



Tribune photo by Scott Wentz

State Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba, DFL-Long Prairie, discusses recommendations of the Citizen Task Force on Livestock Farmers and Rural Communities during a press conference Monday. At right is Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

# Changes proposed to spur agriculture

FRONT PAGE

By Scott Wentz  
Capitol Correspondent

ST. PAUL — Emphasizing local control and more support for agriculture across Minnesota, rural lawmakers on Monday announced plans to assist beginning dairy operations and promote sustainable farming practices.

The proposed legislation is among recom-

mendations of the Citizen Task Force on Livestock and Rural Communities.

The group included the Minnesota Farmers Union, Minnesota National Farmers Organization, Land Stewardship Project and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota.



Lourey



Kubly

Specifically, legislators highlighted two farm bills they plan to introduce during the 2005 session.

One provides aid to beginning dairy farmers. The state would pay \$1 per hundred-weight of milk produced for up to five years with a maximum of \$10,000 each year.

• Sen. Becky Lourey, DFL-Kerrick, will introduce the bill. She said it's critical to support family farms given that, for instance, 96 percent of Minnesota dairy operations are 200-head herds or smaller.

"We must preserve them as other people talk about big (agriculture)," Lourey said.

• Also, Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, will propose a bill providing \$150,000 annually to continue funding the University of Minnesota's Alternative Swine Program and expand it to include dairy and other livestock systems.

• Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, said the citizen task force's recommendations would go a long way to support small livestock operations.

Koenen, who spent 25 years as a dairy farmer, also noted that the task force wants the Legislature to uphold the rights of local governments to make planning and zoning decisions.

The citizen group's recommendations differ from those of Gov. Tim Pawlenty's livestock farming task force from last year. It noted problems with the siting of new livestock operations and called for a review of county and township planning and zoning laws.

The farm groups agreed with parts of Pawlenty's report, but it didn't address pricing, which is the biggest dilemma facing small farmers, Minnesota Farmers Union president Doug Peterson said.

Farm/ Page A2 B

## Farm B

Continued from A1

Legislators expressed optimism that the new proposals would make it through the Legislature.

"I think there will be some support," said Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba, DFL-Long Prairie, who is authoring the House version of the dairy assistance bill.

Yet Otremba said it's unclear whether dollars are available to support the initiatives in a year when the state is facing a \$700 million-plus deficit. Lawmakers did-

n't put an estimate on the proposals' costs.

The Department of Agriculture is expected to issue a report next week that examines the farm proposals.

• Rep. Gregory Davids, R-Preston, who chairs the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, said he wants to see that analysis before weighing in on the task force proposals.

"We'll certainly give it the recognition it deserves," Davids said, adding that any bill with "a financial implication like that" may have a tough time passing the House.

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WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

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**Committee**  
FRONT PAGE  
**posts bring  
changes for  
lawmakers**

**By Linda Vanderwerf**  
Staff Writer

ST. PAUL — Area lawmakers have a variety of new committee assignments at the Legislature this year.

They are still heavily represented on agriculture committees, but new committee structures have moved some of them away from finance committees and into other areas.



**Koenen**

Smaller finance committees have left many in the House of Representatives with fewer committee assignments.

In many ways, that's OK with them. Fewer committee meetings could leave them with more unscheduled time they can use to promote their own legislation, area legislators said.

• **Rep. Lyle Koenen**, DFL-Clara City, joins about two dozen House members who have just two committee assignments.

Koenen said he's OK with that arrangement and feels he'll learn a lot with his new assignment to the Taxes Committee.

For his first two years in the House, he was on four committees, dealing with agriculture and the environment.



**Juhnke**

Sometimes, "I was always in committee meetings, it seemed," he said, and it was difficult to schedule appointments with constituents visiting

the Capitol.

A lighter schedule will give him more time to attend other committee meetings and testify in favor of bills he's introduced, he said.

• **Rep. Al Juhnke**, DFL-Willmar, is a new member of the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee. The committee sets all policies for the House and determines the daily calendar for floor proceedings.

Juhnke will continue as the lead Democrat for agriculture finance on the Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee. It will be the first time he's not on a transportation committee since coming to the Legislature in 1997, he said.

**Committees/ Page A2**

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**Committees: Structured differently**

Continued from A1

That committee will do the work formerly done by two committees, so his reduction from four to three committee assignments won't necessarily mean a lot less work, he said.

• For Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City, the move to the Higher Education Finance Committee was not something he requested.

Nevertheless, he said he'll be glad to talk about tuition costs and his concerns about the University of Minnesota Extension changes.

"I think the leadership felt they needed to put me in education somewhere," he said.

Urdahl, a middle school teacher, didn't always vote with Republican leadership on education issues in his first two years in the House. "My independence may have been a consideration," in moving him from K-12 education issues to higher education, he said.

"I might have given myself something different," he said.

"But it is education, it's an area I'm concerned about, and it's an area a lot of people are concerned about."

**Juhnke says he suggested  
hike in House allowance  
as part of bipartisan effort**

ST. PAUL — At a committee meeting this week, Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar, brought up the idea of raising the per diem rate for House members from \$56 to \$66 a day.

At the same Rules and Legislative Administration Committee meeting, Rep. Marty Seifert, R-Marshall, suggested raising the monthly housing allowance from \$1,100 to \$1,200 a month for House members who are unable to commute to the Capitol.

Juhnke said he and Seifert discussed the raises before the committee meeting.

"I was approached by the Republican majority to help with it in a bipartisan way, so no one could blame either side," he said.

"Someone had to do it, and I'm a senior member."

The per diem had been the same since 1997, Juhnke said. Legislators are able to claim per diem to cover their daily expenses while they are away from home on legislative business, he said.

Juhnke said he and Seifert felt the increases were needed to help rural members.

Rural members are usually maintaining two households during session, and the per diem and housing allowance help to offset those costs, he said.

Legislators can refuse the supplements or ask for just half of them, he said.

The pay rate for legislators remains at \$31,140 a year and hasn't changed since 1999.

— Linda Vanderwerf

**LOCAL LAWMAKERS' COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

District 13 Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson: Rules and Administration, chair; Agriculture, Veterans and Gaming; Capital Investment; Transportation; Transportation Budget Division

District 13A Rep. Bud Heidgerken, R-Freeport: Agriculture and Rural Development; Education Finance; Education Policy and Reform

District 13B Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar: Agriculture and Rural Development; Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Finance; Rules and Legislative Administration

District 14 Sen. Michelle Fischbach, R-Paynesville: Health and Family Security; Elections; Finance; K-12 Education Budget Division; State and Local Government Operations

District 14B Rep. Larry Hosch, DFL-St. Joseph: Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs; Local Government; Rules and Legislative Administration

District 18 Sen. Steve Dille, R-Dassel: Agriculture, Veterans and Gaming; Finance; Rules and Administration; Environment, Agriculture and Economic Development Budget Division

District 18B Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City: Agriculture and Rural Development; Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Finance; Higher Education Finance

District 20 Sen. Gary Kubby, DFL-Granite Falls: Early Childhood Policy and Budget Division; Jobs, Energy and Community Development; Environment, Agriculture and Economic Development Budget Division; State and Local Government Operations

District 20A Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Madison: Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Finance; Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs; Regulated Industries

District 20B Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City: Agriculture and Rural Development; Taxes

WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

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# Legislators have long list of local bills to introduce

By Linda Vanderwerf  
Staff Writer

Legislators representing west central Minnesota will be working on a variety of issues when the Legislature convenes at noon Tuesday.



Urdahl

Major issues like a bonding bill and a new two-year budget will get most of the attention during the session. Transportation, education and health care will also be part of the broader agenda.

Local legislators will add a long list of their own proposals to the mix, including a Willmar sales tax, dairy legislation, tornado relief for Buffalo Lake and a number of proposals for the bonding bill.



Juhnke

"I think one thing we're going to see are a lot of bills brought back again from last session," said Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City. The stalemate at the end of the session prevented many proposals from becoming law, even if they were passed by both houses.

The Willmar Regional Treatment Center and finding new ways to use its facilities will occupy Willmar area legislators.

They'll also be working on authorizing an extension of the runway at the Willmar Municipal Airport, said Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar.

Legislators/ Page A2

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## Legislators

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The Let's Go Fishing program based in Willmar is asking that some license money be dedicated to their efforts. The group takes seniors on fishing outings. Other chapters are starting around the state, and the movement may spread to other states, Juhnke said.

"We hope to find a source of funding for them," he said.

Juhnke will also introduce a bill to revamp the way the state manages the walleye fishery in Green Lake.

Prinsburg School District 815 will seek special legislation to allow a special levy to repay its tuition debt to the MACCRAY School District and to raise enough money to keep its special education program in operation.

Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Madison, a member of the Regulated Industries Committee, said he will propose legislation to aid develop-

ment of small-scale wind power generators.

Larger producers often get credits intended for small generators, and he'd like to change that, he said.

"We could do a lot better with local wind money," Peterson said.

Constituents have talked to him about cutting the time it takes the state to issue vehicle titles, Peterson said. The titles could be issued quicker if it were handled by county auditors through their driver's license offices, he said.

Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, said he hopes to see work start right away on a bonding bill, which didn't pass in the last session.

"We almost have to do that right away," he said.

Koenen represents Buffalo Lake, which was hit by a tornado in June 2003 and is still waiting for \$635,000 in state bonding money to help repair its streets.

"That should have been done last year," Koenen said. "That's the problem with waiting — even when infla-

tion's low, costs keep going up."

Koenen has other interests in the bonding bill. Montevideo and Granite Falls are looking for money for flood mitigation, and Olivia's ag innovation center continues to seek the funding that was approved but vetoed several years ago.

Sen. Steve Dille, R-Dassel, said he's working on some proposals aimed at strengthening marriage and families, and he'll likely introduce some of that legislation after the session starts.

Dille, a veterinarian, also got a request from a Twin Cities chiropractor for a change in state law to allow her to expand her practice to animals. He said he plans to study that more before agreeing to support the idea.

Nursing homes are a concern, Dille said. The state needs to give nursing homes enough money to provide pay raises for their employees, he said.

Several lawmakers said they would work to end the state's \$2,000 surcharge on nursing home residents who pay with their own money.

Rep. Bud Heidgerken, R-Freeport, said he plans to reintroduce legislation to correct an inequity in funding for Stearns County nursing homes.

Heidgerken plans to work for a tax credit for businesses that install an E85 gas pump. If the high-ethanol fuel were more readily available, more people might buy vehicles that use it, he said.

Heidgerken said he would work to change state law to make it easier for small ski hills to afford liability insurance. The problem was brought to his attention by a group trying to open a ski hill in the Glenwood area.

Urdahl first proposed investment tax credits for the dairy industry last session, and he'll work on that issue again this year.

"It should have an easier time this time, because I expect it to be in the governor's budget bill," he said.

Heidgerken also has a dairy proposal. He wants to change tax laws to help farmers transferring the equipment and buildings from their dairy operation to another farmer.



# Lawmakers unsure how new split will affect House

By Linda Vanderwerf  
Staff Writer

When the Minnesota House convenes at noon today, it will be a very different place from the past two years.

Republicans still hold the majority, but their commanding 81-53 majority has shrunk considerably. Republicans now hold 68 seats, just two more than House Democrats.

Legislators from west central Minnesota said last week they were anxious to get back to work in St. Paul but uncertain about how the reversal for the Republicans would play out during the upcoming legislative session.

"I'm hopeful for a productive session where we can work together and get things done," said Rep.

Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City. "I think we will know more when we get down there; there will be early indications of how it's going to work."

Before the session, the two caucuses disagreed over "little things," said Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar.

Democrats felt staff levels ought to be nearly the same, since the caucuses were almost the same size.

"Right now, the speaker is unwilling to raise the level of employees to near parity," he said last week. "It's not a good way to start out if they say they're going to work with both sides of the aisle."

Democrats also wanted a one-vote margin between Republicans and Democrats on committees.

The margin is two votes or more on all committees, though Sviggum did appoint two Democrats as vice chairs of committees.

"Either it will be the best session we've ever seen, and we'll all work together, ... or come July 1, state employees can pack their bags for a couple weeks, because government will close down," Juhnke said. "I can't predict which way right now."

Splits within a party caucus may be more apparent, because all Republican members will be needed to pass something on a party-line vote, the legislators said.

Urdahl used local government aid for cities as an example.

"I can think of three of us immediately on the Republican side that would not vote to cut LGA, and that would likely stop it right there," he said. "I haven't heard about anybody wanting to do that anyway."

House/ Page A2

## House: Less partisan?

Continued from A1

Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, said he saw a rural-metro split on some issues in the past two years.

"I'm a little worried about this session," Koenen said. "The signal of the election should be we should negotiate, compromise and get things through."

Governing under the new circumstances is bound to be stressful for Sviggum, who grew accustomed to a large majority in the past two years, said Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Madison.

"I think the Republicans are just beside themselves that they have to talk to us now," Peterson said.

He hopes to see more cooperation, but members who were in the House last time it was evenly split haven't given him much hope, he said.

Amendments during House debate are likely to be more important than in the past, he said, and it may be "where gut check decisions are going to be made."

For Sen. Steve Dille, R-Dassel, "It's got to go better than (last) year" when a stalemate stopped major legislation.

"The Minnesota House says it's going to be less partisan now that they're closer, but the Senate Republicans say it's so partisan because it's so close," Dille said. "It depends on the leaders — if the speaker and the minority leader want to get along, they're the ones who set the tone over there."

The Senate's makeup hasn't changed, but the thinly veiled hostility between Democratic and Republican leaders is still likely to be there.

Dille campaigned to be Senate minority leader, but



Koenen



Peterson



Dille



Heidgerken

his fellow senators chose to re-elect Sen. Dick Day of Owatonna to the post. If Dille had been elected, things would definitely have been different, Dille said.

"Then I'd be more confident that we'd finish on time," he said.

Dille said he thinks his campaign for minority leader may still have some influence. In letters to his colleagues, "I gave them some other ways of thinking about things," he said.

Rep. Bud Heidgerken, R-Freeport, said he expects the close split in the House to produce better legislation.

"If it's good legislation, I'll always hear it," he said.

"There's good Democrats and good Republicans, and the minute you stop thinking that, you're in trouble."

Republicans will now need Democratic votes to pass legislation, and "Democrats now have a chance to get things passed with a few Republican votes," he said.

"I'm looking forward to it; I know it will be different than it was two years ago," Koenen said. "Our caucus can't be completely ignored this time."

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FRONT PAGE

# Bird Island just 13 houses from max sewer capacity

## House bonding bill doesn't include funding needed for city's project

By Tom Cherveny  
Staff Writer

BIRD ISLAND — Consider the attention that would come were Willmar told tomorrow that it could build no more new houses.

Then you'll understand the angst in Bird Island, where that order is only 13 houses away.

That's the maximum amount of new houses that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will allow the Renville County community to add to its existing wastewater treatment system,

according to Mayor Paul Heyl.

The city has been trying for 20 years to correct the problem by building a new system and has now lined up more than one-half of the funding needed, Heyl said.

But he said the city is worried that it is again hitting a brick wall.

The bonding bill that is being proposed by the Minnesota House of Representatives does not offer the \$800,000 in bond funding that the city sought as part of the nearly \$11 million project to improve the city's

wastewater system.

That's a disappointment, said Heyl, but far from the city's biggest worry. The city had also expected to be eligible for \$4.6 million in low-interest financing from the Public Facilities Authority fund administered by the Department of Employment and Economic Development.

The House bonding bill does not contain the monies to fund the Public Facilities Authority at the level needed to include Bird Island.

Heyl said the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency had indicated it would revise its point system used to prioritize projects for the wastewater treatment funding to meet Bird Island's needs. So far,

the city's priority is not high enough, said Heyl.

The city is counting on obtaining the \$4.6 million at a 2 percent interest rate to make the project economically feasible in a community of 1,195 people. According to the mayor, a higher rate of interest would make the fees and assessments too great against the 530 households and a few dozen business places in the community.

"It's not fair," he said.

The city's situation is an unusual one. The community built what was considered an innovative waste treatment system in the early 1970s. It combined both the sanitary and storm sewer systems.

Bird Island/ Page A2 B

## Bird Island

Continued from A1

The system's capacity to treat wastes is exceeded every time it rains, causing improperly treated wastes to be discharged into Renville County Ditch 66, which sends its waters to the Minnesota River.

State Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, said the Senate has dedicated over \$30 million toward wastewater treatment and related infrastructure needs in the state, enough to barely keep even with the needs. He said the number of projects waiting in line for state funds has grown from 99 to 205, due largely to prior vetoes of these types of projects by former Gov. Jesse Ventura.

But Kubly said that the Senate's \$30 million appropriation contains the funding needed to make the Bird Island project happen.

The House bonding bills contains \$10 million for these types of projects, far short of the level needed to include Bird Island in the

funding, according to Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Maynard.

Koenen and Kubly both expressed their hope that the conference committee that ultimately shapes this session's bonding bill will provide the funding that Bird Island needs.

Heyl said the city is keeping a close watch on the legislative session. The city had been encouraged to move ahead on the wastewater project in anticipation of receiving the state funding — the \$800,000 grant and the \$4.6 million loan. The mayor said it would be "irresponsible" to do so. The city cannot afford the project without the certainty of the low-interest financing from the state, he explained.

The lion's share of the remaining costs would be funded through a combination of grant and low-interest monies from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development program.

"It's been a real struggle," said the mayor.

He said the town's greatest concern is the prospect of being prohibited from adding any new houses or businesses. "That'll kill us," he said.

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# Area flood projects holding their ground in bonding bills

By Tom Cherveney  
Staff Writer

MONTEVIDEO — House and Senate bonding bills now advancing in the state Legislature should keep flood mitigation projects moving forward in Granite Falls, Montevideo and Dawson, according to area legislators.

Funding for a proposed recreational trail connecting Granite Falls to an existing Wegdahl to Montevideo trail is uncertain, however.

The House bonding bill just released contains \$21 million for statewide flood hazard mitigation projects to be administered by the Department of Natural Resources. The Senate's bonding bill offers \$32 million, while Gov. Tim Pawlenty includes \$20 million in his proposal.

Language in the House bill includes the intent to dedicate unspecified amounts for projects in Granite Falls, Montevideo and Dawson, according to House Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Maynard. He said the funds are discretionary, meaning that the DNR would appropriate them depending on a variety of factors.

Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, said the Senate version of the bonding bill specifies amounts for each commu-

nity, although the DNR still retains discretionary authority over them. The department could shift funds if matching federal dollars were not available for particular projects, for example.

That is a possible issue in Montevideo. The Senate has earmarked nearly \$2 million for a proposed \$7.3 million project to upgrade the levee system. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is expected to fund about \$4.2 million of the project.

The federal funds probably won't be available until 2006, said Steve Jones, Montevideo city manager. The state has \$75,000 in planning funds allocated for Montevideo so that engineering work can continue in anticipation of federal funding and construction in 2006, he said.

The Senate's bonding bill sets aside \$2.6 million for flood mitigation projects in Granite Falls, said Kubly. Those funds would be primarily devoted to ongoing efforts to remove flood-vulnerable properties in the city's commercial district.

The Senate's bonding bill also includes \$200,000 for a levee improvement planned in Dawson on the Lac qui Parle River.

Changes are certainly possible when the differences in the House and Senate bonding bills go to a conference

committee. However, legislators Koenen, Kubly and Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Madison, all said they are optimistic that funding for flood mitigation will remain in the DNR's budget.

They are uncertain about the fate of funding for a proposed recreation trail between Granite Falls and Wegdahl. The Senate bill includes \$100,000 for planning and engineering work to advance the project, said Kubly.

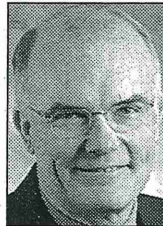
The House bill does not contain any funding for any Minnesota River Trail development, according to Koenen and Peterson. Koenen and Peterson had authored legislation appropriating \$150,000 for trail development between Granite Falls and Wegdahl.

Peterson said the funds were taken from the Granite Falls to Wegdahl project when the measure went to committee amid talk of opposition to the trail plans from the Twin Cities and Western Railroad. The trail is proposed to run on the outer portion of the railroad's right of way between Granite Falls and Wegdahl.

Peterson said he had hoped to keep the \$150,000 in the bonding bill for trail development near Big Stone or Milan, but the funding did not make it into the bill that is now going to the floor for a vote.



Koenen



Kubly



Peterson



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# Ethanol

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"If we lose that, it goes into general revenue (fund), and what's it doing to our Ag budget?" Heidgerken said.

"The urgency is to stop that money from disappearing from the Ag budget," said Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

Once funding is secured, "there's plenty of places for the money to go after that," he added.

Perhaps one of the most popular uses for the unused ethanol subsidies is a proposal from Heidgerken.

Heidgerken proposes tax credits and state grants for businesses that install pumps to sell an 85 percent blend of ethanol fuel, called E85.

From Minneapolis to Fargo on Interstate 94, drivers can find only one E85 pump, in Monticello, Heidgerken said.

"We need to make that available to people," he said.

The grants would provide 70 percent

of the \$70,000 cost of installing an E85 pump, Heidgerken said.

When his bill is heard in committee next week, he said, he plans to offer an amendment to use the funds left over for township and county roads.

## Falling subsidies

Ethanol subsidies were \$69 million a year at their height, said Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar.

That dropped to \$44 million a year when Pawlenty reduced subsidies in his last budget.

Though the governor says he will make no further cuts to ethanol, his proposed budget includes less money for ethanol.

That's because some plants will be losing their subsidies in the next two years, and Pawlenty plans to put the \$10 million into the general fund.

"We would like to capture that and keep it in rural Minnesota," Juhnke said. "Every year we'd like to see it go out as grants."

Juhnke said the money could be used

to help new ethanol plants or to develop new renewable energy technology.

"We're looking for the next ethanol," Juhnke said. There's talk of developing technology to make ethanol from small grains and research into wind, solar and hydrogen power, he said.

"There are certainly a lot of ideas floating around on how to use those dollars," said Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls.

Many of the approximately 100 E85 pumps in the state are in west central Minnesota, Kubly said.

Pawlenty has talked about wanting to expand ethanol use in the state, and the ethanol subsidy proposals would help do that, he added.

In the Energy Subcommittee he chairs, discussions have tended to focus on renewable energy, like biodiesel, hydrogen and biomass, Kubly said.

Plans for using the money will continue to develop if the money is made available, Koenen said.

Heidgerken said he believes his E85 proposal may have the best chance of

passing, because the governor wants to see the state increase its use of ethanol.

"The governor has said he would support something like that," Kubly said of the E85 bill, which he authored in the Senate.

Kubly said Pawlenty might support some of the other proposals, too, but "they'd like to recapture it for deficit reduction, of course," he said.

Other legislators didn't necessarily share Heidgerken's optimism.

"It's been kinda quiet from the governor's office," Koenen said. The Ag Department hasn't fought the proposals, but hasn't really supported them, either, he added.

Dille said he hoped the ethanol recapture would end up in the final agriculture bill in one or both chambers of the Legislature.

He's likely to serve on that conference committee, he said, and he'd watch over the proposal and try to keep it in the final version that would be sent to the governor.

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FROM PAGE

## Legislators want to use ethanol money for rural development

By Linda Vanderwerf  
Staff Writer

Over the next few years, several Minnesota ethanol plants will exhaust their state subsidy payments.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty wants to keep the "extra" ethanol money in the state's general fund, but rural Minnesota lawmakers have a different idea.

Several bills in the Legislature would capture subsidy payments no longer going to ethanol plants and use that money for use in rural Minnesota.

It's a bipartisan effort to keep future ethanol funding at current levels in the state Department of Agriculture budget.

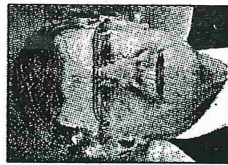
Legislators know they need to move this year if their plan is to succeed.

"We've actually talked about it for several years," said Sen. Steve Dille, R-Dassel. "It's already gone down quite a bit now."

Ethanol funding makes up 40 percent of the total Ag Department budget, said Rep. Bud Heidgerken, R-Freeport.



Dille



Heidgerken

Ethanol/ Page A2

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# Property tax freeze bad news, officials say

By Linda Vanderwerf  
Staff Writer

A local property tax freeze proposed at the Legislature could interfere with street improvements and economic development efforts, local officials say.

Separate proposals in the House and Senate tax committees seek freezing property taxes at 2005 levels.

The House Tax Committee removed the provision Wednesday afternoon "at least for now," said Rep. Lyle Koenen, Clara City, a member of



Koenen

before work on it is done.

Both committees are working on their omnibus bills, which are expected to be finished by the end of the week. The House cuts the overall allocation for state aid to

the committee. The measure is still alive in the Senate.

Koenen said it's possible the idea could be amended back into the House bill

cities, while the Senate increases it.

Local officials aren't pleased with the freeze idea.

"We could not pursue any street or utility improvements," Granite Falls City Administrator Bill Lavin said this week.

When cities or counties sell bonds to pay for projects, they use property taxes to pay off the debt. Without the ability to adjust their tax bills, they can't issue new debt.

Earlier this week, the Granite Falls City Council voted to sell bonds based on the esti-

mated cost of this year's street improvements. It's an attempt to beat the clock, in case the rules change.

## Political motives

The property tax debate is framed differently in each chamber of the Legislature, said Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar.

For Republicans in the House, it's an attempt to control property taxes, he said.

"That's extremely popular in the public arena," Juhnke said. "The farmers and

lakeshore people are screaming at us about property taxes."

Democrats in the Senate are trying to make Pawlenty admit that his stand against raising state taxes has led to dramatic property tax increases in some areas, he said.

"It's an issue that certainly cuts both ways," said Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar.

"I don't think it's good public policy to take that option," he added.

Tax/ Page A2

## Tax

Continued from A1

However, as long as Pawlenty continues to talk about his no-tax pledge while local property taxes are going up, the issue is a legitimate one, Johnson said.

Democrats estimate that property taxes statewide have increased \$1 billion in the past two years.

The freeze proposal is necessary to spur discussion and "for the governor to understand that a billion dollars in property taxes is a tax," Johnson said.

Sen. Steve Dille, R-Dassel, said he doesn't support the freeze, either. He said he thinks it's a way for Tax Committee Chairman Larry Pogemiller, DFL-Minneapo-



Dille

lis, to "stick it to the governor."

Dille said he doesn't like the idea of raising taxes, but he might favor a temporary income tax surcharge over other ideas.

"Somebody's got to raise taxes around here to get enough revenue to make it work," he said.

Juhnke said he expects the provision to be removed from the final tax bill.

"These bills are really formed thinking about nego-



Pogemiller

tiations," he said.

Johnson wouldn't go that far. "I've learned not to predict" in the Legislature, he said.

## No streets

The city of Olivia has done some street projects in the past few years and is preparing to sell bonds to reimburse the city's reserves.

"If we aren't able to issue debt, it will detrimental to our cash flow," said City Administrator Mike Funk.

Freezing property taxes does not take inflation or growth into account, he said.

"Each city and county are different; each city and county have different needs," Funk said. "It really comes down to a local control issue."

Property taxes are "thoroughly debated around

town," said City Administrator Rob Wolfington said.

"I would trust the judgment of local elected officials in making those kinds of local tax decisions over our good friends in St. Paul," he said.

Wolfington and Willmar City Administrator Michael Schmit said street repairs would be a major concern under a property tax freeze.

"We're falling further and further behind in street maintenance," Schmit said.

The administrators said they were not advocating tax increases but were in favor of allowing each community to make its own decisions.

"These should be local decisions," Schmit said.

"The people who live in Willmar should determine their level of property taxes."

WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN  
THURSDAY 16,927  
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INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN

FRIDAY 7,904

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## 1200DU (H) Koenen backs continued military health care coverage (20B)

ST. PAUL — State Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, spoke on the House floor on Monday in support of legislation that will allow members of the military to suspend their MinnesotaCare health coverage when in active duty and re-enroll when their tour ends.

"This issue was brought to our attention by Mike Vogt, a member of the National Guard in Olivia," said Koenen. "He experienced difficulties with medical coverage while in Kosovo and suggested a good option for making this easier."

While in active duty, military personnel are covered by Tri-Care, a federal program.

Because he still had his MinnesotaCare while in Kosovo, Vogt had trouble getting some of his family's medical bills paid, as both health care programs thought the other one should pay. His MinnesotaCare monthly premiums were also increased, from \$12 per month to \$194, an annual total of \$1166 for insurance

coverage he didn't even need because of the Tri-Care coverage.

Under this new bill, military personnel can choose to suspend their MinnesotaCare coverage for the period of time they are covered by Tri-Care, and re-

enroll at the end of their duty for the same premium they had previously.

"This is a good bill for both the state and members of the military," said Koenen.



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# Shaken baby syndrome measure in both omnibus bills

By Linda Vanderwerf  
Staff Writer

ST. PAUL — A bill that would require hospitals to show new parents a video about the dangers of shaking a baby could be on its way to the governor's desk.

The bill would also require licensed child-care providers to watch the video.

The video provides information on the dangers of shaking a baby or very young child. The aim is to educate parents and child-care providers and to prevent injury.

The Senate passed the bill this week on a unanimous vote. A similar measure is included in the House omnibus health bill.

Several bills about shaken baby syndrome were introduced this fall, including those sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar; Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, and Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

Johnson said this week that he is confident the measure will become law this year.

Granite Falls native Matt Johnson and his wife, Charlene, spurred the lawmakers' interest in the issue. Their 9-month-old son, Vance, died after allegedly being shaken by a licensed day-care provider in February 2003.

The provider was indicted for second-degree murder in Vance's death but was acquitted by a jury last year.

The Johnsons, along with members of the support group they attend, lobbied for the bills, and Matt Johnson testified before several legislative committees.

"I just don't want to see

another family go through what our family went through," he said in an interview with the Tribune in January.

Most children who are shaken survive their injuries but often suffer permanent brain damage. About 20 percent of children die within the first few days after being shaken.

## Let's Go Fishing still in line for state funding

ST. PAUL — Funding for expanding the Willmar-based Let's Go Fishing organization is included in the final versions of environment and natural resources bills passed by the House and Senate.

The organization uses volunteers to provide fishing outings for seniors who wouldn't be able to go fishing otherwise. The only expense to the seniors is the cost of a fishing license. The organization began in Willmar and has expanded to a half dozen chapters statewide.

The state funding would help start about 20 new chapters across the state and start a revolving fund to help start new chapters in the coming years.

## Heidgerken on education conference committee

ST. PAUL — Rep. Bud Heidgerken, R-Freeport, is one of five Minnesota House members on the K-12 Education Conference Committee.

Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, is one of five senators serving on the environment and natural resources conference committee.

Other area legislators served on conference committees that have already finished their work. Sen. Steve Dille, R-Dassel, served on the bonding bill conference committee earlier in the session. Dille and Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar, served on the ethanol conference committee, which wrapped up its work two weeks ago.

Also on Tuesday:

■ Senators approved a new system of figuring child-care payments to include both parents' income. Just one income is used under current law.

■ The House approved 85-48 a bill providing grants to organizations that help pregnant women find alternatives to abortions. The bill forbids money from going to groups that refer women to abortion providers. The House bill and one senators passed differ, so a conference committee will have to work out differences.

■ A House-Senate conference committee agreed on legislation allowing conservation officers to use guns equipped with silencers for wildlife management. Crews are shooting double-crested cormorants on Leech Lake because the birds are overpopulating the area and decimating the lake's walleye population, lawmakers said.

■ The House passed a bill 132-0 that prohibits people convicted of a sex offense or other violent crime from obtaining legal custody of children who are not theirs by birth or adoption. Lawmakers pushed for the provision after a registered sex offender was granted custody of a 9-year-old girl and later assaulted her. The bill has not yet passed the Senate.

— Capitol correspondents  
Don Davis and Scott Wentz  
contributed to this report

WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN  
WEDNESDAY 16,927  
MAY 18 2005



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INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN  
WEDNESDAY 7,904  
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# Area lawmakers see hope in special session

By INDEPENDENT STAFF

State Sen. Gary Kubly hopes for a strong education funding bill to emerge from the special session of the Legislature, he said Tuesday.

The regular session ended Monday with several bills still to be determined, and Gov. Tim Pawlenty immediately called lawmakers into special session.

"It was surprising the governor called the special session so quickly," Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, said. "When Gov. Arne Carlson would call a special session, he would wait until an agreement had been reached. That is the fiscally responsible thing to do because some estimate that a special session could cost up to \$25,000 per day.

"While I had hoped we would finish on time, I believe a special session will bring a better education funding solution than if we had simply allowed the governor to move forward with a proposal that is funded through shifts, funding delays and that increases property taxes by more than \$140 million. Our schoolchildren deserve better."

State Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, said bipartisan cooperation will be important in the special session.

"With bipartisan effort and support, we passed a strong state bonding bill, a minimum wage increase and an ethanol bill," Koenen said. "With major issues such as education and health care remaining, it is important that we continue to work in a bipartisan way to finish our work."

Koenen said the spending amounts between the House and the Senate bill are not

that far apart. The differences lie in who will pay for them.

"I am optimistic that with a commitment to finishing the job, we will arrive at a balanced, moderate approach to our state budget," said Koenen.

Sen. Jim

Vickerman, DFL-Tracy, said it shouldn't be expected that budget bills are bare-boned.

## 2005 LEGISLATURE

"While no one can say how long the special session will last, there was movement last week when the governor agreed to increase the cigarette tax to provide more revenue," Vickerman said. "If we want to preserve Minnesota's quality of life and provide the services that are important to people, it will cost money."

While some criticized the regular session as being unproductive, Vickerman said some important things were achieved.

"The Legislature had many accomplishments during the ... session," he said. "Agreement was reached on a bonding bill that provides money for many important repair and building projects across the state, and the rural economy got a shot in the arm with approval of a bill to double the amount of ethanol used in gasoline.

"I was a co-author of the ethanol bill because I believe the industry has brought many good-paying jobs into our communities and I would like Minnesota to remain a leader in this field.

"Under budget bills approved by the Legislature, our communities will be safer as sex offenders are locked away for longer sentences and it will be harder to purchase the ingredients used to make meth, the state's public colleges and student financial aid initiatives will receive funding, and funds are made available to help members of the military currently serving our country and veterans returning from war."

Kubly said health and human services is a key bill to resolve fairly in the special session.

In addition to education and early-childhood efforts, "legislators will also be discussing health and human services funding," he said. "This includes MinnesotaCare, which is an insurance program for working Minnesotans who do not have access to other affordable health care. This is an important issue to rural Minnesota because it impacts farmers as well as people who work for small businesses that are unable to provide health insurance coverage."

Kubly says the Senate version of the human services bill also helps health-care providers.

"This bill eliminates cuts to rural hospitals and pharmacy reimbursements that will help keep these essential health care services available to rural residents as well as those living in the metro or regional cities," he said.

"I hope for a quick resolution to the impasse at the state Capitol. Our children are worth the extra effort it will take to get a quality education proposal that can pass both the House and Senate and be signed by the governor."



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**Pawlenty sticking  
up for taxpayers**

There has been a lot of controversy about the recent transportation proposal that was unfortunately voted out of the House of Representatives with the votes of a handful of metro Republicans and many liberal DFLers.

We, as rural legislators, joined our rural DFL colleagues, Representatives Lyle Koenen (DFL, Clara City), Kent Eken (DFL-Twin Valley), Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth), Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji) and Mary Ellen Otremba (DFL-Long Prairie), in voting no on the Erhardt amendment. This amendment hurts rural Minnesota by rais-

ing our gas taxes by 50 percent, or 10 cents per gallon, and then outrageously changes the funding formula to take money that would go to rural highways and gives it to the metro areas for transit funding. Millions of dollars that would otherwise go to rural Minnesota would be taken from our pockets and transferred to the metro area for bus, rail and other transit projects.

Thank goodness Gov. Pawlenty is sticking up for the taxpayers and rural Minnesota in promising to veto this very unfair proposal. We are hopeful in getting a fair and balanced transportation package assembled in the Legislature, but not at the expense of our rural roads and treating our taxpayers in an unfair manner.

Please contact Gov. Pawlenty at 1-800-657-3717 and thank him for sticking up for rural Minnesota.

♦ Rep. Rod Hamilton, R-Mountain Lake, and Reps. Randy Demmer (Hayfield), Tony Cornish (Good Thunder), Scott Newman (Hutchinson), Dean Urdahl (Grove City), Bud Heidgerken (Freeport), Dan Severson (Sauk Rapids), Greg Blaine (Little Falls), Torrey Westrom (Elbow Lake), Bud Normes (Fergus Falls), Dean Simpson (New York Mills), Morrie Lanning (Moorhead), Marty Seifert (Marshall) and Judy Soderstrom (Mora)



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MARSHALL, MN  
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**New senior prescription  
drug benefit**

**To The Editor:**

If you, your parents or a disabled relative is on or qualifies for Medicare, now is the time to educate yourself on whether to enroll in the new Medicare prescription drug plan, and if so, which plan to choose. Enrollment began Nov. 15, and will extend, penalty-free, to May 15, 2006.

Enrollment is voluntary, so you will have to choose if you want to enroll. The benefit begins Jan. 1, 2006 by enrolling in a Medicare Advantage plan or one of the private prescription drug plans offering Part D policies.

Medicare Part D may not be right for everyone, but one in three seniors will be eligible to have almost all of their drug expenses paid, so it pays to be informed of your options.

Luckily, there are resources for help understanding the new Part D benefit.

Minnesota Senior LinkAge Line, 1-800-333-2433. The Linkage Line is the State Health Insurance Assistance Program for Minnesota as designated by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Counselors will make home visits.

Beneficiaries and their families

can call the line and speak to a specially-trained staff person from 8 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 8 a.m.-noon on Saturdays. Medicare, 1-800-633-4227, open at all times. Minnesota Senior Federation, 651-645-0261, 10 a.m.-noon, 1-3 p.m. weekdays.

If you are connected to the Internet, you can compare plans

online at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). The National Council on Aging Web site [www.benefitscheckuprx.org](http://www.benefitscheckuprx.org) can show you how you would benefit from all state and federal programs.

**Rep. Lyle Koenen •**  
**DFL-Clara City**



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Weekend Focus

# Shaken baby

FRONT PAGE

## Family's loss could lead to laws to reduce infants' injury and death

By Linda Vanderwerf  
Staff Writer

It only takes a few moments.  
That's all the time it takes for a frustrated adult to go from comforting a crying baby to losing control.  
That's all the time it takes to shake the life out of a defenseless infant.

For the families and friends affected by shaken baby syndrome, those few seconds change the rest of their lives.

Matt and Char Johnson's 9-month-old son Vance died after being shaken Feb. 11, 2003, at the home of a licensed day care provider in Apple Valley.

The Johnsons and other members of a support group for families with shaken children are channeling their grief and loss into an effort to change state law.

They are looking for ways to educate the public about shaken baby syndrome — brain damage caused by shaking or throwing a child. Three-quarters of shaken baby syndrome victims survive their injuries but many suffer permanent brain injury.



Tribune photo by Bill Zimmer

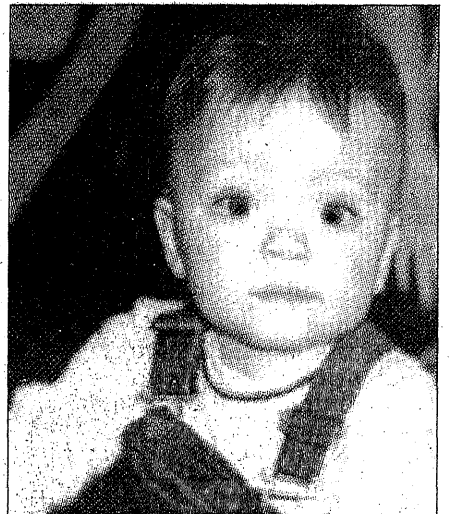
**ABOVE:** Mary Potter, social worker at Yellow Medicine Family Services in Granite Falls, asked legislators to introduce a bill about shaken baby syndrome.

Submitted photo

**RIGHT:** This picture of Vance Johnson was taken nine days before he died of shaken baby syndrome.

"I just don't want to see another family go through what our family went through," said Matt Johnson, a native of Granite Falls. "I don't want to see another child go through what our son went through in the last few minutes of his life."

**Shaken/** Page A9 A



WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN  
SATURDAY 16,927  
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# Shaken: About 20 percent of shaken babies die; 75 percent live with brain injuries

Continued from A1

Most of the families in their support group have children who survived being shaken, Johnson said, but many of those children face a lifetime of struggle because of their injuries.

Several bills inspired by the Johnsons and their friends have been introduced at the Legislature this year.

Lawmakers from western Minnesota have proposed requiring hospitals to show new parents a video about shaken baby syndrome. New York State already has a similar law.

Another bill adds a requirement for licensed day care providers and legal non-licensed providers to view a video as part of their training.

Another would allow parents to learn about complaints against childcare providers. Now, that information is confidential.

## Vance's story

Matt Johnson's mother, Barb Gustafson, and her friend Mary Potter marvel at his ability to talk about the family's tragedy and to lobby for legislation.

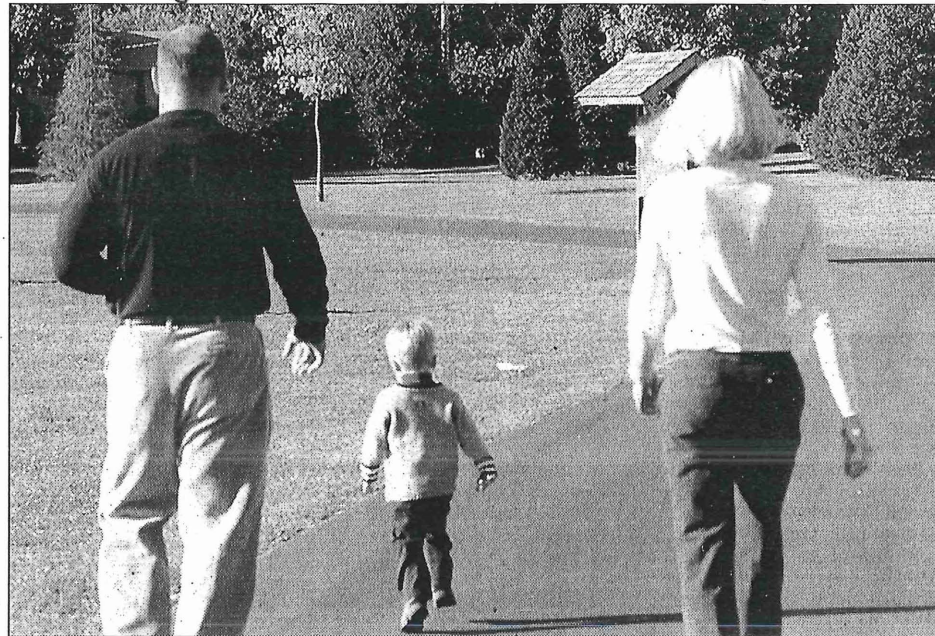
As they listened to him talk this week, both had tears in their eyes.

"A few seconds of anger can lead to the death of a child," said Potter, who is social services supervisor for children's services in Yellow Medicine County. Gustafson also works for the county family services department.

Gustafson pointed to a photo of a wide-eyed Vance, overalls askew as he played at his grandparents' home. "This was taken nine days before he died," she said.

"They were at our house on Sunday, and they were perfect, ... then a little over a week later," she said as her voice trailed off.

Vance was "essentially dead within moments of being shaken, he was shaken so severely," Johnson said.



Submitted photo

Matt and Char Johnson take a walk with their surviving son, Vance's twin brother.

Emergency doctors and pediatric specialists at Twin Cities hospitals knew right away that Vance must have been shaken, Johnson said.

Because of the severity of his injuries, doctors conducted a full medical assessment on Vance's twin brother, who had been at the same day care. He was not injured and is now a thriving toddler.

The day care provider was indicted for second-degree murder but acquitted in a jury trial last summer. The family's belief that Vance was shaken stands firm on the testimony of numerous specialists who studied his injuries.

"Charlene and I never in a million years thought we would be in this kind of a situation," Johnson said. "We never thought our little boy would be walking to school by himself."

That mental picture of their twin sons walking hand in hand to their first day of school has been wiped out "because of somebody's inability to handle a situa-

tion," he said.

"It doesn't end with parents and grandparents," Gustafson added. Vance had cousins, aunts and uncles and many other relatives, she said, and his death created ripples of grief through all those lives.

"It affects friends and family and just acquaintances even," Johnson said. The couple had friends living in another state who "felt almost paralyzed," he said, because they didn't know who they could trust to care for their children.

The family had chosen their day care provider from a list of licensed providers in Dakota County, Johnson said. They learned after their son's death that there had been 11 separate allegations of abuse against that provider. That information had not been available before.

Those allegations were not allowed at the trial of the provider, Gustafson said.

"Confidentiality laws do protect a provider," said Potter.

"That is a flaw in our system."

## Education works

An eight-county pilot program in New York led to a sustained 50-percent reduction in shaken baby injuries, according to information from the Twin Cities Metro Shaken Baby Syndrome Prevention Program.

Potter got involved with the legislation last fall, when a letter about the New York law landed on her desk.

"With what Barb was going through in her life, I couldn't just let this sit," she said. "I felt like I needed to do something — I called (Sen.) Gary Kubly and said, 'We need to begin protecting our children.'"

Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, said he believed his bill would receive wide support in the Legislature.

"I wouldn't think it would be very controversial," he said. "There is a small cost

## Shaken baby syndrome facts

Babies' necks are too weak to support their heads. As a result, when a baby is shaken, the brain moves inside the skull, causing blood vessels to tear away and blood to pool inside the skull.

About 20 to 25 percent of children who are forcefully shaken or thrown die of their injuries. Those who live may have permanent brain damage and many complications.

Normal play, use of infant swings or even a fall from a low surface such as a bed or couch will not cause shaken baby syndrome.

In Minnesota from 1999 to 2001:

- 50 cases a year resulted in death or an inpatient hospitalization.

- 68 percent of victims were male.

- 82 percent were under age 1.

- 68 percent of perpetrators were parents or their partners.

- 18 percent were day care providers.

## Symptoms

Symptoms can be vague, depending on the severity of injury. They may include irritability, sluggishness, vomiting and a poor appetite.

In severe cases, a child loses consciousness immediately. A caregiver sometimes will put the child to bed and hope a nap will improve the condition.

By the time they receive medical attention, these children may be comatose or not breathing.

Shaken babies may have other injuries, including broken bones, bruises or burns. Bleeding inside one or both eyes is also common.

## Prevention

Never shake a baby. Don't slap or hit a child of any age on the face or head.

Learn about child development and what is normal behavior for children at different ages.

Learn healthy coping strategies to handle stress and control possibly harmful behavior.

If you think you may lose control, lay the baby in a safe place and go into another room. Call a family member or a friend for help.

Screen potential child care providers carefully.

Sources: <http://www.webmd.com>, Minnesota Department of Health, <http://www.aboutshakenbaby.com>

involved, but there isn't any cost to the state."

The cost for hospitals should be minimal — the purchase of a video that can be used many times, he said.

"Gosh, if it spared one child, I think you'd be ahead of the game," he added.

Potter said the average hospital cost for a shaken baby cost exceeds \$30,000. Because shaking a baby is child abuse, child protection workers and

law enforcement also become involved. If a case goes to trial, the monetary cost continues to climb.

- Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, introduced the hospital video bill in the House.

"I think there's a lot of new parents that aren't aware of how serious that can be, life threatening, in fact," he said. "It's a good time to present that information to new parents, at the hospital."



INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN  
FRIDAY 7,904  
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**LIVESTOCK LEGISLATION** (20B)



**SIDEWAYS THUMB:** The early lines are drawn in discussions over livestock issues in this year's Minnesota legislative session.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty and his livestock task force have one set of recommendations for how the state should manage or work with livestock operations. It was countered Monday by DFL lawmakers, including Rep. Lyle Koehn, and DFL-leaning organizations who want to stress support for small and new farmers.

Critics of the governor's task force say it could fuel large, corporate feedlots in rural Minnesota and they worry about the loss of local decision-making ability. The DFL plan would ensure that feedlot regulations remain in the hands of township and county boards.

The governor's task force appears to want more uniformity among feedlot location decisions, and says it is important to remember that decisions should factor in private-property rights. The task force also is tackling odor and impact on small business issues.

State lawmakers have their hands full with the budget problem this year. But the livestock debate will create its own share of contention.