, Entenza said.

The Legislature this session grappled with restoring \$60 million in LGA, but that was also left on the table when the session adjourned.

• While both Reps. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, and Doug Lindgren, R-Bagley, voted against the 2003 bill which cut LGA and both are co-authors of this year’s measure, Rukavina said Fuller and Lindgren are to blame for their original 2001 votes to reform the property tax system which allowed LGA to be cut.

Because of that, property taxes in the Bemidji area have gone up in double digits, 20 percent for some, Entenza said.

“That is the policy that we’ve seen from the Republican majority, of shifting responsibility to local government, leaving them in a position so that the only way to raise revenue is through property taxes,” he said.

“To watch Doug Fuller and Doug Lindgren voting for what seems to be Edina instead of Bemidji and their districts is disheartening for me,” Rukavina said. “I like a good fight and everybody knows that, but Fuller and Lindgren haven’t been fighting at all for you folks.”

He pointed to Frank Moe of Bemidji to replace Fuller this fall and to Brita Sailer of Park Rapids to replace Lindgren, with both candidates joining Entenza and Rukavina at the news conference.

The 2001 property tax reform bill put the state into structural deficit forever, Rukavina said, adding that Fuller supported that measure.

Fuller and Lindgren may say they voted against their Republican colleagues on the tax bill, Entenza said, “but they were silent — they didn’t stand up and defend this region. They and a few other Republicans were told it was OK to vote against it because they voted at the beginning of the legislative session to make sure that all those Republican committee chairs are in place who will support the suburbs at the expense of greater Minnesota.”

“Leadership is defined by those who stand up for their area, and Reps. Fuller and Lindgren were absent without leave,” Entenza said. “Right now, Fuller and Lindgren are the best representatives Edina’s ever had, because they’re part of the group that has made sure those suburbs get taken care of first.”

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DECEMBER 31, 2004

OUTDOOR NEWS

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DNR proposes Paul Bunyan truck trail

By Joe Albert
Staff Writer

Akeley, Minn. — A DNR plan to create a trail within Paul Bunyan State Park for four-wheel drive trucks has touched off a debate about the wisdom of the proposal.

Many residents around the state park are outraged the DNR would build a trail where trucks could test their driving skills over logs and boulders, said Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point.

"Christmas hasn't been real busy for emails, but that is just continual," said Ruud, who opposes making trails for four-wheel drive trucks on any state forest land.

The DNR is considering building an eight-mile trail that four-wheel drive vehicles would be able to use. About two or three miles of that would be a "technical trail" with tight turns, a small hill and assorted rocks and boulders, said Mark Carlstrom, DNR area forestry supervisor in Park Rapids.

The proposed trail would be an opportunity for truck drivers to take a slow, scenic ride through the woods while going over natural obstacles. The trail is different than "challenge areas, mud holes, and scramble

areas," which in the past have been shown to cause rutting and erosion, said Brad Moore, DNR assistant commissioner.

The DNR built a "challenge area" in Foothills State Forest, which was closed this year after extensive erosion and rutting.

In 2002, the DNR said challenge areas were not appropriate uses of state forests. Its current plan for a trail in Paul Bunyan doesn't constitute a shift in policy, Moore said.

"They are mistaking it for a challenge area," Moore said.

The challenge areas are available at other places, like a park at an old mine near Gilbert. Challenge area or not, Ruud said the truck trail plan isn't good for the environment.

"I think it's just irresponsible to go down that road," she said.

Truck enthusiasts aren't looking for a challenge area in Paul Bunyan, said Scott Reiling, president of the Minnesota Four Wheel Drive Association.

But they do want a place where other cars wouldn't be able to go.

"They should be able to come up with a trail that's not a road,

but at the same time not a challenge area," Reiling said.

"We are looking for the nature experience, the drive through the woods."

The proposed truck trail is based on existing trails. Some logs and rocks that previously had been cleared from the trail will be pushed back on, Carlstrom said.

The land in the area is flat, for the most part, Carlstrom said. There is one area with a small hill that's about 100 feet long.

The trail isn't a threat to the environment, Moore said.

"Whether you are using a truck, motorcycle, or ATV, how you use the vehicle is really going to say a lot about whether you do damage or not," Moore said.

If the trail opens and there is damage from trucks, it will be closed, Moore said. "The trucks folks know that."

The DNR is currently collecting public comments on the proposal.

There will be an open house on Wednesday, Jan. 12 at the Park Rapids Area High School.

City Council, legislators discuss area needs

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City hopes for 2005 session mirror this year's requests

BY MOLLY MIRON
Pioneer Editor

The issues the Bemidji City Council wants the state Legislature to move on in the coming session are about the same as those in the last couple of years.

The half-cent city sales tax for parks and trails improvement, funding the completion of the Paul Bunyan State Trail through the city, maintaining Local Government Aid and growth management were the major topics under discussion during a Friday lunch meeting with the City Council and Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and Representative-elect Frank Moe, DFL-Bemidji.

Mayor Richard Lehmann and Councilors Ron Johnson, Nancy Erickson, Roger Hellquist, Barbara Meuers and Jerry Downs, as well as Councilor-elect Onen Markeson, took part in the discussion.

Ruud said the city sales tax for Bemidji passed in the Minnesota Senate, but Rep. Ron Abrams, R-Minnetonka, Tax Committee chairman, denied the issue a hearing in the Minnesota House. Bemidji voters approved the sales tax in 2002.

"We went through all of the channels up to the legislative process. ... It just got stalemated at that point," said Lehmann. "That's the frustrating part."

"This is a regional town and tourism and it's only fair that those who use it (parks and trail) pay for it," said Downs. "It's good for the big picture to do this."

Moe agreed. "Parks and recreation is fundamental to everything here," he said.

Ruud said the new House Tax Committee chairman will be Rep. Phil Krinkie, R-Shoreview.

"I can't tell you he'll be any more or less favorable," Ruud said. "Committee chairs have tremendous power. They decide whether bills get heard or don't get heard."

However, she questioned why cities should go to the expense and effort of holding a referendum if they can't get a hearing in the Legislature.

"If the citizens vote and they want to do it to themselves for themselves" the Legislature



Pioneer Photo by Monte Draper

Representative-elect Frank Moe, DFL-Bemidji, and Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, (not pictured) meet with Bemidji City Council members on Friday afternoon. This was a direct opportunity for the city councilors to voice concerns and hopes for the 2005 Legislature.

should honor their wishes, Ruud said.

She urged the City Council to emphasize the point that the tax, which is set to raise \$9.8 million, would sunset when it reaches that goal, in about five years.

On the question of LGA, Ruud said she would absolutely fight to maintain the contributions to rural cities. However, looking at a \$1.4 billion shortfall means some things will have to be cut. The services she said she sees as essential include school and transportation funding, LGA and the bonding bill.

The bonding bill should finish the Paul Bunyan State Trail through the city and fund the Bemidji State University Bridgeman Hall and Northwest Technical College-Bemidji construction projects, Moe and Ruud said. However, they have doubts about a hockey arena.

"I don't see it happening at all," Ruud said of the proposed \$18 million project.

Lehmann said he is so frustrated about the lack of progress on the trail, which would connect Brainerd and International Falls, but which dead ends at Bemidji, that he is tempted to finish it with city funds and charge a toll for use.

"It's a state trail. It will have wide impact," he said.

"It's less than a mile," Erickson said of the gap.

Downs, who is the councilor on the Paul Bunyan Trail Committee, said he is confident Ruud and Moe will make the trail completion happen in the upcoming session.

Moe said many of the issues

that affect rural Minnesota are more geographical than partisan.

"We make our case stronger if we work across party lines," he said. "We'll see if we can make that go. Partisanship is not what the voters want."

City Manager David Minke cited the recent agreement between the city and adjacent townships, Bemidji and North-

ern, on expanding city limits and providing services over an orderly period of years. He said he would welcome legislation to address growth management and encourage compromises between competing interests.

Moe said, "Let's hope the example you set can be a precedent for cities and townships around the region."

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Gas tax part of road plan

Minnesota counties ready to propose transportation package

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

A \$1 billion yearly transportation proposal supported by Minnesota counties calls for a 10-cent a gallon gasoline tax boost.

The proposal, to be unveiled Monday, would also index the state's gas tax in succeeding years to inflation, and would allow the metro area to impose a half-cent sales tax for transportation and transit programs.

The plan has the support of Beltrami County commissioners, who presented it Friday to local legislators, with the provision that the current formula to distribute gas tax revenues remain as it is.

"We're not excited about changing the formula, but if so, that it be changed only with the new funding coming in," Beltrami County Board Chairman Ron Otterstad said.

The transportation funding package will be outlined in a 10:30 a.m. Monday State Capitol news conference by the Association of Minnesota Counties, which approved the plan at its convention last week.

The biggest fear has been a metro push to change the constitutionally dedicated gas tax formula to give more money to that

► Transportation / Page A14 C

area — something which rural counties oppose.

Otterstad said a compromise would allow a formula change with new monies — if the tax is increased — to the account while keeping it as it is for what is currently levied. The state's gas tax has remained unchanged since 1988.

A provision for a half-cent sales tax in the metro area would allow that area to raise more revenues for roads and transits that would not affect rural road funding, Otterstad said.

"We have a very good formula now," Sen. Rod Skoe, DFL-Clearbrook, told Beltrami commissioners. "But I can't see politically how to get more money into it. I will support a gas tax increase as a way for new money, but not also a sales tax."

Skoe said he fears that if a large area, such as the metro, raises its own tax to take care of its transportation problems, "then the rest will never get money."

Another problem, Skoe said, is that Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who steadfastly has refused to raise taxes, would most likely veto a gas tax hike.

The AMC proposal would raise \$1 billion a year for transportation with a 5-cent gas tax hike the first year of the biennium and another 5-cent hike the second year. The tax would be indexed to inflation starting the third year.

In addition to the metro sales tax, non-metro counties could also voluntarily adopt local option half-cent sales taxes dedicated to transportation. A combination of a local county option wheelage fee and registration fee would increase, and a renewed commitment made to the state bridge-bonding program, in addition to new state bonding for roads.

The primary component of the AMC plan is to provide a dedicated funding stream for local transit services by proposing legislation which would grant local transit districts the authority to use local sales taxes to support transit and transportation projects.

"The metro area is facing rapidly increasing congestion," Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin says in remarks prepared for Monday's event. "Citizens want and need a menu of transportation alternatives, especially in light of

the success of the Hiawatha Light Rail system. By granting the authority for local governments to use sales tax revenues, local officials can craft transit solutions that best meet the needs of their communities."

Beltrami County's support is for the full package. "Should changes be made to the transportation package that are unfavorable to rural counties, then the County Board position will be that the existing County State Aid Highway formula must remain unchanged," according to a board policy statement.

"We will walk away from the table if the formula changes for the existing money," Otterstad said. "The sales tax won't pass without rural support, and the rural area wants structural change to transportation funding."

Still, Skoe lauded the counties for coming up with a plan that apparently all counties can support. The failure to rally around a plan has transferred to the Legislature, which equally has failed to find a transportation funding agreement.

"I am glad to hear counties are working together," Skoe said. "This will move the discussion forward."

County agenda

Commissioners also met with Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and Reps.-elect Frank Moe, DFL-Bemidji, and Brita Sailer, DFL-Park Rapids, to present the county's legislative agenda.

The agenda includes ensuring that a formula for county aid and \$95 million in new aid remains intact, that the state seek a statewide smoke-free ordinance, policy be passed to help small seasonal resorts stay intact and in business, to support Bemidji State University bonding projects, state participation in preparing for the 2006 opening of walleye fishing on Upper Red Lake, helping curb methamphetamine abuse in rural Minnesota, and help increase the availability of affordable housing.

The lawmakers said many funding decisions will depend upon how the next biennium budget is crafted, with a shortfall of \$700 million to \$1.4 billion at the outset.

"With that kind of a shortfall, we will have to be vigilant," Moe said. "We can't assume anything is off the table, but we

will have to fight to the end of the session."

Commissioner Jim Heltzer noted that the county lost \$2 million as part of the last budget-solving crisis, mostly in human services funding.

"If we suffer another loss, we'll be up the creek without a paddle," Heltzer said. "We cut things like WIC (Women, Infants, Children nutrition program) and children's health services, so we absorbed what we could."

Heltzer suggested that lawmakers form a rural caucus, but Ruud cautioned against such a maneuver as that could create an even more powerful suburban caucus in opposition.

"I would hate to put up barriers if each is in its own structure," she said. "Rural legislators already work together quite well."

But Moe said that in the House, where the DFL made great strides in the Nov. 2 election to narrow the Republican edge to 68-66, freshmen members of both parties are talking about forming a rural coalition.

"Differences are more issue oriented than geographic," argued Ruud.

Gaming plans

Asked about gaming issues, Skoe said that while he has not supported a state venture into gaming, he predicted the Legislature will spend much time on the issue.

"If so, I hope we can get a percentage of casino revenues going to the counties that host casinos for their human services costs," he said.

Pawlenty has pitched that the state receive about a quarter of American Indian gaming profits in exchange for exclusivity, while another proposal would have the state share in a Twin Cities-area casino with the Red Lake, White Earth and Leech Lake bands of Chippewa.

"None of us are advocating that revenues from White Earth, Red Lake or Leech Lake be used for the state budget," Moe said when asked if the governor's proposal for taking a share of revenue would include those tribal operations. "We will dig in our heels on that."

A state casino with the three poorest tribes would increase the pot of money for all entities, Skoe said. "We are trying to increase revenues for everybody, not take money away."

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Polar Plunge will be held Valentine's Day

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Community leaders support Walker Area Community Center

Individuals and teams from near and far will jump or slowly slide into the frigid waters of Leech Lake Feb. 14 to raise funds to build the Walker Area Community Center.

The event will take place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the beach in city park. Each participant will raise pledges, and prizes will be awarded according to the amount raised. Prizes will also be awarded for the best individual and team costumes, most money raised by an individual and team, and a prize for the oldest "plunger."

Local celebrity Ken Bresley will emcee the event. Additional hosts will be Minnesota State Rep. Larry Howes and Sen. Carrie Ruud. Paul Bunyan Broadcasting's Kev Jackson will issue a challenge and will jump in if his monetary goal is met. Tune in to Paul Bunyan Broadcasting stations for details.

After the jump, "plungers" will head for a hot tub and heated tents where there will be warm refreshments. Those too chicken to jump are invited to join in the fun and make a pledge to a braver soul.

The Polar Plunge is part of the annual Eelpout Festival, this year held Feb. 13, 14 and 15. Many people have already committed to take the plunge, including an all-female team from the local Rotary Club, the local youth hockey teams and a



Polar plungers and beach bums will be at the Walker City Beach Eelpout weekend (Feb. 14) from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. to take part in the Polar Plunge. The plunge is a fund-raiser for the Walker Area Community Center. Registrations forms are available at area merchants. Photo submitted

family team from grandpa on down. A minimum pledge of \$20 is required. Registration forms are available from area merchants or by calling (218) 547-1853.

The Walker Area Ambulance Service will be on hand to ensure safety. The WHA High School Wrestling Club will sell refreshments to participants and specta-

tors. Northern Lights Hotel and Casino is sponsoring the event. All preparations and equipment is being donated by Thompson's Rent-All. All this means that 100 percent of money raised will go toward the Walker Area Community Center.

The Walker/Leech Lake area has been targeted as one of five areas in

the state for a high number of youth at risk. In response to this and other community needs, leaders from the Walker area developed a plan to build a community center.

WACC will provide a safe and supportive environment for healthy

Polar Plunge Continued on page 7A

Polar Plunge

Continued from page 1A

activities for all community residents. The attractive 53,000 square foot, year-round facility will house a youth center, a fitness center, gymnasium with an elevated walking track, community meeting rooms, a catering kitchen and an arena that will house an ice rink five months and can be used the rest of the year for trade shows and other large events.

Fund-raising efforts for the WACC began a year ago, with a goal of raising \$3.4 million for center construction and first year operating expenses. Currently the goal is to reach the \$2.2 million mark by

May 1, which will activate a \$400,000 grant from the Blandin Foundation.

The Walker area business community and residents have diligently worked and raised all but \$600,000 to meet the challenge.

"So many people, young and old, have worked so hard and come so far. I am very proud of what our small community has done," said Ben Brovold, WACC Board President. "Now, with just a little more help, we will realize our vision of building a strong future for our community."

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AP Photo/Brainerd Daily Dispatch, Nels Norquist

Linda Walker, left, mother of missing college student Dru Sjodin, and Patty Wetterling, mother of Jacob Wetterling who was abducted in 1989, attended a town hall meeting about sexual offender laws in Pequot Lakes, Minn., Saturday.

Officials face residents of Dru Sjodin's hometown

PEQUOT LAKES, Minn. (AP) — Residents in Dru Sjodin's hometown told the state's top prison official on Saturday that they're angry more isn't being done to lock up convicted sex offenders like the one accused of kidnapping Sjodin.

At a town hall meeting at Pequot Lakes High School, residents told Corrections Commissioner Joan Fabian they were frustrated that sex offenders like Alfonso Rodriguez Jr. — the Crookston man charged with kidnapping Sjodin — are released back into society.

"Why can't these people be taken off the streets and put on a farm someplace where they can be productive to society?" asked Shirley Langland. "Doing farm work so they can't be out in the public again."

Fabian, other corrections officials and state lawmakers discussed sex offender laws

and proposals by Gov. Tim Pawlenty. Pawlenty advocates changes in the civil commitment process, arresting and convicting more sexual offenders and longer sentences for sex crimes, among other changes.

Rodriguez was released from prison in May instead of being committed indefinitely to a treatment center. He has said he was not involved in Sjodin's disappearance.

Fabian said the Corrections Department can recommend civil commitment for sex offenders deemed to be at a high risk to reoffend, but it is up to county attorneys and the attorney general to pursue a civil commitment in court. She said she agreed with Pawlenty's proposals, in particular that the civil commitment process needs to be reformed.

Police Chief Mark Forsberg

said he, his officers and the public are fed up.

"I'm a father, a husband and a brother," he said. "What about the victims? I support, for the worst of the worst, the death penalty." Several audience members cheered and clapped when Forsberg stepped away from the microphone.

Several lawmakers at the meeting said they supported the death penalty, including Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker; Sen. Dave Kleis, R-St. Cloud; Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point; Sen. Betsy Wergin, R-Princeton; Rep. Dale Walz, R-Brainerd; and Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji.

Linda and Sidney Walker of Pequot Lakes, Sjodin's mother and stepfather, attended the meeting, as did Patty Wetterling, the mother of Jacob Wetterling, the 11-year-old St. Joseph boy who was abducted in 1989.

Committees fail to OK riot penalty bill

Hottinger doesn't think bill was right solution

By Mathias Baden
Free Press Staff Writer

ST. PAUL — Authors of a bill to impose financial penalties on student rioters say they need a DFL co-author in the Senate, but there are no takers.

"This bill won't go anywhere," said **Sen. Carrie Ruud**, R-Breezy Point.

She is sponsoring the Senate version of Rep. Carla Nelson's proposal to make college students convicted of felonies or gross misdemeanors related to riotous behavior ineligible for state money for one year.

They would instead pay the highest applicable tuition rates if they went to a public university. Schools, which receive

state money based on population totals, wouldn't be allowed to count convicted rioters.

The House passed a version of the bill with Rep. John Dorn, DFL-Mankato as a co-author.

But so far, Sen. John Hottinger, who represents the university area, isn't signing on.

"I don't think what the House did is the right solution," said Hottinger, DFL-St. Peter. "Local governments make better decisions on these sorts of things."

Ruud hasn't asked Hottinger

for help with the bill.

And, without an outspoken Democrat supporting the proposal, it hasn't received a hearing. Hottinger said it's only chance to pass in the Senate would have been during a Monday meeting of the Senate Finance Committee, but amendments including the higher education package passed without anyone talking about anti-riot legislation.

"They're not hearing any Republican-authored bills," said House author Rep. Carla

Nelson, R-Rochester.

Hottinger said he isn't sure if the bill is realistic and enforceable, but he admitted it is unlikely for legislators to vote against anti-riot legislation if it gets a hearing on the Senate floor.

He has questions about what acts would qualify for additional penalties, the definitions of "riot" and "student," how to deal with on- and off-campus incidents and whether the

▶ Please see RIOT, Page B3

RIOT: Bill passed House last week

Continued from Page B1

penalties should be applied at all.

Because the bill passed last week in the House, the issue could come up during a conference committee gathering, at which leaders of the House and Senate meet with the governor to negotiate compromises — sometimes they make them, sometimes they don't — between each caucus' recommendations.

Mankato City Manager Pat Hentges, somewhat involved in Mankato's anti-riot fight, said he's "indifferent" about the bill.

But he added that a stricter penalty for rioting might deter

students from staging a potential copycat event for which Mankato officials are preparing.

"I can't say that's going to be a full deterrent, but a student is going to have to think twice," Hentges said. "For some people, the criminal charges are enough."

Hentges said opponents of the bill see it as unfair for students, who would be penalized more severely than nonstudents who are convicted of like crimes. Proponents argued that property owners have rights to live in a safe place, to enjoy their things and to be free from fear.

Certainly, Hentges said, not all of the rioters near the

Minnesota State University campus on homecoming day were students at a public college.

Rioters impeded on the rights of not just oversensitive citizens who call the police about minute infractions but MSU's usually tolerant neighbors.

Mankato Public Safety recently formed an on-foot patrol to police the off-campus area near MSU and increased the number of officers on the hilltop during potentially "volatile times," Hentges said. The city responds to university security's concerns and takes an aggressive, intolerant stance on loud parties, he added.

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NTC future bright

1,000 students in three years, plans more programs

BY BRAD SWENSON
Pioneer Political Editor

Northwest Technical College plans to add at least three new programs a year, and foresees 1,000 students in three years.

"We'd like to try adding three programs a year, which is almost impossible," NTC Provost Vern Treat said Thursday. "But we're so committed to it because we feel there is a great need here."

Formally part of a five technical college system, the Bemidji campus now stands on its own, under Bemidji State University President Jon Quistgaard.

The two institutions are sharing programs more and more, and the two hope for \$10 million in bonding funds from the Legislature this session, Treat said in a briefing Thursday to members of the Bemidji Area Intergovernmental Relations Committee.

"As five colleges, it was hard to move through the maze," he said, "but now as one college, being alone is a strength and we can make quick decisions."

Especially in working with BSU, curriculum changes can come quickly so students in both institutions can share, plus their courses can articulate between each other, he said.

For example, NTC plans to add a construction

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► NTC future / From Page A1 D

management plan next fall to complement a similar program at BSU, Treat said.

"Our program would give practical experience working on sites," Treat said, something that employers want. "This way, students get both the theory from the university and practical from us. That really strengthens education."

As part of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities bonding request, BSU and NTC are asking for \$10 million, of which \$3 million is for a 11,150-square-foot addition to the tech college for an allied health program serving both campuses.

Ranked 19th by MnSCU and not a part of Gov. Tim Pawlenty's bonding requests, the BSU/NTC request is being carried by Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, and Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point.

Originally part of a \$20 million plan to co-locate BSU and NTC, Treat said MnSCU now wants to keep the tech college at its Nymore location, since the building is in good shape and there is 17 acres available for expansion.

"We are closely aligned with the university," he said.

The new tech addition will also allow both institutions to share health-related programs, he said. "Health is huge for this region. Only 1 1/2 years ago, we were serving 120 nursing students. Now we have 240, doubling that need. And apparently they're all getting jobs, which

knocks my socks off."

BSU's part of the bonding request, \$7 million, is to renovate Bridgeman Hall for advanced and emerging laboratory and classroom space. NTC plans to start two programs next fall which eventually will move into the new quarters — model making in addition to construction management.

Meanwhile, while the outside walls of NTC remain the same, internal changes are constant to increase student capacity, Treat said.

"Twenty-five years ago, we taught at a 10 students to one teacher ratio," he said. "Now, if you have smaller numbers of students, you get a smaller amount of money, so we need larger classes."

But while expanding classrooms and adding new programs, quality will not be sacrificed, Treat said. "The quality piece fits in every day. It will be in every piece that we do, or these programs won't survive."

Started this year were programs for massage therapy construction electricity and carpentry assisting. Planned next fall are model building, construction management, a heating and ventilation system program and a jailer/dispatcher program which Treat said has never been offered before in the state.

Proposed programs include building inspector, cyber security/crime, manufacturing engineering technology which would be offered with BSU,

health services administration, para educator, and about 30 other potential programs.

NTC also plans to offer distance learning through online computer courses, such as in nursing, Treat said. "Distance programs are a huge part of our future, as we must always consider the edge of where we can go. Right now we have the only nursing program on line."

Enrollment last year was 600 students, he said, and this year it's 750. "We're not going to stop there. Two falls from now we hope to be where we should have long been, at 1,000 students. Then we have the challenge of new equipment and paying new faculty. But we're planning for that."

Treat, who plans to retire July 6, says that he intends to continue working with NTC to develop programs on the three area American Indian reservations.

"We have had a collaborative effort for two years, and are exploring what we can do together," he said. "They do have strengths and all are very committed to education and training for their people. We need to teach in non-traditional ways."

An application deadline for provost ends March 1. "New leadership will be a great thing here," Treat said. "There will be new ideas and thinking out of the box, but while still having to be in the box."

✉ bswenson@bemidjipioneer.com

► NTC future / Page A6 D



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Capitol notes

Seasons change but politics goes on at the state Capitol

With the arrival of spring this weekend we turn our attention to the Minnesota Legislature, which continues to plod along in its work just as massive snowbanks of December slowly but surely yield to brown, fertile soil.

Following is a collection of notes, tidbits and items heard Friday as a Brainerd Lakes Area Chambers of Commerce leadership group listened to state leaders and area legislators in St. Paul.

- Gov. Tim Pawlenty carefully chose his words and acted as if he was walking on egg shells when he discussed his plan to fund separate Twins and Viking stadiums. He said his bill would use no general fund revenue that wouldn't be there without the stadium development. Pro sports are a cornerstone of Minnesota's quality of life, he said and help attract talent to the state.

- The governor has a sales job ahead of him among members of his own party on the stadium issue. Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker, said outstate residents are not clamoring for tax dollars to be spent on pro sports stadiums. He offered the the following assessment of Pawlenty's stadium plan: "The stadium bill is ridiculous."

- House Minority Leader Matt Entenza sounded like the popular perception of Republicans when he told members of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce that the economic road ahead was still fairly perilous. He identified among his top priorities: higher education, transportation and health care reform. "We have to continue to pare back the size of state government," he told the business audience.

- Bill Blazar of the Minnesota Chamber highlighted some key numbers that need crunching this legislative session. There is a \$160 million is the gap between revenues and expenditures that must be fixed this session. There is a \$440 million gap that's

expected in the 2005-2007 biennium. Those numbers grow considerably when you adjust them for inflation. In other words, we're not out of the "fiscal crisis" woods yet.

- The House and Senate are on a collision course when it comes to closing the budget shortfall. The House will push for the Racino plan (expansion of gambling to include more card games and slots at Canterbury Downs) while Democrats will oppose it. It's clear Pawlenty wants the Indians to voluntarily renegotiate the gaming compacts so the state will receive some revenue. The hammer hanging over the Indians' head is the possibility of competition for their casinos. All Pawlenty will say at this point is that if the tribes are not open to renegotiating the gaming compacts, which have no termination date, then other options might have to be pursued.

- The transit strike in the Twin Cities may drag on for awhile, Gov. Tim Pawlenty said. Some of the retirement benefits granted to workers in the past were "irresponsible" and changes have to be made, he said at the Minnesota Chamber luncheon.

- Sen. Paul Koering's measure to increase penalties for the improper videotaping of individuals was rolled into the omnibus crime bill.

- The spread of methamphetamines and meth labs is a problem that's starting to clog our court systems. "It's just an incredible problem," Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said. "We're going to lose a generation of kids if we don't do something."

- Some lawmakers and are skeptical of Pawlenty's plan to have the Minnesota Gang Strike Force folded into the Minnesota Drug Task Forces, a network of regional anti-drug units. The fear is that fight against methamphetamines will suck up all the money and leave little for the anti-gang effort.

- Because the Paul Bunyan Trail request for a pedestrian bridge near Bemidji involves land acquisition money and is considerably more expensive than the \$1.5 million trail pedestrian bridge being requested for Excelsior Road in Baxter, the Bemidji area might have to settle for an on-call stop light.

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12-19-04 Republicans attack ad criticizing Pawlenty's sex offender policies

Some say DFLers are capitalizing on tragedy

By Kirsti Marohn
kmarohn@stcloudtimes.com

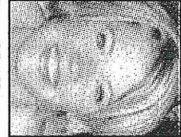
ST. PAUL — Senate Republicans fired back Wednesday after the DFL Party launched a TV com-



Tim Pawlenty



Dave Kleis



Dru Sjodin

mmercial accusing Gov. Tim Pawlenty of botching the

an "outrage" and accused DFLers of using the disap-

pearance of Dru Sjodin for political purposes. They said DFL legislators have voted against bills in the past that would have lengthened prison sentences for sex offenders and possibly prevented the Sjodin tragedy.

"Shame on you," said Sen. Carrie Rund, R-Breezy Point. "You are using Dru Sjodin, this lovely woman, as a pawn in your partisan politics." Rund's district includes Sjodin's hometown

of Pequot Lakes. A group of DFL lawmakers said they asked the party to develop the ad because they thought Pawlenty has diverted public attention

See AD, 5B



Bill offers tough penalties for sex offenders/5B

who decide whether to pursue commitment. The Legislature is debating changes to the commitment process and open-ended sentences for sex offenders.

Republicans said DFL legislators voted against bills in the past that would have lengthened prison sentences for violent sex offenders. Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, said those bills didn't include a way to pay for additional costs.

"It's easy to talk about a new prison," said Johnson, DFL-Willmar. "What about paying for the beds and staff in the year 2006 or 2008?"

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

From Page 1B
Ad

from the issue with his call for the death penalty.

The ad campaign, which began airing Tuesday in the Twin Cities, is unusual in that Pawlenty won't face re-election for more than 2 1/2 years.

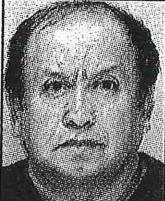
Some have speculated DFLers hope to tarnish his popularity to help state House candidates this fall.

In the commercial, a camera closes in on Pawlenty's eyes as a narrator says, "These eyes just watched as administrative bungling and the wrong budget priorities let rapists and sexual predators back on our streets."

Kleis noted the DFL Party's Web site asks for donations to keep the ad on the air.

"We tried to change public policy and they prevented those things from happening," he said. "Now, they're trying to capitalize on a tragedy."

The commercial doesn't specifically mention Sjodin, 22, who disappeared last November from a shopping mall parking lot in Grand Forks, N.D. Convicted rapist Alfonso Rodriguez Jr. has been charged with her abduction, although he denies any involvement.



Alfonso Rodriguez Jr.
Charged with Sjodin abduction

Rodriguez was designated a Level 3 sex offender, the category considered most likely to reoffend, when he was released from prison in May. He was eligible to be civilly committed, but the state didn't pursue it.

The DFL legislators are concerned about Pawlenty's cuts last year to sex offender programs, party spokesman Bill Amberg said.

"This is the No. 1 public safety issue confronting Minnesota families right now," he said.

Pawlenty has acknowledged flaws in the civil commitment process. The Department of Corrections now refers all cases of Level 3 sex offenders scheduled for release to county attorneys,

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At the Capitol
Kirsti Marohn
Times staff writer

Hotdish bill clears House

House and Senate committees got down to serious business last week after setting deadlines. Bills must pass out of committees by those dates to be considered this year by the full Legislature.

Committees debated bills on a range of topics, from sentencing sex offenders to raising the minimum wage.

One of the more unusual bills introduced this year has passed one body of the Legislature. The House approved Rep. Al Juhnke's bill allowing home canners to sell canned pickles or other fruits or vegetables at farmers markets or roadside stands.

The bill exempts small-scale pickle-packers from state food-inspection requirements, although they would have to label jars with their names, addresses and the date the food was preserved. The law would apply to those who sell less than \$5,000 worth of canned goods a year.

The House passed the measure as part of a larger bill containing a host of food-inspection changes.

The bill goes to the Senate.

Juhnke, DFL-Willmar, was the author of a similar bill three years ago exempting homemade foods brought to community social events. In a press release touting his bill's passage, Juhnke said his "hotdish bill" caused no ill effects on Minnesotans — except some weight gain.

Dancing is not a regular feature of the Minnesota Senate. But four female freshman Republicans thought lapel pins of four dancing girls were a good way to symbolize their camaraderie and common purpose.

The four — Betsy Wergin of Princeton, Julianne Ortman of Chanhassen, Julie Rosen of Fairmont and Carrie Ruud of Breezy Point — were elected in 2002 and are finishing the second year of their first terms in office.

The senators share a special connection, Wergin said. Along with nine freshman men, the newcomers learned the ropes together.

"We all had to know where the bathroom was, and it's a little embarrassing to ask," she said.

Wergin said, however, she doesn't believe the women face more difficult challenges than the men.

"I think you earn your respect regardless of your gender, and I've always been willing to earn respect," she said.

Shortly before the House voted last week on a resolution honoring St. John's University football coach John Gagliardi, Speaker Steve Sviggum questioned whether legislators who graduated from other private colleges had to join in.

"Rep. Stang, do Royals and Tommies and Gusties and Cobbers and Oles have to vote on this resolution or not?" Sviggum asked Rep. Doug Stang of Cold Spring, the resolution's author.

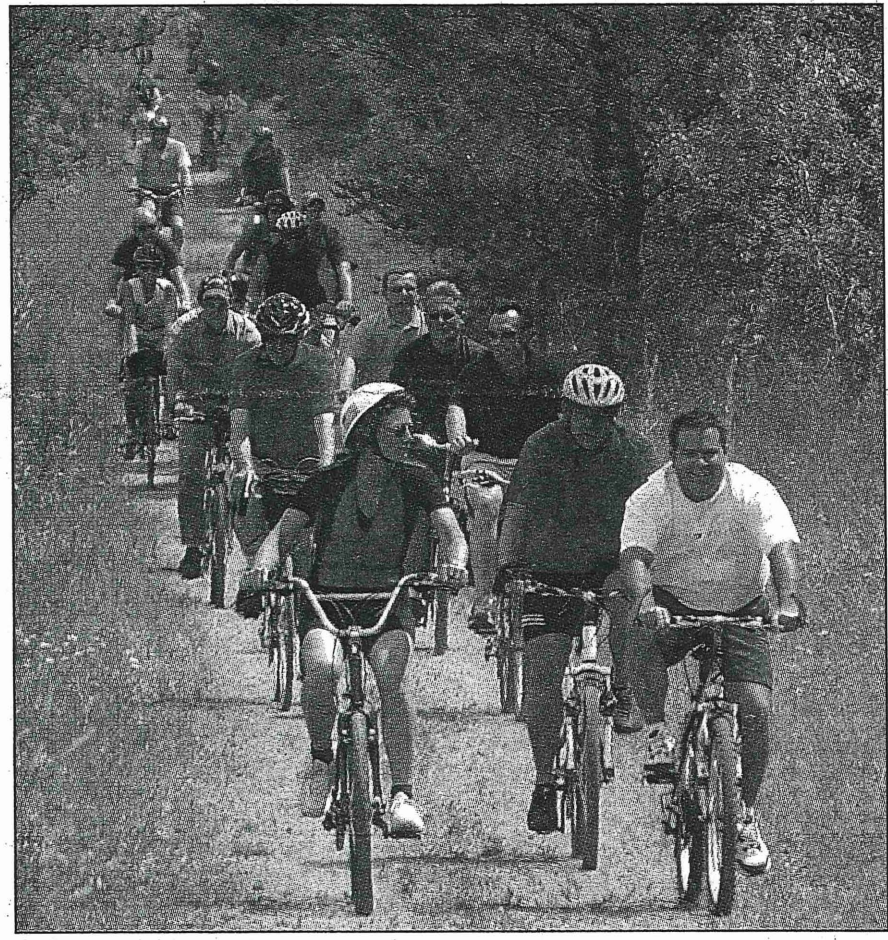
Stang, a St. John's University alumnus, said he doubted whether graduates of the other schools would know which button to push.

"Mr. Speaker, we may have to explain to those folks what a red vote means and what a green vote means," Stang said.

Contact reporter Kirsti Marohn at the Times Capitol bureau, (651) 224-4937 or by e-mail at kmarohn@stcloudtimes.com.

1200DU

► Trail ride / From Page A1 B



Pioneer Photo by Monte Draper

Near Bemidji Industrial Park on Tuesday afternoon, Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, lead a pack of more than 20 bicyclists over State Highway 197 on the Paul Bunyan State Trail.

Government officials, public gets close up look at Paul Bunyan Trail needs, potential

BY MICHELLE RUCKDASCHEL
Pioneer Staff Writer

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, who joined the trip.

Geared with bicycles and bottled water, more than 20 government officials and others set out Tuesday afternoon to see firsthand what a connection of the Paul Bunyan State Trail through Bemidji would mean. "Today we learned some of the priorities of the trail," said

Starting at the Pioneer, the bicyclists rode over State Highway 197 on the state trail to the highway's intersection with First Street. They continued east through the former Georgia-Pacific site, where there is no trail, and met up with the trail again near Lincoln Elementary.

The bicyclists took the state trail to Lake Bemidji State Park and to the Rocky Point Vista before heading to the Hampton Inn for refreshments.

Jerry Downs, who sits on the Bemidji City Council, said Ruud contacted him a few weeks ago to see if he would show her the trail and proposed trail links.

► Trail ride / Page A6 B

That was when he called for others to join them on bicycles for an afternoon ride.

The trail ride's purpose, Downs said, was to emphasize the community need for a completed state trail system through Bemidji.

Forrest Boe, regional trails and waterways manager for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in Bemidji, rode his bicycle Tuesday afternoon to show his support for efforts to connect the trail system.

"We were able to show people the needed link, the missing link," Boe said.

He said, in Bemidji, the existing state trail runs from Rako Street to a "Y" section near State Highway 197 and picks up again near Lincoln Elementary.

And exploring the developed parts of the state trail along with the sites proposed for connecting the trail helped to give the bicyclists better perspective.

"I think from a bicycle seat, it's easier to see how the proposed trail connection fits in with the existing trail system," City Manger David Minke said.

Ruud agreed.

"We looked at many of the pieces to the puzzle that need to be solved to really make this trail go," said Ruud, adding that she and the other bicyclists rode on rough terrain at times.

"It's the biggest state trail connection that isn't completed in the state of Minnesota," Rep.

Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, said. "And probably the most expensive to complete."

He said the connection would be expensive because the city still needs to acquire land to link the state trail as well as eventually build a permanent trail crossing at State Highway 197 and First Street.

Ruud said the crossing is important to the trail.

"We don't want to get to a point where someone is hurt or killed before we pay attention," she said. "We need to pay attention and get it solved now."

Rep. Doug Lindgren, R-Bagley, said purchasing the land for the trail now would be less expensive than in the future.

He added that a completed trail between Brainerd and Bemidji may spark new recreational events and races, bringing more people to the city.

Larry Young, the executive director of the Joint Economic Development Commission, said he thinks a connected trail would improve the quality of place in Bemidji. And this, he added, is important to the city's economic development.

"Bemidji would be one of the terminal points of the trail," Young said.

As a terminal point, the city would draw in new residents and more tourists, he said. Besides bringing more money into the community, Young said a completed state trail would provide recreation and promote

healthy lifestyles.

Downs agreed such a trail would draw in many outdoor enthusiasts to Bemidji.

"But first, we need to get it connected," he said.

Overall, the DNR is responsible for the Paul Bunyan State Trail. But, Boe said, the DNR relies on local people to help secure funding.

"It's a real cooperative effort," he said.

In June, the city purchased an abandoned Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad corridor that runs from Mississippi Avenue through the "Y" at State Highway 197. The "Y" is needed to construct a trail crossing at the highway for the state trail.

However, the city continues to seek funds to acquire necessary property to connect and complete the state trail within the city, including construction of trail improvements and the highway crossing.

Next year, the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources will recommend state legislators give \$400,000 to Bemidji next year for a state trail connection within the city. Bemidji requested \$5.2 million.

When completed, the state trail will span 110 miles between the Brainerd/Baxter area and Bemidji, according to the DNR. The existing trail is primarily located on a former Burlington Northern railroad grade.

✉ mruckdaschel@bemidjipioneer.com

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LOCAL

Summary

1200DU Rep. Lindgren sponsoring bill to aid resorts

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

A bill with local support would allow resorts to stay in business longer.

Part of a package of bills to help resorts. Rep. Doug Lindgren, R-Bagley, is sponsoring a bill that will financially aid resorts in Minnesota's lake country.

The bill, also sponsored by Rep. Doug Fuller, R-Bemidji, is designed to combat a declining number of lake resorts by helping them stay in business longer.

"Resorts are extremely important to Minnesota's small-town economy," says Lindgren. "A person vacationing spends significantly more at local businesses than private lakeshore owners, so it is important to keep these resorts available for Minnesota families and tourists."

The bill would do several things: It

provides a freeze on property valuations, allowing resort owners to make enough money to pay the taxes. Under the bill, property tax assessments on the value of lakeshore would be deferred and yearly payments would be based only on the value of the business.

If the resort is sold, the owner would be responsible for paying the full amount of property taxes at that time. Resort owners would also be exempt from sales tax on materials to make improvements on their business, with the exemption capped at \$10,000.

"Resort improvements and developments are important to boost interest," Lindgren said. "The goal of the bill is to keep those who want to stay in business, in business."

The House has yet to consider a tax bill, and one is expected perhaps this

week. A part of that bill, says Fuller, should also be Bemidji's request for a half-cent sales tax for parks and trails improvements.

A bill in the Senate, authored by Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, and co-sponsored by Sen. Rod Skoe, DFL-Clearbrook, would postpone the first-half deadline for resort property taxes from May 15 to July 15, to allow a cash flow. Typically, many resorts open with fishing in mid-May.

That bill is also in the House, sponsored by Lindgren, Fuller and Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker.

A University of Minnesota study shows that guests in Minnesota resorts spend an average of \$21,000 per cabin per season, Lindgren notes. Resorts in Minnesota have declined from 2,500 in 1980 to fewer than 1,000 today.

"Keeping resorts in business will not

only help the state, but will allow families to continue to enjoy these vacation destinations," Lindgren said.

The Bagley Republican's bill would also delay public school start dates until after Labor Day. Many resorts employ high school students over the summer and early school start dates force resorts to shorten their season. School schedules also make it difficult for families to book vacations early or late in the season, Lindgren said.

Ruud is chief author of a bill in the Senate that would put off the school start for this fall only as no earlier than the first Tuesday after Labor Day in September.

"Resorts have pushed for an earlier school start date for a long time," says Lindgren. "Keeping resorts fully employed and financially stable will preserve a great summer tradition for

families — one that is economically essential to northern Minnesota."

Ruud is also hoping that a state reorganization will help Minnesota's tourism industry.

"On Thursday the tourism bill on which I am a co-author passed the Senate," Ruud said. "It creates 'Explore Minnesota Tourism,' a new department under the Department of Employment and Economic Development. This move will help tourism in the state because the new department will focus on our \$9 billion tourism industry. This is great news for greater Minnesota."

The bill, with Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, as chief author, passed 63-0 and would create the new office in the executive branch with a director appointed by the governor and under the supervision of the DEED commissioner.

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4

Area lawmakers come home disappointed

By MIKE O'ROURKE
Associate Editor

Minnesota's 2004 legislative session was rated a disappointment by most area legislators — with one state senator saying he'd give the lawmakers a failing grade this year.

"I'd give us all an 'F,' all 201 legislators, including myself, if we can't come down here and put people first," said Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley.

Rep. Dale Walz, R-Brainerd, completing his last regular session before he returns to being a full-time Baxter

police captain, said he was disappointed the House and Senate couldn't reach agreement on a budget fix or a bonding bill.

"This session was the worst in four years as far as partisanship," Walz said.

He was particularly disappointed the Senate refused to vote on a Defense of Marriage Act, noting he received about 5,000 e-mails from people who wanted the Legislature to act on that issue.

Mean-spirited and partisan were the words Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, used to sum up the session. She faulted DFL leadership for not having

the full confidence of its members and the ability to close a deal.

"I really think the DFL (majority in the) Senate was given many, many, many opportunities ... many compromises they could have worked out," Ruud said. "I don't think they have a closer."

One major disappointment for her was that sexual predator laws were not toughened. She said DFL senators objected to life sentences for first-time offenders in heinous crimes.

Also disheartening, she said, was the DFL Senate leadership's refusal to

allow discussion on the Defense of Marriage Act.

"We were never allowed to have that discussion," she said. "Vote it up or down. If we had brought it to a vote we would not have spent all this time on it. The only reason time was spent was because the DFL refused to bring it to a vote."

Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker, who watched the Senate proceedings regarding the Defense of Marriage Act said the Senate was "totally wrong" when it

See SESSION, Page 5A

SESSION / Some things were accomplished

ignored a motion before the body on that legislation.

The Legislature did approve a bill dropping the drunken driving threshold to .08. Ruud voted for the measure, stating it was time to get it done and not hope the state could recoup federal transportation money down the road by adopting it later. Koering voted against it, objecting to the federal government's coercive tactics and saying he was unconvinced that the measure would save a specific number of lives as its proponents claimed. He also saw it as an unfunded mandate that would affect counties.

The two senators also found themselves on opposite sides of the off-highway vehicle bill that was approved by the Legislature, with Ruud favoring the bill and Koering wishing it would have been more mindful of private property rights.

Ruud said the previous year's bill got too hung up on regulations. This year's bill references the wetlands act that's already in place.

"Basically you can't ruin the wetlands whether it's public or private," she said.

Koering said the bill didn't go the direction he wanted to see it go.

"I still believe that our private property rights are under assault," Koering said. "People think government knows best."

Ruud and Howes both were pleased with the statewide phosphorous ban for most residential lawn owners.

If a special session considers a bonding bill, Ruud said she'd like to see the bridges for the Paul Bunyan Trail at

Baxter and Bemidji approved. The Baxter bridge cost is \$1.5 million and the Bemidji bridge is \$5.2 million because it involves land acquisition. She said the Baxter project might have a better chance than the Bemidji one because of the lower cost.

Koering expressed frustration that bills he worked on that would set a penalty for video voyeurism and change some of the regulations regarding MnCare eligibility requirements for farmers and resort owners were placed into a "giant garbage bill" on the last day of the session. The bill wasn't approved in the Senate.

"You put four months of work into it then to have it blow up the way it did Sunday morning at 7 a.m.," Koering said.

Koering said he opposed the Senate's bonding bill because it was one the state couldn't afford. The DFLers, he said, refused to compromise and seemed to not want to pass a bonding bill.

"I'm at a loss for words for how we get back to the way it should be. I even saw members of the Senate speaking very ... talking very personal about other senators (on the Senate floor). At the end of the day it isn't about personalities it's about getting the work done."

Howes said the House was considerably less partisan.

"Most everything we passed was bipartisan after we yelled at each other for a few minutes," the Walker lawmaker said.

Howes said the session could have been markedly improved if the sexual predator law had been strengthened and

if investments had been made in northern Minnesota's reforestation projects. He said he also would have liked to see passage of a law allowing Cass County to match \$6 million in state funds for a regional jail. Cass would operate the jail with 75 state beds and 25 Cass beds. The pluses of this legislative session, Howes said, might be remembered in what it didn't do.

"We didn't raise your taxes," Howes said. "We didn't take anything away from the people."

Rep. Greg Blaine, R-Little Falls, said a considerable amount of work was done on the House side but the Senate leadership was often scared to vote on certain issues. Bills that would have toughened up the state's sexual predator and methamphetamine laws were part of the House omnibus judiciary bill.

"There were some major bills out there that didn't get done," Blaine said.

Blaine said he was successful in passing legislation stipulating penalties for unlicensed drivers, a measure known as Vanessa's bill. The bill was named in honor of Vanessa Weiss, a young girl who was a passenger in a car driven by an unlicensed 15-year-old. Weiss died in a one-car rollover just north of Pierz.

"It's been frustrating to me listening to some of the radio and TV media saying the Legislature did nothing," Blaine said. "I guess I would beg to differ. There were an awful lot of long days and long nights by House members."

MIKE O'ROURKE can be reached at mike.orourke@brainerddispatch.com or 855-5860.

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Senate District 4 Democrats endorse House candidates

BRAINERD DAILY DISPATCH

BRAINERD, MN
SUNDAY 17,496
APR 4 2004

Senate **District 4**
Democrats endorsed House candidates on the first ballot at their 2004 endorsing convention March 28 with 185 delegates and alternates attending the convention in Bemidji.



MINNESOTA CLIPPING SERVICE

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William Weis of Pine River was endorsed in District 4B, which includes most of northern Crow Wing and southern Cass counties and parts of Hubbard County. Weis ran against incumbent representative Larry Howes, R-Walker, in 2002. Weis was unopposed for the endorsement.

Weis is a chef and food service manager at Grand View Lodge.

“Education funding — at all levels — and environmental issues are two of the main areas of difference I have with our current representative,” Weis told the delegates. “My campaign is already under way, and I plan to knock on doors throughout the district, meeting voters and hearing their ideas, from now to November.”

Frank Moe of Bemidji won the DFL endorsement in District 4A over John Persell of Bemidji on the first ballot. DFL rules require 60 percent to achieve an endorsement. Moe has been campaigning against incumbent Doug Fuller for almost one year, while Persell started his endorsement effort last fall.

Delegates heard from Sen. Rod Skoe of District 2, immediately to the west of District 4, and Rep. Loren Solberg of District 3B, immediately to the east of District 4. Both DFL representatives issued harsh criticism of the priorities and programs of the Republican governor and House majorities.

“Northern Minnesota is not well served by the Republican agenda, and we need to win a DFL majority in the House of Representatives in November,” said Solberg. Delegates responded enthusiastically to this challenge.

Pawlenty, up north, hears the case for a special session

L60.109
Governor promotes new jobs

By Dane Smith 5.21.04
Star Tribune Staff Writer

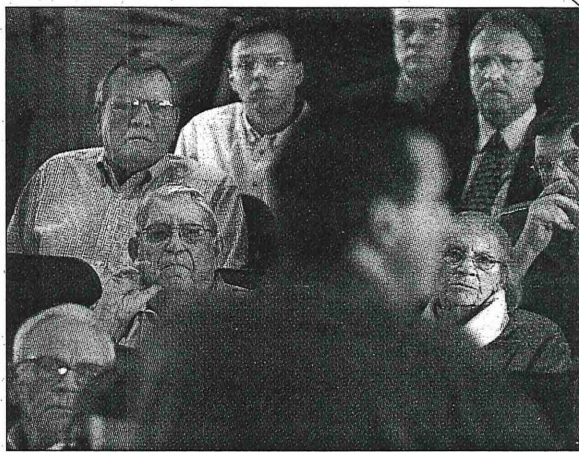
MOORHEAD, MINN. — Bearing good news about a few job-creating laws he signed into law after an otherwise unproductive session of the Minnesota Legislature, Gov. Tim Pawlenty on Thursday flew into three northern Minnesota communities deeply affected by the Legislature's deadlock.

Legislators in both parties he met along the way said that after a few days gathering reaction back home, they definitely favor a special session. And Pawlenty himself sounded more favorable

about a "do-over."

"We have a lot at stake here ... [the adjournment] is unacceptable for our community," said Rep. Morrie Lanning, R-Moorhead, noting that the failure of the Legislature to agree on a bonding bill will delay about \$25 million in local construction projects, most of them at Minnesota State University Moorhead.

The area also happens to be the scene of the abduction and killing of Dru Sjodin, which provoked a bipartisan drive for tougher penalties for sex offenders. That popular proposal nevertheless also stalled in the



Jim Gehrz/Star Tribune

Gov. Tim Pawlenty told a crowd at the Moorhead City Council chamber that two businesses — a wind-energy company and John Deere — plan to consolidate and expand their operations in Moorhead in conjunction with his JOBZ initiative.

Legislature. Lanning said northwestern Minnesotans are concerned that sex offenders may be moving to Minnesota to avoid notification laws and tougher provisions in other states.

On his way home to St. Paul,

Pawlenty edged closer to saying that a special session is necessary.

NORTH continues on D3:
— In Grand Rapids he received a bipartisan cheer.

NORTH from D1

Pawlenty paves way for special session

Pawlenty said action on a bonding bill and sexual-predator laws is needed for the well-being of the state, although he continued to express reluctance to call legislators back unless specific prearranged deals are made between the DFL Senate and Republican House majority leaders.

Pawlenty added that he expected to meet separately with Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, and House Speaker Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, sometime early next week.

Sviggum said he called Johnson on Wednesday evening to talk about the prospects for a special session. "I told him that if he wanted to talk about a special session with a restricted agenda, I'd be willing. I think there's interest."

One possible complication: The contentious proposal for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages. Sviggum said he would like to see the amendment on a special-session agenda, but he agreed that it's probably a deal-killer.

Grand Rapids, Moorhead

In Grand Rapids, which has been promoting itself as the "Forest Center" of Minnesota, Pawlenty ceremonially signed a bill that will reduce and streamline timber regulations and allow expanded production of forestry products.

At a large Potlatch plant that produces particle-board panels, Pawlenty noted that one of his first visits as governor was to Grand Rapids to promise a response to layoffs there in early 2003.

"We're not out of the wood yet, no pun intended," Pawlenty said, but he added that the industry, which is the fourth largest manufacturing sector in the state, is recovering.

Legislators from both parties cheered his return to Grand Rapids. And Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, put in a plug for another try at a bonding bill. The bills left hanging by the Legislature contained as much as \$40 million for the area, mostly for higher education but also for things such as improving the safety of the Paul Bunyan recreational trail, she said.

Pawlenty's last stop was Silver Bay, where he also participated in a ceremonial signing of a bill that he said would help stimulate an emerging "iron nugget" technology that could rejuvenate taconite processing in northeastern Minnesota.

The legislation shortens the time for environmental reviews and could prevent Indiana from luring away the companies working on the process, Pawlenty said.

Joining Pawlenty were two DFL state senators from the region: Thomas Bakke of Cook and David Tomassoni of Chisholm. Bakke praised Pawlenty for supporting the nugget bill "as the session was collapsing all around us." And Tomassoni said he hoped Pawlenty would push harder for a special session. "I know the governor knows the importance of the bonding bill," he said.

In Moorhead, Pawlenty's pitch centered on the announcement of two new development projects that will take advantage of his JOBZ program, a set of tax exemptions for underemployed communities, which was enacted last year. The two projects combined could produce 150 new jobs in the next two years, state officials claimed.

One JOBZ project would help build a new service and sales plant for John Deere agricultural and industrial equipment in Moorhead.

The other winner of JOBZ tax breaks is Midwest Construction Services Inc., a parent firm with seven companies involved in harnessing wind energy, most of them in North Dakota and South Dakota. The company plans to bring those subsidiaries together in four new buildings in Moorhead.

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Staff writer Patricia Lopez
contributed to this report.

1250 DU
**Lawmakers, reporter turned away from tour of Ah-Gwah-Ching center
Officials allowed on grounds**

By **GAIL DEBOER**
Walker Pilot-Independent

geriatric nursing home near Walker.

WALKER — District 4-B Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker, and District 4 Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, are trying to find out why they and others were turned away from Ah-Gwah-Ching Center June 30.

AGCC has been discussed as a facility to handle level three sexual offenders who have completed their sentences but who need nursing home care or cannot be released into the community.

In a July 2 phone interview, Howes said that Minnesota Public Radio reporter Tom Robertson of Bemidji had contacted him June 25 for an interview about AGCC, the state-run

Howes, Ruud and others, including former AGCC CEO John Grimley, were invited to accompany Robertson, who confirmed June 29 that the tour had been arranged. Later that day, Howes

Please see **CENTER A8**

MESABI DAILY NEWS

VIRGINIA, MN
SUNDAY 12,387
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Center from A1

Officials refused tour of facility

received a call from Department of Human Services Commissioner Kevin Goodno, who told him he wanted all interviews and tours to be arranged through his office, and that he did not want Howes and the others to tour AGCC.

programs there without specific legislative approval.

Howes pointed out that the tour had been arranged by Robertson, not himself.

"I keep asking them, 'When are you planning to ask us for approval to close?' They say, 'Well, next year we'll have a plan and come to you to ask for money for something new.'"

"The conversation went on and on, and finally I asked Goodno, 'Are you not going to let us in?' He confirmed they wouldn't. So I called Robertson to tell him."

"I tell them, 'That won't happen!' The Legislature won't give DHS money for a new facility when we have ones that are useable. But DHS thinks they can make their case to us."

In her July 1 e-mail, Ruud noted, "Wednesday was an interesting day. I was invited to tour AGCC in Walker ... but when we got there, we were not allowed to enter, on orders from DHS Commissioner Kevin Goodno. We are still trying to sort out the reasons for not allowing us to tour the facility."

The Legislature has not made a decision that AGCC, the Willmar or Fergus Falls regional treatment centers should be closed, Howes summarized. "Until we do, there should be no more talk of closure. This has gotta stop!"

Although DHS has announced its plans to close AGCC by Jan 1, 2006, and has been transferring patients and downsizing staff and programs, some legislators now are eyeing it as a facility to care for aging or ill sexual offenders who cannot be placed in private facilities after they have completed their prison sentences.

Howes said he has asked his staff to begin drafting a bill to address how to handle sexual offenders who are scheduled to be released from state prison. The bill would stipulate that one year before a sexual predator's scheduled release from the Department of Corrections, the DOC and Attorney General must review the risk to the public and decide whether civil commitment options should be used.

Despite DHS's refusal, the legislators and Robertson showed up at AGCC June 30. Howes said Robertson's report was scheduled to air on MPR stations statewide sometime after July 4 and would be on the Web at www.mpr.org.

If they decide civil commitment is needed, the person must be committed to a state, not a private facility. Earlier this year it was learned that sexual offenders who had been sent by DOC to live at a private Twin Cities nursing home had sexually assaulted several of the home's vulnerable residents.

Although denied entrance to the buildings, the group was escorted by AGCC staff around the exterior and saw several improvements and upgrades.

Several sexual offenders currently are housed at AGCC's secured units.

"We rode in a new service elevator that was installed very recently; were shown where the C-2 and D-2 (secured) units are; (staff) pointed out the new nurses' station that opened two years ago; and we saw roofs that were replaced in recent years.

"Maybe some sexual offenders would come to AGCC, or maybe they'd be better served at Willmar; it would depend on each situation," Howes continued. "But the way it is now, it's up to [each offender's] local county authorities to ask for civil commitment. I don't think it's fair for them to have this responsibility. Since the offenders are under the authority of DOC, we should have discussions with the Attorney General."

"Everything is in tip-top shape," Howes noted. "Even if you have to maintain your facilities, why spend so much money, if you intend to close it or to sell to a developer who might tear it down or make it into condos?"

As for funding, Howes said he thought most people would not object to a tax increase, if it was used to ensure the safety of their loved ones by allowing "fewer of these people on the streets."

Howes said he was very disappointed and disheartened by DHS' refusal to let the group tour AGCC.

As for funding, Howes said he thought most people would not object to a tax increase, if it was used to ensure the safety of their loved ones by allowing "fewer of these people on the streets."

"Yet we are reminded of statutes that say, DHS can't close any regional treatment center, state operated nursing home or any

Gail DeBoer is a reporter with the Walker Pilot-Independent, a Murphy McGinnis Newspaper.

12-24 DU

Lawmakers list their priorities

By MIKE O'ROURKE
Associate Editor

Here are some of the top priorities identified by area lawmakers for the 2005 legislative session:

• **REP. GREG BLAINE** — The Little Falls Republican said he'll have an aggressive agenda that includes a comprehensive methamphetamine bill, a constitutional amendment that would prohibit abortion if the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade ruling is overturned, the bonding bill and benefits for National Guard members.

He also said he's spent considerable time on issues dealing with zoning of livestock facilities.

"I think most people out there understand the budget will be the No. 1 priority," Blaine said. "We've got to be sure we've got the budget in line."

• **PAUL GAZELKA** — The rural Brainerd Republican who will represent District 12A this term said the \$700 million budget shortfall will have to be considered in all issues. He said he's open to using part of the \$1 billion reserve fund to help make up the difference. He said he wants to see kindergarten-12 and higher education adequately funded, make sure those people with the greatest needs, such as the residents of nursing homes, are taken care of and he wants to reduce health care costs. He also wants the Legislature to pass the Defense of Marriage Act, stating that "healthy societies are built from healthy families."

He'll seek to change the rate at which Brainerd area long-term care providers are reimbursed by the state, a rate that's considerably less than Twin Cities care providers receive. Gazelka said he'll also consider legislation suggested by Crow Wing County commissioners to help the county monitor septic systems in watershed districts as a long-term way to protect water.

• **REP. LARRY HOWES** — Howes, a Walker Republican, said passage of the bonding bill is important to his district residents. The bill that was considered in the last session contained a forest legacy project that would prevent 4,600 acres of forest land from being developed. The bill also contained \$2 million for Cass County to demolish buildings if and when the state decided to move its geriatric prison-

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8L

GOALS / Big year in '05

4

ers out of Ah-Gwah-Ching near Walker.

Howes' preference is that the state continue to operate the facility at Ah-Gwah-Ching and possibly use it to house sexual predators.

He said he's pleased with the JOBZ program that has brought an estimated 30 to 40 new jobs to Walker.

• **SEN. PAUL KOERING** — Koering doesn't have much good to say about the 2004 legislative session, counting the creation of a tourism council as one of the few accomplishments.

"We truly, in my opinion, didn't get a whole lot accomplished," he said. "I'm going to be doubly committed to working together. Democrat, Republican, at the end of the day we're all Minnesotans. Somehow we have to put the partisanship aside and work together."

In 2005 he wants to eliminate the depreciation part of an eligibility requirement in MinnesotaCare so more farmers and small business people can be eligible. He also wants to adjust the caps that are placed on MinnesotaCare payments for procedures such as chemotherapy.

Koering will reintroduce his "peeping tom" bill, a bill that increases the penalties for video voyeurism. He'll work for passage of a bonding bill that includes \$1.5 million for a bridge over Excelsior Road at the Paul Bunyan Trail and \$1 million for the Garrison-Kathio sewer district.

The Fort Ripley Republican also is considering a bill on the use of the Brainerd Regional Human Services Center in a meth treatment pilot project.

"I think there's a lot of potential," he said of the site. "We've got a facility out there that's there, instead of putting up a brand new building."

• **REP. MARY ELLEN OTREMBA** — The Long Prairie Democrat would like to see outstate lawmakers stick together, regardless of political party, for rural projects.

"I'm hoping because we have a closer margin (in the House) that we'll be able to work together," she said. "We absolutely need to stick together no matter what party we are."

Otremba would like to limit the power of the state to place liens on farms that are in a life

estate or a joint tenancy and whose owners have used programs such as medical assistance.

• **SEN. CARRIE RUUD** — Passage of the bonding bill is at the top of the Breezy Point Republican's to-do list for the 2005 legislative session. She said some of the higher education buildings she has toured are "very sub-standard." Having recently been asked to sit on the Capital Investments Committee, Ruud hopes the committee has more input into what makes up the bonding bill.

"I'm hoping that we (potential committee members) will have some sort of say in structuring the bonding bill," she said.

She also listed sexual predator legislation and solving the state's \$700 million budget shortfall as important goals for 2005.

The future of Ah-Gwah-Ching is something she'll monitor closely. Cass County has indicated interest in the site if it ceases to be a state-run facility.

"Cass (County) will be integral in whatever happens to Ah-Gwah-Ching," she said. "I'm very fortunate. I have five counties that are fantastic to work with."

• **SEN. DALLAS SAMS** — Sams said Gov. Tim Pawlenty can't afford to keep his promises to hold nursing homes and kindergarten-12 education harmless in the budget process without raising taxes. The DFL senator said about 90 percent of Medicaid's cost is for senior citizens, the disabled and people in assisted living.

Sams wants to back legislation that would offer voters a proposed constitutional amendment providing sales tax increase of 3/16 of 1 percent for the environment and improving water quality. The measure, he said, would raise about \$80 million a year.

He said he hopes the budget shortfall can be settled with a balanced approach.

"Transportation is a huge issue," Sams said. "Again, the governor will not support anything that has new revenue. We're way, way behind in transportation. I think legislators are going to want to get some things done."

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See GOALS, Page 9L

BRAINERD DISPATCH

BRAINERD, MN
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Senate bill helps Red Lake

FRONT PAGE

Skoe happy with bonding package

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

Red Lake schools gained, but Bemidji State University hockey lost Tuesday in an \$889 million bonding bill outlined by Minnesota Senate Democrats.

Despite the bill calling for nearly \$290 million more in bonding than the GOP-led House's bill of last week, the Senate failed to provide \$18 million for a NCAA Division I hockey arena/events center at BSU, which the House bill does.

But the Senate does provide \$22.13 million to the Red Lake School District design, construct, renovate, furnish and

equip middle school and high school facilities on the reservation. The amount is what Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty recommended, but isn't in the House bill.

"I'm happy to see the Red Lake schools included in there," said Sen. Rod Skoe, DFL-Clearbrook, who authored the provision. "It's an ongoing project and a concern we've been working on for a number of years."

Skoe called for \$33 million, but said he'll be happy with the \$22.1 million. "I think we'll leave it there," he said.

► Bonding / Page A6 A

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, meanwhile said the bill was too huge, and that lawmakers should first balance the budget before doling out money for projects.

The House and Senate agreed to fund \$10 million for the collocation of BSU and Northwest Technical College, as well as funding for the Paul Bunyan Trail.

The Senate, however, included \$400,000 for rip rap along the trail's edge at Lake Bemidji and \$500,000 for trail acquisition — which must be matched by the city of Bemidji. The House bill funds \$900,000 to trail acquisition and \$400,000 for rip rap.

With the Senate DFL bonding bill drafted by Capital Investments Chairman Keith Langseth, DFL-Glyndon, Skoe said he's briefed him that the funding is inadequate for Paul Bunyan Trail acquisition. "There's no sense doing the crossing and the fix-up unless they've got the land to connect the trail," Skoe said. "So we are aware of that."

Skoe called the BSU/NTC project important as part of a statewide effort to boost health care jobs.

"It's phase 2 of Bridgeman Hall remodeling," Skoe said. "It also is premier industrial and emerging technology degree programs, an addition at Northwest Tech and support nursing and health care workforce training."

Renovation will help the institutions' Two Plus Two career ladder for nursing programs, he said.

"In our state, what we're really struggling with now is jobs," Skoe said. "The economy is holding our economic recovery back. We've got more than 3,000 jobs waiting to be filled in the nursing area. We've got a backlog of students to fill that."

Bonding is needed to build classrooms for those students, leading to good-paying jobs, he said. "There's a lot of emphasis on the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities part, on the nursing program and labs for nursing."

Ruud blasted the process, saying that the bill was drafted with little input.

"We got our first look at the bonding bill this morning," she said Tuesday. "Sen. Langseth did not involve anyone in the process. No hearings, no committee meetings."

"The hockey arena/convention center and the \$5.2 million for the Paul Bunyan Trail are not included," she said, referring the original request for the trail. "The regional jail in Walker and the community center are not included. The Crosslake Library, not included."

The House included \$6 million for a regional jail at Ah-Gwah-Ching, but both the Senate and House didn't include funding for a Walker Community Center.

Bridgeman Hall was included but not moved up the list as in the House, Ruud said, while it appears all MNSCU projects were included.

The hockey arena was requested through the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission, with the Senate agreeing to fund \$3.2 million toward a national volleyball center at Rochester instead. The House funded the hockey arena, and \$100,000 toward a Bloomington ski jump.

"There has been no explanation of how we will pay for a \$949 million bill when our bonding capacity is closer to \$700 million," Ruud said. "I think our priority should be solving the budget. We passed the budget bill over a month ago and still have had no conference committees assigned or anything worked on."

The total Senate DFL building projects bill is \$949 million, of which \$889 million would be borrowed. It compares to \$677.5 million in projects with \$602 million in bonding in the House bill.

"The bonding bill is like dessert and I think we should eat our vegetables first," Ruud said.

Senate Republicans meet this morning to decide whether to support the public works bill.

"We hold the cards," Sen. Cal Larson, R-Fergus Falls, said Tuesday as two committees approved the second-largest public works bill in state history.

Republicans are feeling their oats because Democrats, who hold a narrow Senate majority with 35 members, do not have enough members to approve the bill by themselves. They need six Republicans to vote for the measure, which requires 41 votes to pass.

The GOP put up little resistance Tuesday when the bill passed the Senate Capital Investment Committee 16-1 and the Finance Committee 16-3. But Republicans warned things could be different when the full Senate debates the measure, probably Thursday.

Some Republicans want to borrow less for public works projects, some are upset with other issues.

Skoe said he would lobby for the BSU hockey arena, but adds that his stature is lessened because it isn't in his district.

"We'll keep working on it and see what we end up with," he said. "While I represent a lot of Beltrami County, I do not represent Bemidji, and that makes it a little tough for me. I am working on it."

While DFLer Langseth crafted the bill, Skoe said no input was given for Bemidji projects. "I have talked to Sen. Langseth about that (the hockey arena). ... Sen. Ruud has not talked to him about any of these projects, all year."

Skoe added the bill does include \$1.4 million for a visitors center at the new Big Bog State Recreation Area at Waskish, almost mirroring the \$1.3 million included in the House bill.

Capitol Reporter Don Davis contributed to this report.
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BEMIDJI, MN
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MINNESOTA CLIPPING SERVICE

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Algae cleanup, milk for kids top priorities

4

Lawmakers observe silence for Sjodin, mull judge candidates

By CANDI WALZ
Legislative Correspondent

FRONT PAGE

ST. PAUL — Cleaning up Minnesota's lakes and delivering milk to children were among the House's top priorities last week.

Senate members took a moment of silence in honor of a north central resident while the governor announced three finalists for the St. Louis County judge vacancy. Amongst the busy schedule, one member found time to share government with a youngster.



"I think all of you that have opportunities to be on Minnesota lakes in the summertime, and waters, you know how difficult of time we have been having with the algae problem," Rep. Dennis Ozment, R-Rosemount, said.

Phosphorous plays a major role in turning Minnesota lakes and streams green. One pound of the nutrient — used on lawns and farms — can produce 300-700 pounds of algae.

In a heated debate, proponents of the bill said the state could handle the problem by taking away one algae-creator, phosphorous. But, opponents said counties and cities need to have local control and the current law goes far enough.

"I still consider this a stupid piece of legislation," Rep. William Kuisle, R-Rochester, said. "It's unenforceable."

Ozment disagreed, "I don't understand why you would belittle this. Don't call the effort to protect the waters of the state of Minnesota stupid."

Local Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker, added, "This is the right thing to do. Our lakes are in danger."

Minnesota became the first state to pass a phosphorous-free lawn fertilizer bill in 2002, for the seven-county metro area. The law took effect this year on Jan. 1. Greater Minnesota counties were allowed to use 3 percent phosphorous fertilizers, but had an option to implement a ban. Locally, Crow Wing County has opted for the

Please see **SESSION A8**

One step closer to blue waters:

The House voted Monday to ban phosphorous-containing fertilizers to be used on lawns.

Session from A1

Algae, milk, among top priorities

use of phosphorous-free fertilizers.

Under the new law, passed with an 88-40 vote, all counties will have to go phosphorous-free. Local legislators that voted for the bill included Reps. David Dill, DFL-Crane Lake, Bill Hilty, DFL-Finlayson, Howes, Tom Huntley, DFL-Duluth, Mary Murphy, DFL-Hermantown, and Dale Walz, R-Brainerd.

Voting against the bill were Reps. Irv Anderson, DFL-International Falls, Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, and Loren Solberg, DFL-Grand Rapids.

Honoring Dru:

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, rose Monday and asked her colleagues to take a moment of silence in honor of Dru Sjodin.

Sjodin was abducted at knifepoint Nov. 22 while leaving a shopping mall in North Dakota. Her body was recently found outside of Crookston. Alfonso Rodriguez Jr., a convicted level 3 sex offender was arrested for kidnapping Sjodin. Level 3 offenders classified as most likely to re-offend. Sjodin's funeral was Saturday.

Ruud said, "As you know, as of Saturday, we have found Dru. Dru has come home."

Finalists named for St. Louis judge vacancy:

Gov. Tim Pawlenty released the names of three finalists for St. Louis County's Sixth Judicial District trial court Wednesday.

Starting with a field of 20 candidates, the field was narrowed to Charles B. Bateman, Kathleen S. Bray and Shaun R. Floerke. Bateman is an attorney with the Duluth law firm of Reyelts, Leighton, Bateman, Hylden and Sturdevant. He has been working in the law business for 29 years and resides in Saginaw.

Bray, of Duluth, has been an attorney for 14 years. She currently works at Hanft Frider Floerke is a senior assistant attorney in the civil division of the St. Louis County Attorney's Office. Living in Duluth, he has worked in the law field for 13 years.

The candidates are seeking to fill an open seat left by Carol M. Person on Feb. 29. The finalists will be interviewed by the state's 13-member Commission on Judicial Selection. The commission will make a recommendation to the governor.

Take your child to work:

While it wasn't his child, Rep. Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, had a young visitor with him on the House floor Thursday. It was national "Take Your Child to Work Day."

The youngster, Wyatt, was a friend of Sertich's. "I thought that it would be great to get him on the floor," Sertich said.

Wyatt learned first hand about the job of a legislator. Sertich showed him how to push the voting buttons, yes and no. Wyatt also got his picture taken in the House chambers.

But the most exciting experience was taking attendance — when Sertich gave Wyatt the reins. Wyatt pressed the red and green buttons showing that Sertich was present on the floor. The voting board lit up back and forth between two colors, but Wyatt decided to leave it green — he liked that one better.

Sertich said he enjoys showing youngsters around the Capitol and thinks it is very important for their development. "As soon as you can make it (government) accessible to people, I think that helps."

And Sertich himself was inspired by lawmakers. Growing up, his family took him out to Washington, D.C. where he met members of Congress. "That had a long lasting effect on me," Sertich said.

During the day, parents are encouraged to talk about work and futures with their children. Sertich said that lawmakers, too, have a role in the process.

"It is one of our obligations to pass along good feelings of government to future generations."

Here comes the milk man:

Minnesota women, infants and children may be receiving milk deliveries at their homes in coming months, thanks to new legislation.

Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, offered an amendment Thursday to deliver foods to residents on the WIC program. Qualifying families could make their orders by phone, fax or the Internet.

"It's a way to help get nutritional foods to women and children on the WIC program," Rukavina said.

Members voted 76-53 in favor of the amendment. All local legislators voted with Rukavina.

But members outside of northeast and north central Minnesota raised some questions.

Rep. Dale Walz, R-Brainerd said, "All that we are saying is that these home delivery businesses should be able to deliver to the doors. It's helping a few small businesses in Minnesota maintain their customer base. I don't see anything wrong with that."

But, Rep. Lynda Boudreau, R-Faribault, wondered why the provision was needed. She said that WIC recipients have to go out to pick up their vouchers, shouldn't they also be able to stop by a grocery store and pick up their food?

Rukavina said, "Being from a farm state" the legislation was important.

He added, "The 'M for kids caucus' discussed this ... (and) thought it was a good idea."

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.

DAILY TRIBUNE

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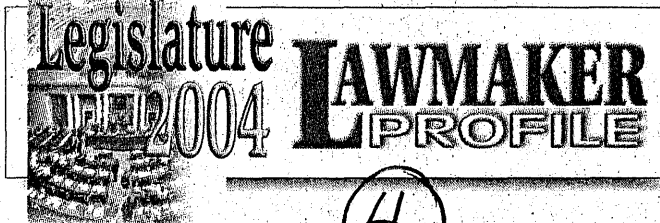
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MESABI DAILY NEWS

VIRGINIA, MN
SUNDAY 12,387
MAR 21 2004


MINNESOTA CLIPPING SERVICE

12 DU FRONT PAGE



Ruud runs for office, marathons

Breezy Point GOP senator works hard for constituents

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — She wore out three pairs of running shoes visiting communities and door knocking during her election, but Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said it was worth the effort.

“I door knocked the entire district, and more than once in some places,” she said.

Ruud first decided to run for the state Senate as mayor of Breezy Point.

During her time in office,



SEN. CARRIE RUUD

Please see **RUUD A7** A

Lawmaker runs for office, also marathons

Ruud was involved with proposing political redistricting options. The completed task split Crow Wing County, and left an open seat. Ruud filed for the position.

"I thought this was a great opportunity," she said. "It doesn't happen very often."

In the primary, Ruud didn't receive the party endorsement. The lack of support didn't stop her.

"It was very good for me, it made me work hard, it made me get my message out there," she said.

Ruud said she also had great support from friends and family during her campaign. Her parents, from Deerwood, participated in the campaign. Being 88 years old, they both door knocked, and attended meetings.

"They were phenomenal in their support. I am very blessed that way," she said.

She successfully won the election and was sworn into office in January 2003.

Mayoral Duties:

During her service in Breezy Point, Ruud said the best part was networking and opportunities. The state's mayors' conference was hosted in Breezy Point. The governor's fishing opener was also held in Breezy Point.

"I have had a lot of wonderful experiences. I was very fortunate," Ruud said.

"It is such a lovely place to be from."

While there were benefits to serving, Ruud said the hardest part of being mayor was making the tough decisions.

"The decisions you make affect people right next door, that you have coffee with," Ruud said. "That is difficult because sometimes you have to make tough decisions that not everyone approves of or wants, but you have to do what is best for the city."

She added, "I applaud everyone that serves at that level, because it is not easy."

From a Different Mold:

In the back of Ruud's office is a collection of elephants. Some are ceramic, and others stuffed. She has an elephant wearing a diaper, and another holding a rose.

Ruud said she never planned the collection, "It just sort of happened. People started giving me elephants."

The most noticeable elephant is a lady being lifted up by the trunks of others.

This elephant is wearing a pink feathered hat and high heels.

Recently, Ruud's younger son stopped to visit. He made an observation about the elephants — they were all of the Republican senators, but the one in the middle was her. Ruud, who has a great relationship with her sons, laughed at the comments.

Room Mom to Adventurer:

The mother of two sons, Ruud said she spent most of her career as a mom.

As her sons were growing up, Ruud worked part-time so she could be involved in their lives. She served as a room mom in their classes, and also supervised field trips. One of her favorites was going to the Monticello power plant — the coal and nuclear plants.

"It was phenomenally interesting," Ruud said.

Ruud would take her sons on "adventures" when they weren't in school. The trio loved the outdoors and recreational activities.

"Having two boys is wonderful, we did such fun things," Ruud said. "We just enjoyed each other and doing things together."

The family always went skiing on Ruud's birthday, which falls on President's Day weekend.

One year, they went to the North Shore — they explored a river's flow into Lake Superior and examined the ice

chunks.

"I really enjoy my children," Ruud said.

Her sons are now grown. The oldest son lives in Colorado and works as a ski instructor. Her youngest resides in Nisswa with his wife and two children.

"It's wonderful to have them (nearby)," she said.

Ruud also said she is close with her mother, father, two sisters and brother — all who supported her when running. Although one brother and one sister live in different states, they offered long-distance support.

Ruud showed how an interest of government runs in the family, with two photos. The first showed her brother, who is a colonel in the armed forces. The second was of her mom, a school teacher, on a class trip visiting the Capitol.

The class was pictured with then-Gov. Rudy Perpich.

"We have some interesting memories of the Capitol," Ruud said.

In her spare time, Ruud snowshoes, hikes, in-line skates, bikes and runs marathons. Every year, she rides the Paul Bunyan Trail with U.S. Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn.

"I love the outdoors. I've always enjoyed it," she said.

A Juggling Act:

After getting a divorce from her husband, Ruud went to school to obtain her real estate license. While she was establishing herself, Ruud worked three jobs — as a waitress, in a deli, and as a real estate broker. The experience helped her prepare for busy legislative sessions.

While working with real estate, Ruud met her current husband.

The couple was married last year. Together, the pair has a big family — mostly coming from his side. Ruud's husband has 15 grandchildren, varying in ages from 1 to 20.

"We have a lovely combined family," Ruud said.

She added that everyone was over for a family Christmas. "It was just a riot," she said with a big smile and a laugh.

Working Together:

Ruud's husband managed her senatorial campaign.

"It is very humbling to have people take all of this time and energy to work for you," she said.

Ruud pointed out another picture in her office — a black and white photo of five people in a Capitol office. Sitting at the desk was a very young-looking, now Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar. Ruud pointed to a young man in the back of Johnson, and said, "This is my husband."

He managed Johnson's Willmar campaign when he was first elected as a Republican.

Session Two:

This year is Ruud's second session in office. She serves on the Health, Human Services and Corrections Budget Division; Higher Education Budget Divisions; Jobs, Housing and Community Development committees. Her legislative concerns are small business, tourism, environment and education.

Last year, Ruud voted on the Personal Protection Act, and the Women's Right to Know bill.

"I was so fortunate as a freshman to take votes on bills that people have worked on for years," Ruud said.

She also focused on ATVs, with Sen. John Marty, DFL-Roseville. "We got almost \$5 million for trails."

This year, Ruud has authored legislation that would require mandatory sentencing for sex offenders. The legislation would also create an appointed sex offender review board. If passed, the board would govern the review and release of sex offenders.

"It is a very good bill, it addresses a lot of the issues," Ruud said.

She represents the town of Pequot Lakes, the home of Dru Sjodin. Last November, Sjodin was abducted after leaving work from the Columbia Mall in Grand Forks, N.D. Alfonso Rodriguez Jr., a known Level 3 sex offender from Minnesota, was charged in December with abducting Sjodin. Ruud participated in a Pequot Lakes town meeting; she said the legislation addresses most of the issues brought up at the meeting.

Other legislation Ruud has also been working on pertains to forestry, and ATVs. She has also authored a bill to bond \$6 million for a regional jail in Walker. Currently, Cass County has come up with the other half of the funds, \$6 million.

"They really put their money where their mouth is," Ruud said. She said she hopes this legislation would be included in the Senate's bonding bill.

Ruud has also requested bonds for the Paul Bunyan Trail, Central Lakes College and Bemidji State University.

Ruud added that it has been harder to be in the minority this year. She said she has more than 20 bills she's been trying to get heard.

"There are a lot of good ideas that should not be partisan issues," Ruud said. "They should be good for the state of Minnesota."

Quadrupling Experience:

Ruud is sometimes seen wearing a special pin — four women with arms raised, hands held in unity and heads lifted high.

The pin represents four freshman colleagues, all women and all Republicans — Ruud; Sen. Julianne Osterman, Chanhassen; Sen. Julie Rosen, Fairmont; and Sen. Betsy Wergin, Princeton.

Ruud said the four work together and help each other out.

Combined, the group quadruples knowledge, shares committee happenings and supports legislative efforts.

Ruud said this team is a good support network.

Keeping the Faith:

"My faith is very important to me," Ruud said.

She participates in a Wednesday morning Bible study at the Capitol. The study is open to everyone — senators, representatives, and staffers.

"It is a wonderful way to refocus and really get back down to earth and really know what we are here to do," Ruud said.

In her position, she added that faith helps. "It's a lot of tough issues and we know that it is not always in our hands."

Staying in Touch:

Ruud meets with many constituents and often hears from people in the district. Covering five counties, she stays in touch with commissioners. She also said she has coffee with community elders, "the pulse of the community."

"They don't pull any punches. They let me know what's really going on," Ruud said.

Overall, Ruud said developing and maintaining relationships is a key to success, "I think that is really important. Politics is all about relationships and working together."

Candi Walz is the legislative correspondent in St. Paul for the Mesabi Daily News, Hibbing Daily Tribune, Grand Rapids Herald-Review, Cloquet Pine-Journal, International Falls Daily Journal and the Brainerd Dispatch.

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Area lawmakers provide overview of what's to come

By MATT ERICKSON
Staff Writer

BAXTER — With the start of the 2004 Legislative session just two weeks away and a proposed \$760 million state bonding bill on the table, area lawmakers getting ready for what may be a long session.

Meeting before about 50 area business men and women, five area lawmakers laid out what they believe will be the most-debated issues for this year's Legislature during the Brainerd Lakes Area Chambers of Commerce-sponsored Eggs and Issues forum Monday morning at the Bonanza Restaurant.

Topics discussed included the Northstar commuter rail line, stadiums for the Minnesota Twins and Minnesota Vikings, lowering the legal blood alcohol content limit to 0.08, health care costs, early childhood education and taxes.

Area legislators attending were Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker; Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley; Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point; Rep. Greg Blaine, R-Little Falls; and Rep. Dale Walz, R-Brainerd.

Koering noted a few local projects being proposed for the bonding bill include the Fletcher Creek flooding abatement in Little Falls, the Garrison sewer project and a walking bridge across Excelsior Road in Baxter.

However, all five lawmakers believe the major debates, and the most money, will be reserved for metro and state-wide projects and issues.

"I have a sense it's going to be very difficult for any of us to get local projects (on the bonding bill)," said Howes.

Koering felt this could be a con-

tentious year between Democrats and Republicans.

"We're going to see a lot of obstruction," on the part of the Democrats, said Koering. "They're mad about the last session and everything a Republican puts forward the Democrats are going to fight. They're scared because their majority is shrinking."

The Northstar commuter rail project, which in its conception was planned to extend to Rice, has been scaled back to end at Big Lake because of the cost. Blaine pointed to the cost overruns experienced in the Hiawatha line in the Twin Cities.

But even a scaled back version wasn't enough for Howes.

"Until we own the track it runs on, I'll vote no," he said.

On the stadium issue, Koering said while he was in favor of finding a way to keep professional baseball and football in Minnesota, he was opposed to using taxpayer money to do so. Howes noted there is a proposal to build a casino to fund a stadium.

Howes said there could be an attempt to pass the legislation to lower the legal blood alcohol content to 0.08 on the first day of the Legislative session. Blaine, however, noted there would be no fiscal benefit to the state in passing the legislation because jails and courts are already too full.

Blaine noted a huge disconnect between taxpayers and their understanding of their tax statements. He was critical of the city of Little Falls for blaming its tax increase on the state's decision to cut local government aid, noting a city shouldn't be cutting its taxes in an economic downturn. He said legislators should work within their districts to help people understand their taxes so they can in turn discuss them with their local government units.

"After you get your tax statement, it's too late. You pay it or you lose," said Blaine. He said Little Falls should have looked more closely at where cuts could be made within its budget rather than raise taxes on many people who can't afford them.

Ruud noted another piece of legislation that will be discussed is a medical savings account, which people would be able use to offset medical costs not covered by insurance and then at age 65 use to pay Medicare and Medicaid costs.

All the legislators agreed more money needs to be spent on early childhood education. Walz said he has tried to introduce the idea of balanced funding with increases for inflation for education, but in past legislative sessions other lawmakers balked because of the cost.

"I think if we came up with a way to stabilize the funding, it take the fight out of that every two years," said Walz.

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2004

Lawmakers discuss budget woes

FRONT PAGE

Views offered at local forum

BY BRAD SWENSON

Pioneer Political Editor

Deficit or shortfall — Minnesota lawmakers still must work at balancing a state budget projected to fall in the red. How best to do it provides the rub.

After facing a \$4.5 billion deficit for the current two-year budget, projections now call for a \$700 million problem for the next two-year budget which begins June 1.

Or, \$1.4 billion if inflation is included — another difference in terminology.

Area legislators offered their views on how to approach the pending budget battle Friday morning during a Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce-sponsored forum at Bemidji City Hall.

Sen. Rod Skoe of Clearbrook and Reps. elect Frank Moe of Bemidji and Brita Sailer of Park Rapids — Democrats all — said raising revenue must be part of the solution. Skoe and Moe both put income tax hikes on the table, while Sailer said she wanted to study what revenue-raiser would be best for House 2B residents.

Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, said raising taxes shouldn't be the first option, rather raising revenues to the state through expanded jobs.

The four answered a host of questions first posed by the Chamber's Public Affairs Committee and then by the 20 audience members attending the early morning pre-session



Pioneer Photo by Morite Draper

Sen. Rod Skoe, DFL-Clearbrook, and Sen. Carrie Ruud, R-Breezy Point, answer questions at a legislative hearing on Friday morning sponsored by the Bemidji Chamber of Commerce.

forum. The 2005 session starts Jan. 4.

"We need to have some permanent solution, either in revenues or permanent reductions," Skoe said of yet another projected state budget downturn.

But while the projected deficit isn't anywhere approaching the previous \$4.5 billion deficit, next year's budget crafting will be tougher as lawmakers want to give K-12 spending at least an inflationary increase after several years

of flat funding. That budget is 42 percent of the state's budget.

"We also don't want to go with higher tuition for higher education, and we will have

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(over)

Lawmakers don't see much done on issues

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they were from central Minnesota or the Iron Range, Republican or Democrats, all felt the session should have produced more.

"It was the most unproductive, difficult and contentious sessions I have witnessed," said Rep. Loren Solberg, DFL-Grand Rapids, who is serving his 11th term.

As the most senior member of the House, Rep. Irv Anderson, DFL-International Falls, with 32 years of legislating, said he hasn't seen anything like this session since 1971. He mentioned that the House Republicans didn't agree to the governor's initiatives of solving the budget bill and the stadiums. "That says something, doesn't it?"

From Breezy Point, Republican Sen. Carrie Ruud said, "I was disappointed that we didn't accomplish what the citizens sent us there to accomplish."

If Sen. Paul Koering, R-Fort Ripley, had to grade all of legislators including himself "I would give out Fs."

He added, "You take four to four-and-a-half months out of your life to work on very important issues for the state of Minnesota. You pour all of your effort into it. When it comes down to it, it ends up being politics. People playing politics."

Rep. Mary Murphy, DFL-Hermantown, would have liked to see a bonding bill and budget fix before the session concluded. Otherwise, she thought the session was productive, "A lot of people got a lot of bills passed." She later added, "We did a lot ... especially in the last day-and-a-half."

Chisholm DFLer, Rep. Tony Sertich, thought that the session brought out the "lowest civility" he has seen at the Capitol. "There were a lot of mean words said in the last couple of weeks, a lot of name calling."

Rep. Dale Walz, R-Brainerd said, "The House and Senate made offers but they were unacceptable. Their heels were dug in pretty good."

Many senators and representatives traced the lack of progress back to last session, saying that Gov. Tim Pawlenty and House Speaker Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon, strong-armed Senate Democrats in negotiations. They claim former Senate Majority Leader John Hottinger, DFL-Mankato, folded and gave the Republicans everything they wanted — including no new taxes, Local Government Aid and education cuts, and nursing homes funding reductions.

The turmoil was felt this session, as leadership in both bodies failed to reach agreements on how conference committees would be set to solve the budget issues and the size of bonding bills.

Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, said there has been two constants the past several years regarding the turmoil in St. Paul — Pawlenty and Sviggum.

"In 1999 and 2000 we didn't have special sessions because people were like kids in a candy store giving back money," Rukavina said.

"In 2001 we got the tax bill that Roger Moe (former Senate Majority Leader) told them there was not enough to pay for it. But Roger compromised to a degree and the bill was passed."

"There was a special session in 2002, but it was for flood control."

"The 2003 special session led to (House Speaker) Sviggum and (Gov.) Pawlenty getting everything they wanted at the expense of rural Minnesota and the neediest state residents. Dean Johnson (DFL Senate Majority Leader) said that wouldn't happen this year. He said that even outnumbered two to one we wouldn't give up. And we didn't."

"We've had three different Senate majority leaders the past few years. But the Republicans have had one leader in the House (Sviggum) and Pawlenty both as governor and in the House. It's clear where the fault lies, especially when Republicans killed the governor's own initiatives on the Northstar Corridor, the stadium bill and the bonding bill," Rukavina said.

Deficit Looming:

With the state's projected shortfall at \$160 million and no foreseen agreements, Pawlenty solved 60 percent of the problem using solutions previously agreed to by both bodies. But leadership didn't agree with these, either.

Monday, when the session was adjourned without an answer, the governor finished filling the hole by taking money from freezing or delaying bonds sales of previously approved capital projects, borrowing federal money that pays for health care for low-income families, and cutting 3 percent from the budgets of state agencies.

His solution drew heat from local legislators.

Koering said the health care take could "turn into a crisis" with fewer people insured. "The more people we can have on insurance, the better off we will be."

Anderson added, "The governor

doesn't have any concern for the poor people at all. He comes from too much money."

No Bonding, Fewer Jobs:

The failure of the Senate's bonding bill prohibited leaders from calling a conference committee to work out the differences in the legislative packages. Requiring a 60 percent major, the Senate bill died by two votes.

Bonds, essentially the state's borrowing plan, fund infrastructure and equipment at state colleges, pay for updates on trails and sewer systems, and improve or build state assets. Laying out the plan is one of the main tasks during even-year sessions.

The northland would have fared well in the bonding bills this year. Money was earmarked for the Mesabi Trail station on Highway 53, overflowing Canisteo Mine by Bovey, reforestation, area trails and parks, renovations at University of Minnesota, Duluth, Forest Highway 11, and many sanitary sewer projects — for the Central Iron Range Sanitary Sewer, Duluth and Two Harbors. All projects were included in one or both bills. It is projected that bonding bill would employ 10,000 people, and borrowing rates would be at a comparatively low rate.

Sen. Tom Bakk, DFL-Cook, said the bill included "some things that really needed to be done." He added that now is the time to act before the interest rate goes up next year, as it is projected to do. "An extra point on an interest rate is a lot of additional debt service, especially when the state is borrowing millions. From a timing standpoint, it makes sense (to do it now)."

Other legislators were disappointed that funding wasn't included for their specific projects and noted some delays could be costly.

The bill could have added more business opportunities by improving the Central Iron Range Sanitary Sewer, Sertich said. Businesses could be built with the sufficient out take system and employees could be hired. He also thought the investments in educational buildings would keep the tuition rates lower. Students could be then trained to open their own businesses which would also put more people to work.

Many legislators wanted to see a special session called to revive the bonding bills, some expected it.

Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, said the session would be "an absolute waste of time" if a list of projects weren't approved. "Not bonding now is a huge mistake ... putting them (projects) off will only cost more in the long run."

Ruud added, the bill meant "jobs and economic development, that is what we are all about in greater Minnesota. We need to have it happen."

Identifying The Good:

Most legislators found a highlight of the session. The positives ranged from approving increased weight limits on trucks and opening access for off highway vehicle drivers to adopting new graduation standards and expediting environmental review for a Mesabi Nugget plant.

Solberg and Ruud said the best part of session was increasing the weight limits that logging trucks could carry but adding another axle, so weight would be evenly distributed. The increase makes the industry more competitive since Minnesota now matches up with other states' restrictions.

Solberg said it was passed "with about 45 seconds to go at the end of session."

"We need to be competitive with neighbors," Ruud added.

OHV and all terrain vehicles can be driven without harming wetlands, thanks to new legislation. Lawmakers said the bill was a great compromise. Last year's law prohibited travel on specified wetlands. Since northern Minnesota has many wetlands, there was little place left to ride.

"I went to session determined to fix that, and we did," Bakk said. "I think it is a good fix for ATV owners."

"It took 12 drafts to where we could all agree," Ruud said. "This is a good solution. We all worked hard to get there."

The state also defined education standards for social studies, science, physical education and health. Tomassoni originally offered a bill to require physical education and health after seeing some districts propose dropping the courses to make up for the budget cuts.

"That was nice to see that happen," Tomassoni said. "People were worried that physical education and health would be eliminated."

"It was important to reach a compromise," Walz added on all of the standards.

Sertich identified three highlights including the expedited environmental review process at the potential Mesabi Nugget plant in Hoyt Lakes, the intact 21st Century Minerals Fund, and the extended benefits for military men and

women.

The expedited permitting at the potential Cliffs Erie site in Hoyt Lakes could take up to 10 months to obtain. The new plant could offer jobs for the Iron Range and opportunities for the state. Iron Range Resources worked to entice the plant to Minnesota after learning of a possibility of building the plant in Indiana.

Bakk said, "If that doesn't happen in Minnesota now, it is certainly not the state's fault."

The 21st Century Minerals Fund is an interest accruing account that was set up by the state to attract businesses to develop new mining technologies that could benefit Minnesota. The governor and House Republicans proposed using it as part of their budget fixes for the \$160 million shortfall. With the governor acting unilaterally, this fund wasn't touched.

"Ironically because there was no budget fix, the Republicans didn't take any more of the 21st Century Minerals Fund," Sertich said.

Last year, the governor unallotted \$49 million of the fund as part of a solution to the state's \$4.56 billion deficit.

The military benefits to service personnel give extended time off when coming home from service for soldiers to readjust. "It is important to honor their service," Sertich said.

Murphy identified the House bonding bill as her highlight. She sat on the committee that created the "bill that was worked out carefully and cooperatively with people from both sides of the aisle."

Koering was most pleased with legislation to provide Minnesota Care, a state health insurance plan, to farmers and employees of the tourism industry. He said another positive was his video voyeurism legislation which adds stricter penalties for "peeping toms."

Asking For More:

But legislators had additional requests of bills they would have liked to pass this session. Most revolved around bonding projects that weren't granted, while others varied from defining marriage to creating tougher laws for sexual predators.

With no bonding, Anderson didn't receive funding to removed high water levels at the flooded Canisteo Mine. He also lost funding for constructing a WWII memorial in St. Paul.

"I will be back with it (next session)," said Anderson, the WWII veteran.

Representing the district with the hometown of Dru Sjodin, Ruud thought that there should have crafted stricter sexual predator laws. She thought her constituents were "angry. We had town meetings. People came (to St. Paul) to testify and poured their hearts out."

Sjodin, 22, a Pequot Lakes native was abducted Nov. 22 after leaving work in Grand Forks, N.D. Alfonso Rodriguez, of Crookston, a known Level 3 sex offender — most likely to re-offend — was charged with the crime. Sjodin's body was recently found in Minnesota.

Tomassoni and Bakk wanted to see the taconite offset taken off of LGA formulas. In a four year phase-in taconite communities would face a dollar-for-dollar reduction in city funding. Both serve on the Senate Tax Committee.

Tomassoni said, "I hope we bring the tax bill back up (in special session)."

Bakk said he would fight hard for the repeal, "It is my highest priority after bonding."

With this is his last session, Walz, not seeking re-election, would have liked to have seen the Gang Strike Task Force signed into law. As a Baxter police captain, he worked hard to help craft legislation that would merge the Gang Strike Task Force and the regional task force. The merger would permit information to be shared. "I worked very hard on that one, twisting some arms ... I am disappointed it didn't pass."

He also would have liked to see the Senate vote on sending a constitutional amendment to voters this fall that would define marriage as one man and one woman. The House passed the measure earlier this session and the Senate never took a vote on it. DFLers said it didn't get out of committee and shouldn't come up on the floor.

"I think that the people in Minnesota are smart enough to figure this out for themselves. Let's give them a chance" to decide on the ballot, Walz said.

Moving Forward:

Pawlenty has made no official announcements of special session, but Tomassoni heard that one would be called when all parties reached an agreement. The session would last two-three days. Both chambers have to approve what the conference committee developed. If legislation passes, it goes to the governor's desk for approval.

Mesabi Daily News Editor Bill Hanna contributed to this article.

higher health care costs," Skoe said. "Even if we reduce eligibility or services, it won't save a lot."

A permanent solution — taxes — must be found, Skoe said. He ticked off possibilities of an income tax surcharge, boosting the cigarette tax and closing corporate tax loopholes.

"At some point, you have to do something," he said.

The \$4.5 billion deficit was solved without raising taxes, notes Moe, adding that program and service cuts "took all the low-hanging fruit. Now, the easy fixes are gone and we need to look at a long-term solution."

The state needs to invest more in education, he said, adding that "a high tax, high income state has worked well for us. Low tax, low services states such as Mississippi or Alabama is a price I'm not willing to try."

Moe said he would look at raising income taxes on the wealthiest Minnesotans, closing corporate tax loopholes and seek health care reforms to cut costs, such as administrative streamlining and pooling prescription drug and health insurance coverage.

He would also boost Local Government Aid to the poorest cities, which helps keep property taxes down, but cut market value aid to mostly wealthy suburbs which don't receive LGA and were left out of cuts the past two years.

Sailer said lawmakers "must look at all options on the table, and there won't be any one thing which will solve it. We need to look at taxes, but there must be fairness."

She said there may be cuts, but "I have a hard time imagining that."

Republican Ruud disagreed with the definition — calling the projected downturn in the next biennium budget a shortfall, not a deficit.

"We do not have a deficit," she said, adding the new budget will start with a \$495 million surplus which will be kept for a reserve and cash flow.

"People are saying which tax, but why look at taxes to raise revenue?" Ruud asked. "Why not raise revenues by bringing in better jobs to the state?"

She cited efforts such as Gov. Tim Pawlenty's Job Opportunity Building Zones program as a way to grow jobs in rural Minnesota, raising tax revenue by creating new jobs. She also pushed for higher education investments, which can lead to higher-pay jobs.

"We should invest in the state so there are better jobs," Skoe agreed, "but we need the money to invest."

How legislators deal with the deficit — or shortfall — will determine spending for a host of other programs from higher education to LGA, he said.

The legislators found some agreement on measures to curb health care costs. Ruud cited proposals from Republican Pawlenty as "an amazing plan" and "great foundational plan," and Moe embraced many of the provisions.

"We need to entertain some of his proposals," Moe said, "especially in administrative cost savings and uniform record keeping." But he added that controlling the cost of pharmaceuticals is also needed, using collective pools to buy down drugs and insurance.

Sailer added that small business can be helped by pooling insurance, but also that the state needs to restore funding to the state's MinnesotaCare health insurance program for the low income. That coverage will save higher state costs as poor people not in the program instead wait until their illness is an emergency room problem at a higher cost.

"Small business pools is an ideal goal," agreed Ruud. "But also health care savings accounts is a way for small business to offer insurance for major medical coverage."

But Ruud added that perhaps it shouldn't be the state's goal to cover all medical procedures, just the most expensive ones which can break a family budget. "We can't cover everything — do we need wonderful Cadillac plans? We can't afford them."

Moe agreed with the health savings accounts, saying "now that some Democrats understand it, it has some merit."

Skoe also called for more emphasis, not less, on MinnesotaCare as preventive health care. "We should expand access to health insurance through MinnesotaCare, and remove some of the caps we placed."

The legislators also offered their support for tax or valuation breaks to small seasonal resorts to prevent their development into residential tracts, more transportation funding which includes rural Minnesota, and providing affordable housing. They also offered support for parks and trails improvements, including Bemidji's half-cent sales tax to do so and bonding to complete the Paul Bunyan Trail.

The Democrats favored a boost in the state's gasoline tax to provide more transportation funding, while Ruud said those funds have constantly increased with more driving miles.

"I am not a big supporter of gas tax increases," she said, "Revenue has increased over 10 years from \$450 million a year to \$650 million. I am concerned a tax increase is not just you and I paying, but also school districts, loggers and counties."

Moe, who during the campaign spoke against raising the gas tax, now supports one. The state Department of Transportation "does not have any fat, no slush, nothing left to cut. We need to look at fully funding it ... you need to look at some new revenues as the gas tax is one."

And while the Democrats talked about ways to increase affordable housing, Ruud, a real estate agent, said housing stock could be improved but that a goal of homeownership shouldn't be the only goal.

"Why not a rental?" she asked, adding that the high cost of homes puts them out of reach of many families. "There's nothing wrong with not having your own home. Rentals can be good, and we need to get past single-family homeownership."

Skoe, who this week attended a seminar on methamphetamine abuse, called meth a rural crisis and said lawmakers will make it a priority — from increasing public awareness to limiting access to precursor compounds that can be used to manufacture meth.

On many common issues, "we need to work together in greater Minnesota regardless of party, for unless we do, we will lose out," Moe said.

DFL makes hay out of snowfall

Lawmakers commence squabbles on opening day

BY BILL SALISBURY

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Minnesota legislators know a timely issue when they see one.

So when they convened their 2004 legislative session Monday during the heaviest snowfall of the season, they immediately started debating the state's snowplowing policies.

There were tussles over the concealed-handgun law and spats over changes in committee schedules — all of which suggested a contentious session to come despite admonitions from new Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson about striving for civility.

After the opening-day floor session, House Minority Leader Matt Entenza, DFL-St. Paul, renewed his criticism of Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty's administration for cutting the state's snowplowing budget.

"There's no question that when you have fewer plows on the road, we're going to have more accidents," Entenza told reporters.

DFL lawmakers will push to restore the \$950,000 the administration cut from the Department of Transportation's plowing budget, he said.

House Speaker Steve Sviggum, R-Kenyon,

DFL MAKES HAY, 6A

(over)

DFL makes hay

(continued)

dismissed the criticism as baseless partisan rhetoric. He said Lt. Gov. Carol Molnau, who also serves as transportation commissioner, had assured him the roads would be plowed as quickly as they had been in the past.

"You mean the Democrats are complaining that the Republicans made it snow?" Sviggum joked.

Data from early this winter showed MnDOT was plowing roads in the metro area about as fast as it has in two of the past three years, even though it put fewer plows on the road.

House Majority Leader Erik Paulsen, R-Eden Prairie, said snowplows were "out in full force."

But they weren't able to clear roads for all the lawmakers. Sviggum said seven of the 134 House members missed the first floor session of the year because of the weather. All 67 senators made it to the Capitol.

Snowplowing was just one hot issue lawmakers sampled on the first day of the session.

Even before the two houses convened at noon, a handful of opponents of Minnesota's new concealed-handgun law held a rally in the Rotunda calling for its repeal. The law makes it easier to get a permit to carry handguns for self-defense.

Rep. Nora Slawik, DFL-Maplewood, told the 30 or so people at the rally that more than 27,000 Minnesotans have signed petitions supporting her bill to repeal the weapon law.

"The odds are long," Slawik said, "but Minnesota is ambitious, and we will work hard."

The House sponsor of the gun law, Rep. Lynda Boudreau, R-Faribault, said the small turnout at the rally showed a lack of support for scrapping the law. "I think you have it right there, a handful of people," she said.

Boudreau opposes any changes in the law this year and predicted none would pass. But that won't prevent a lively debate.

Opening day marked the start of Johnson's tenure as Senate majority leader. The Willmar DFLer announced on the floor that he wants to break a long-standing Senate tradition: starting its meetings late.

"Members, let us start our committee meetings and floor sessions on time," Johnson said.

Although he started Monday's session on time, he couldn't end it as quickly as he planned. The Senate's first floor fight lengthened what was supposed to be a largely ceremonial session to more than an hour.

At issue was the route a bill on tobacco sales would take through Senate committees. Sen. Dave Knutson, R-Burnsville, said his tobacco sales-related bill should rightly go first to the Commerce Committee, not to a health policy committee to which senators voted to send it.

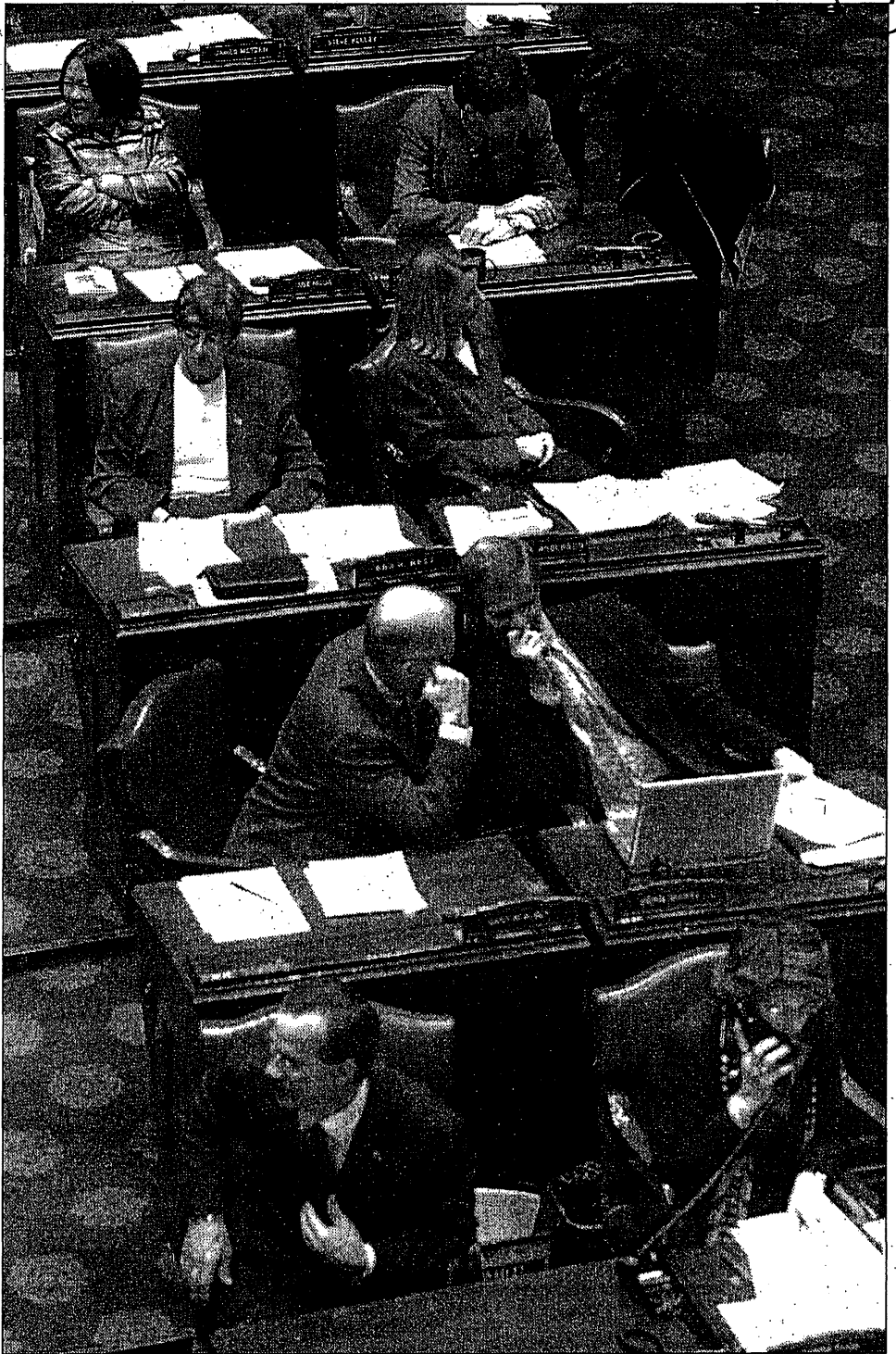
"I object. I strongly object," Knutson said. His objection set off a lengthy floor debate on what usually is a routine motion.

Sen. Becky Lourey, DFL-Kerrick and chairwoman of the Health Committee, sought to soothe the trouble.

"I know that change is often very difficult. ... Sometimes, it's good that change is difficult," Lourey said.

In the end, Knutson, who said the motion circumvented normal procedure, just accepted that the Health Committee would deal with his bill first.

In the House, the opening session marked the end of another tradition. For the first time in 63 years, House Chief Clerk Edward Burdick was not in the chamber. Instead, he was in United Hospital undergoing routine tests after becoming ill last week, said the Rev. Lonnie Titus, the House



State senators study up and take care of last-minute business with seatmates, with colleagues across the aisle or by phone as they await the opening of Monday's session, the first of 2004. Pictured, clockwise from top left, are Democratic-Farmer-Labor Sens. Mee Moua of St. Paul; Larry Pogemiller, Minneapolis; Ellen Anderson, St. Paul; and John Marty of Roseville; Republicans Carrie Ruud of Breezy Point and Mark Ourada, Buffalo; Gary Kubly-DFL, Granite Falls and Ann Rest, DFL-New Hope.



Rep. Nora Slawik, DFL-Maplewood, speaks at a rally calling for the repeal of the state's new handgun permit law, enacted in the 2003 legislative session. The Repeal Conceal Coalition sponsored the event.

chaplain. He expected Burdick, 82, to be released from the hospital later Monday and to return to the House for its next floor session on Thursday.

Even without the guidance of Burdick, who has worked for the House since 1941,

the members completed their first-day duties and adjourned in 23 minutes.

Rachel Stassen-Berger contributed to this report. Bill Salisbury can be reached at bsalisbury@pioneerpress.com or 651-228-5538.

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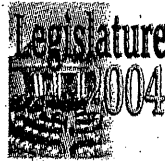
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FRONT PAGE
**Lawmakers are
calling it a 'do
nothing' session**

No solution to budget
shortfall, stadiums and more

By **CANDI WALZ**
Legislative Correspondent

ST. PAUL — It has been deemed a "do-nothing" session by members of both bodies and political parties.

After 3 1/2 months of work, lawmakers adjourned early Sunday morning after meeting over a full day, which began midmorning Saturday.



While many votes were taken in the last hours, there was no solution to the state's \$160 million budget shortfall, bonding bill, stadiums for the Twins, Vikings or Gophers, new laws for sexual predators and no constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages.

Region legislators were disappointed. Whether

Please see **SESSION A10 B**

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