

WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE Online

A 'green' agenda now comes with lots of energy

Tom Cherveney

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2012

MONTEVIDEO — Put three dozen people together with an interest in clean water and the environment, and where does the discussion lead?

Straight to renewable energy and the prospects that the Minnesota Legislature will take steps to encourage its development in western Minnesota.

"The public interest is there, the public is behind that," said Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, as he and Reps. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, and Aaron Peterson, DFL-Appleton, joined for a meeting on environmental issues for the upcoming session. They met Wednesday at the Milwaukee Road Depot in Montevideo for a session sponsored by the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, which represents more than 80 environmental organizations in the state; and local sponsors including Clean Up our River Environment and the Land Stewardship Project.

Although the session has yet to begin, the three legislators said renewable energy already has wheels. They expect a host of bills and amendments to be considered during the session.

Much of the debate will focus on whether the state should set renewable energy objectives, as Gov. Tim Pawlenty wants, or hard and fast standards. Kubly, who is soon to be announced as the chairman for the Senate's energy subdivision of the Energy and Natural Resources committee, said he favors standards.

"I am just not sure anybody can do it without a mandate," he said.

Like the state's experience with ethanol, the three legislators also voiced their support for bills that would encourage local or community ownership of wind and other renewable energy projects.

Koenen said it is "very important to him" that renewable energy development remains focused on local ownership.

Both Kubly and Peterson emphasized the economic importance of a renewable energy industry to their rural districts, and the state as a whole. A potential "multibillion-dollar jolt" is how Kubly described the development of wind and other renewable energy sources on the scale being promoted. The governor called for producing 25 percent of our electric power from renewable sources by 2025. There are other proposals calling for 20 percent by 2020.

"It would be the biggest economic development thing we've seen," said Kubly.

Despite their enthusiasm, the legislators cautioned that renewable energy proposals face major challenges this session. Rural Electric Associations and municipal utilities have already made known their opposition to renewable energy mandates, they noted.

They also anticipate legal challenges to measures that would favor the development of Minnesota-owned renewable energy projects. The legislators are well aware of wind-power developments in South Dakota that are targeting Minnesota electrical markets. They'd like to see community-based or Minnesota-owned projects given preference, despite possible conflicts with interstate commerce law.

There are also marked divisions among proponents of renewable energy. Peterson noted that Xcel Energy wants hydroelectric power it purchases from Manitoba, Canada, counted toward the renewable energy standard or objective. He said that he suspects that the governor may want to include these and other out-of-state sources as well. "What are we going to count?" he asked.

There may be lots to overcome, but Kubly suggested that renewable energy has the momentum needed to move forward.

“Because the people support it,” he said.

For the very same reason, the Kubly said he believes that legislators will start asking the state’s utilities to look at how they can reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. He believes it is only a matter of time before greenhouse gas emissions are regulated in some manner, perhaps through the carbon trading model proposed by Gov. Pawlenty. “I think it is going to happen because the people want it,” he said.

Koenen says he's ready to fight for fairness

Two terms have convinced him rural Minnesotans have not been treated fairly

By Tom Cherveney
tomc@wctrib.com

CLARA CITY — Lyle Koenen is often described as a quiet sort of guy who is willing to work behind the scenes to get the job done.

But there is a well-stoked fire in his belly, too.

Koenen, 49, said that two terms as a member of the minority party in the Legislature have convinced him that rural Minnesotans have been

treated unfairly by the Republican party and the suburban legislators who have been ruling the roost in St. Paul.

He's said he's running for a third term on a demand for "fairness." Metropolitan areas have been gaining while rural areas lose. "We're paying more for less," said Koenen, who adds that the struggle goes beyond rural and urban differences.

He said low and middle income workers, family farm-

ers and business owners have continued to struggle while the most affluent have been handed tax breaks. Rural schools are hurting, the cost of a higher education is soaring, and everything from rural transportation needs to health care is being neglected, the DFL incumbent for the District 20B House seat said.

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Koenen

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Koenen says he's bringing these issues to this campaign, one that sees him spending long hours on the go. Koenen said he is well aware that his is a targeted race.

Koenen knows a little bit about adversity too. He's farmed for 27 years and worked as a truck driver and a bus driver to make a living.

He said his first term in the Legislature was all about being up against adversity. "It seemed all we could do was object," he said.

"It felt like you were getting run over."

Things improved in the last session, when the DFL picked up enough seats to force some honest dicker-

ing, according to Koenen. Now, he said that he is "cautiously optimistic" that DFLers will pick up more seats and he can begin to see the accomplishments



Koenen

he's always hoped for in St. Paul.

He wants fairness in taxes. "We're not doing a good job," he said. State cuts and newly-imposed fees mean rural areas pay more, said Koenen. Property taxes in rural communities have climbed by 11 and 12 percent, while owners of \$250,000 homes and properties of greater values in the suburbs have only moved upward by eight percent, he said.

Health care is the issue that people raise with him most often when he's knocking on doors. He wants to see the self-insured and others working in jobs that do not provide health care allowed to buy into the Minnesota Care program.

It would provide them with the cost savings of being in a large buying group.

He also believes there is much the state can do to standardize the paperwork and administrative costs in providing care.

He'd also like the state to negotiate for better prescription drug prices from manufacturers, while also making sure that rural pharmacists are not short changed in the process.

The state needs to live up to the promise it made earlier to provide more education funding. Changes are needed in how schools are funded. The current, per pupil formula is not fair to children in rural districts, he said.

He proposes a funding system based on a school's sections instead of strictly enrollment.

Koenen said Gov. Tim Pawlenty has not been willing to invest in our transportation system other than to add debt and "make our children pay for our roads." Koenen said he's leery of the transportation amendment due its wording, but wants to see more funding provided transportation. He'd consider a gas tax increase if he could be assured of "fairness" in how the monies are distributed to rural road needs.

There is a big job to do in St. Paul, but Koenen said he can't think of a better time to get to it. Renewable energy offers great promise to agriculture and rural areas. Rural communities could enjoy job and population growth if rural legislators can wrestle fair treatment for infrastructure, health care and educational needs, he said.

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Van Binsbergen challenges Koenen in District 20B

Scott Van Binsbergen of Montevideo is making his second bid for the state Legislature with the support of the Republican Party. He is challenging incumbent DFLer Lyle Koenen of Clara City, who has served two terms as a state representative.

District 20B includes Chippewa, Yellow Medicine and Renville counties.

Why are you seeking this elected position?

Koenen: It is important that rural Minnesota gets the same consideration as the metro area when budget and tax policy is set. Budget-balancing responsibility was laid heavily on rural Minnesota. We must continue investing in people through education and infrastructure, roads, etc. to ensure a prosperous future for our state.

Van Binsbergen: It's clear to me that rural Minnesota needs a leader. Our towns are shrinking and our businesses are leaving. I am raising my family here, and I have a business that employs 140 people. I want to see our area grow and prosper, and I believe I can provide leadership.

Why should the state's role be in providing access to health care and how should that be achieved?

Lyle Koenen

Age: 49
Family: Wife, Sandy; four sons
Occupation/employer: Farmed for 27 years, truck and bus driver
Political experience: Two terms in Minnesota House of Representatives



Koenen

Koenen: Health care costs have grown beyond many working Minnesotans' paychecks. A few things that could be done to address this problem include reducing paperwork for providers, allowing for negotiated bulk purchases of prescription drugs through local pharmacies. Also allow small employers, families and individuals to purchase coverage through MinnesotaCare or the state employee plan. This could save small employers and families as much as 31 percent on the cost of health insurance. Using the state's Health Care Access Fund for health care and not back-filling the state's general fund will also help working Minnesotans with health care availability.

Scott Van Binsbergen

Age: 35
Family: Wife, Clarissa; daughter, Whitney, and son, Andrew
Occupation/employer: Owner of Van Binsbergen & Associates Inc. and Health Providers Inc.



Van Binsbergen

Political experience: Named Southwest Minnesota Entrepreneur of the Year in 2004; worked for U.S. Rep. Vin Weber 1991-92 and Sen. Rudy Boschwitz 1994-95

Van Binsbergen: The health care issue is a major problem in Minnesota as well as the entire country. It's clear that employers and employees can't afford 30-40 percent rate increases every year. I believe the main focus of any major health care proposal should be reduced cost and more choice for family medical care. I think to start with we should be removing discrimination in tax code against the uninsured and self-employed, and making the total cost of health care

insurance or cost fully tax-deductible. Incentives to entice providers to come and stay in Minnesota would also be something to look at.

What changes, if any, are needed in how the state provides funding for education at all levels?

Koenen: A few years ago the state promised to take over a greater share of education funding and this still needs to be done. This will provide fair and adequate funding for all students across the state. Early childhood education funding was increased this past session but is still not up to levels before the 2003 budget cuts. Early childhood education funding still needs to be addressed, including all-day-every-day kindergarten. College tuitions are too high and funding needs to be directed at lowering these cost to students.

Van Binsbergen: I have two immediate concerns. First, the funding inequities that exist between metro vs. non-metro school districts. Second, the declining school enrollment is a big problem. With the right lawmakers in office, the funding issue can and will be fixed. For rural Minnesota to survive and thrive, we also need to grow. Our long-term goal should be to create new jobs for this region. I have a history of creating

jobs, and I will work with community leaders, entrepreneurs and government officials to make our communities vibrant again. I am an optimist and believe the best is yet to come.

Discuss your views on how to bridge the "urban v. rural" divide that often exists in the Legislature?

Koenen: The first step is to look for issues that we have in common and work together to move forward on them. Examples would be Minneapolis and St. Paul on school funding and local government aid. If all rural legislators and Minneapolis-St. Paul legislators pulled together on these issues, progress could be made. There are metro-area legislators who understand that Minnesota is one state. There is potential in working with these individuals.

Van Binsbergen: This area is in need of leadership. The job of state representative is about making things happen. It is becoming increasingly evident that the battle is not so much Republicans v. Democrats, but more rural Minnesota vs. the metro area. All of the power, money and economic strength are in the metro. If this area is going to move ahead, we need a legislator that can effectively communicate with the metro-dominated Legislature about what's happening in rural Minnesota.

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INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
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Lyle Koenen
DFL-Clara City
(Incumbent)



1. Please explain why you are running for office.

The most important task is to represent the majority of the people in District 20B as accurately as possible in St. Paul. After all our government is a representative democracy. It is important that rural Minnesota get the same consideration as the metro area when the Legislature sets state budgets and tax policy. In rural Minnesota we pay a higher percentage of our income in state and local tax than do residents of the wealthy outer-ring suburbs. Minnesota ranks high in many quality of life measurements, thanks to investments in people through education and investment in infrastructure, roads, etc. It is important to build on these successes and continue these forward-looking investments in our future. I've enjoyed working with people from our part of the state on the issues important to rural Minnesota and the entire state.

2. List what you view as the top three or four priority issues for the district.

Health care costs have grown beyond

Koenen PAGE 8C D

Koenen

FROM PAGE 1C

many working Minnesotans' paychecks. A few things that could be done to address this problem include reducing paperwork for providers, allowing for negotiated bulk purchases of prescription drugs through local pharmacies. Also allow small employers, families and individuals to purchase coverage through MinnesotaCare or the state employee plan. This could save small employers and families as much as 31 percent on the cost of health insurance. Using the states Health Care Access Fund for health care and not backfilling the states general fund will also help working Minnesotans with health care availability. Our children deserve a high-quality education anywhere in the state, including rural Minnesota. If our children are going to compete in an ever-increasing world economy we need to be aggressive about early childhood education, K-12, and higher education. College tuition is too high, some graduates have student loans as large as house payments. Renewable energy has a lot of potential for our part of the state. It can provide good jobs, keep profits here at home, help farmers and the environment.

3. What personal qualities would you bring to the position?

I farmed for 27 years, 25 as a dairy farmer. My wife Sandy, our sons and I are members of Bethany Reformed Church in Clara City. Our boys attend MACCRAY schools. We are lifelong residents of west central Minnesota. I've experienced life in rural Minnesota and now represent District 20B in St. Paul. I graduated from Maynard High School and Willmar Vo-Tech from the ag production course. I am running for my third term (two-year terms) in the Minnesota House of Representatives. I have served on the Ag and Rural Development Finance, Environment Policy, Ag Policy, Environment Finance and Tax committees.



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LETTER: Reasonable balance needed on issue of eminent domain

Thursday, March 23, 2006

By From Rep. Lyle Koenen
District 20B, DFL-Clara City

One of the hot issues we are facing during this legislative session is eminent domain. Although the power of eminent domain has long been used by local governments as a tool for economic development, a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision has created new concerns nationwide. These concerns are prompting state governments to consider redefining when the use of eminent domain should be allowed.

To begin with, governments most commonly use the power of eminent domain when they need to acquire property that is necessary for a public use, such as a road or highway. In other cases, it is used to acquire areas of a town that have become run down, or blighted. The power of eminent domain allows for the purchase of the property without the consent of the owner, but as stated in the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, just compensation, or fair market value, must be paid to the property owner. Over the years the definition of "public use" has expanded to include economic development plans which use eminent domain seizures for commercial development that improves the community. Recently, the Supreme Court ruled that local governments are allowed to take private property and hand it over to another private party, unless prohibited by state law. Critics contend this changes the intent of eminent domain law and damages personal property rights. Supporters argue that it is necessary for the improvement of communities and must be protected. This has led many states, Minnesota included, to introduce their own legislation that more clearly defines how they want the power of eminent domain used in their state.

The initial proposal that was introduced at the Minnesota State Legislature includes some components I would like to see considered.

First of all, it asks for a formal process to define blight, making it much less subjective and arbitrary. The legislation would also prohibit local governments from using eminent domain to transfer private residential property to another private entity, and would lower the cost of dispute resolution for the parties involved. The bill also includes compensation for loss of going concern, which would help out those businesses that are forced to move and then suffer a decline in business because of their new location.

As with most policy issues, at times the pendulum tends to swing too far one way and needs to be brought back to a reasonable middle ground. I believe that this session we will pass legislation on eminent domain, and I am hopeful that it will strike a balance between the rights of private property owners and the need for local governments to improve and develop their cities.

Please feel free to contact me with your suggestions and feedback. I can be reached by phone at 1-800-341-5897, by mail at 337 State Office Building, 100 Martin Luther King Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55155 or by e-mail at rep.lyle.koenen@house.mn.

Detailed reports can be found in the print edition.

Readers leaving their full name and e-mail address in the article comment area will have their comment considered

for online publication.

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Candidates file across the region to run in election

The following candidates have filed to run for state or local office in west central Minnesota in the Nov. 7 general election.

Candidates for county offices file in their county auditors' offices. Most legislative candidates file with the secretary of state.

In the case of legislative districts that do not cross county lines, candidates may file with county auditors.

The list of state and county candidates is reported on the secretary of state's Web site. An (I) in the listing below denotes an incumbent.

Filing for school boards with even-year elections is currently open, too.

Candidates may file for office through 5 p.m. on July 18. They have until 5 p.m. July 20 to withdraw their candidacies if they choose.

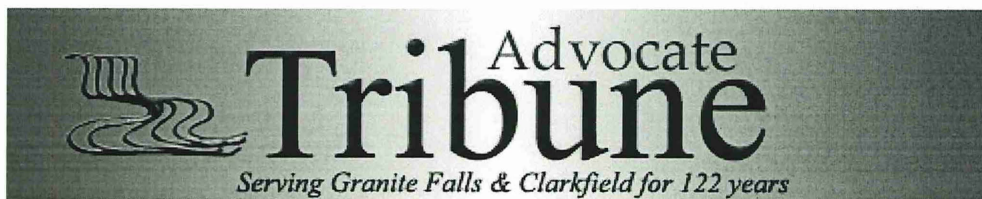
The Tribune will publish a full list of area candidates after filings close.

State Senate

- District 18: Hal Kimball, DFL, Annandale.

State Representative

- District 18B: Dean Urdahl (I), Republican, Grove City.
- District 20A: Mike Bredeck, Republican, Madison.
- District 20B: Scott Vansbergen, Republican, Montevideo.



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Print Page

News

Kubly, Koenen preview legislative session

By Sarah Elmquist Editor

The 2006 legislative session is about to begin, and State Rep. Lyle Koenen and State Senator Gary Kubly both say they hope things will run more smoothly than the last.

There is a strong indication that the session will stick to its 12-week schedule, with the main task being to pass a bonding bill to fund work and infrastructure projects around the state.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty has already offered a proposal on a list of projects, carrying a cost of just under \$900 million. The house and senate are expected to offer their own versions in the first part of the session. "Right now, it appears the three sides will be fairly close in terms of the total size of the bill, so an agreement should come relatively quick," said Koenen.

Kubly said that he expects some policy discussion about eminent domain. A potential re-definition for the term 'public use' could pose more restrictions for local governments' ability to seize land, but Kubly said that that was an issue that would primarily effect the metro areas.

Koenen said that they may hear legislation on issues like strengthening assessments of sex offenders, protecting citizens from identity theft, and other issues associated with undocumented immigrants.

"With all of these issues, it is my hope that common sense will prevail," said Koenen.

Kubly agreed, saying he hoped that arguments about an amendment banning same sex marriages wouldn't become a distraction.

"It really isn't needed," he said of the amendment, adding that the state already has a law which bans same sex marriages and a state supreme court decision on the definition of marriage.

Kubly is on his way to tour Yucca Mountain in Nevada this week as part of the Joint House and Senate Electric Energy Task Force, and plans to give the Advocate Tribune an update upon his return.

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Getting started

Bills look to help new dairy farmers achieve their dream

By IRENE VOTH

Jon Kaiser owns 40 of the 180 cows on the Dodge County organic dairy farm where he works. They give him a small portion of the milk checks the dairy farmer receives. But more than additional income, the cows are equity — a step toward his 8-year-old dream of owning a dairy farm.

"I may be kind of late getting started," he said.

Kaiser, 37, grew up in Albert Lea. A town-kid who has little memory of his grandfather's farm, he was likely unaware of the 1980s farm crisis. And as a young adult, he probably didn't notice the disappearance of 5,700 dairy farms and 80,000 dairy cows from Minnesota's landscape from 1992 to 1998.

Rather, he was inspired to become a dairy farmer by an article he read in a 1998 issue of *The New Farm* about "a younger person who started from scratch on a grass-based dairy."

Kaiser was working on a hog farm at the time, but through the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization promoting farmland stewardship, he was connected with Dan French, who is now his employer/mentor in organic dairying and rotational grazing.

While he has been learning and building up his cow-equity, dairy numbers in Minnesota have continued to decline. From 2003 to 2006, the state lost 1,000 dairy farms and 34,000 dairy cows. At the same time, the market value of agricultural land rose as fast, or faster, than the rest of Minnesota's real estate, estimated at 10 percent or more per year.

Although Kaiser's cows were paid for last year, the real estate situation continues to make his dream a lofty one.

"Rochester is one of the highest-priced land areas in the state," he said, explaining that the salary and benefits of his wife's clerical job at the Mayo Clinic also makes it difficult to consider relocating to areas where farm land may be cheaper or there may be land available for rent.

"Farmers tend to rent their land to bigger farmers," Kaiser said of the Rochester-area landowners, adding that they may be more comfortable renting to a "proven" farmer than to a beginner.

With the price of agricultural land what it

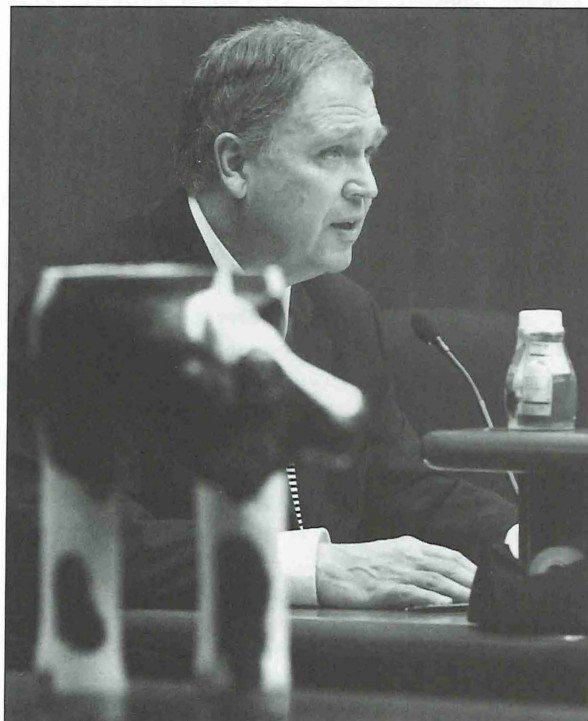


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

Rep. Dean Urdahl, sitting behind his cow statue and with a Grip 'n Go milk container, presents his proposal to provide an income and corporation franchise tax credit for qualifying investments in dairy operations during a hearing of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee March 15.

is, Kaiser said purchasing is impossible, since he cannot establish "cash flow" — the ability to make the land produce enough money to make the required land payments.

Several bills being considered by the

Legislature this year may be of some help to Kaiser and others like him who want to become dairy farmers.

HF3843, sponsored by Rep. Lyle Koenen (DFL-Clara City), would expand the Rural Finance Authority's beginning farmer program by authorizing credits against state income and/or franchise tax for a person selling or renting to qualified beginning farmers. The bill awaits action by the House Taxes Committee. Its companion (SF3437), sponsored by Sen. Gary Kubly (DFL-Granite Falls), awaits action by the Senate Taxes Committee.

"A landowner willing to cash rent his land to a beginning farmer would receive a tax credit equal to 10 percent of the gross rental income. If the rental agreement calls for a shared rent, that would move up to 15 percent. If the landowner is willing to sell his land to a beginning farmer, that credit would be set at 5 percent of the sale price," Koenen said.

The bill would also offer a tax credit of up to \$500 to beginning farmers who take an approved financial management course.

Another bill, HF3366, sponsored by Rep. Andy Welti (DFL-Plainview), requires a study and report on the feasibility of a public-private partnership to fund a milk volume production loan program. The revolving loan program would make low-interest loans of at least \$500 per cow for as many cows as the commissioner would recommend per dairy producer, as part of the producer's dairy capital improvement project. Its companion is SF3017, sponsored by Sen. Paul Koering (R-Fort Ripley). Both bills await action on the floor of their respective bodies.

Finally, HF2879, sponsored by Rep. Dean Urdahl (R-Grove City), provides a one-time credit of 10 percent or up to \$50,000 for expenditures made to modernize dairy operations. While the bill may not be directly helpful to beginning farmers, it would assist people like French, who may want to employ and mentor additional future farmers. It awaits action by the House Taxes Committee. Its companion (SF2862), sponsored by Sen. Dallas Sams (DFL-Staples), awaits action by the Senate Taxes Committee.

Kaiser said for legislation to reverse the dairy decline in Minnesota, it would have to "make it attractive to people exiting the dairy business to sell to beginning farmers rather than the highest bidder." 🌾



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Minnesota Twins Sports, Inc. President Jerry Bell sits behind a drawing of the proposed new outdoor stadium for the Twins as he listens to proponents testify before the House Taxes Committee April 19. Team and Hennepin County officials would like the Legislature to authorize a 0.15 percent sales tax increase without voter approval to fund the county's share of the ballpark.

officials led by Jerry Bell, president of Twins Sports, Inc., explained the content of HF2480, sponsored by Rep. Brad Finstad (R-New Ulm).

The bill sets forth the means by which a Minnesota Ballpark Authority would be created to build a \$390 million, open-air ballpark on the edge of downtown Minneapolis. The plan includes access infrastructure at an additional cost of \$90 million.

Financing provisions in the bill include raising the sales and use tax collected in Hennepin County by 0.15 of 1 percent, or approximately 3 cents on \$20. Imposed by ordinance rather than referendum, the tax would continue until the county's share of the construction expenses financed through the sale of bonds would be repaid.

"There is no agreement if a referendum is required," said Mike Opat, Hennepin County commissioner.

Opat said the bill "does not seek to circumvent state law" regarding imposing the tax increase by ordinance rather than referendum, but not everyone agreed.

"I think I understand the county's interpretation (of the law), but I don't necessarily agree with it," said Rep. Paul Kohls (R-Victoria).

The issue of whether the citizens of

Hennepin County support the tax increase was brought forth by Rep. Phil Krinkie (R-Lino Lakes), who chairs the committee. His inquiry about whether any public surveys had been conducted to find out was answered in the negative, but county officials said numerous public hearings had been held.

The same issue was approached from a different perspective by Rep. Dan Dorman (R-Albert Lea), who asked if anyone supporting the ballpark had won a recent election.

Hennepin County Commissioner Randy Johnson said voters had preferred him to two anti-ballpark opponents in the most recent election.

Other questions to the Hennepin-Twins team included whether there has been an economic impact study to establish whether there is actually an economic benefit to businesses in the vicinity of a ballpark.

Bell's response was that one had been done many years before, but not recently. "Whether or not there is an economic impact that benefits the state of Minnesota is largely an academic debate that goes on forever," he said.

The Twins' contribution to the plan includes \$130 million upfront. The team would also be responsible for any cost overruns on the ballpark itself; \$1 million per year for capital improvements; operations; a 30-year use

agreement; a \$250,000 contribution each year for youth activities; and up to 18 percent of the gross sales proceeds if the team should be sold.

The committee was to take a road trip April 20 to the team's former home city, Bloomington, to hear more testimony and possibly take action on the bill. If necessary, the three-meeting series would be completed back home in St. Paul April 21.

A companion bill (SF2297), sponsored by Sen. Steve Kelley (DFL-Hopkins), awaits action by the Senate Taxes Committee.

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AB Marshall Independent 5-17-06

AREA VOTES TUESDAY:

The Minnesota House of Representatives passed an Omnibus Transportation bill containing language that clarifies language on the proposed Constitutional Amendment to Dedicate the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax, specifies money for bonding, contingent on the amendment passing and spends \$83 million in trunk highway funds for road construction, among other provisions. The vote on final passage of the bill was 100-31.

Seifert: Y
Finstad: Y
Magnus: Y
Peterson: Y
Koenen: Y

MAJOR AMENDMENTS OFFERED:

The House rejected an amendment that would make failure to wear a seat belt a primary offense. If adopted, police would be able to pull drivers over solely for not wearing a seatbelt. It is

currently a secondary offense in Minnesota. The vote was 40 in favor and 89 opposed.

Seifert: N
Finstad: N
Magnus: N
Peterson: N
Koenen: N

The House rejected an amendment that would change the proposed constitutional dedication out of the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax for transportation from the current 60 percent for roads and 40 percent for transit to 80 percent for roads and 20 percent for transit. The amendment failed on a vote of 43-89. A "yes" vote was for the 80 percent dedication to roads, rather than 60 percent.

Seifert: Y
Finstad: Y
Magnus: Y
Peterson: N
Koenen: Y

The House rejected an amendment that would disallow drivers under 18 from having more than one passenger in the vehi-

cle with them, if under age 21 and disallow them from driving between the hours of midnight and 5 a.m., unless accompanied by a parent. The vote was 22 in favor and 110 opposed.

Seifert: N
Finstad: N
Magnus: N
Peterson: N
Koenen: N

The House rejected an amendment to strip all bonding ability from the bill. This language would fund over \$2 billion in road construction projects around the state if the proposed constitutional amendment passes in the November election. The amendment to strip out the bonding failed 59 in favor and 72 against. A "yes" vote was to strip out the bonding provision and a "no" vote was to keep it in the bill.

Seifert: N
Finstad: N
Magnus: N
Peterson: Y
Koenen: Y

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Supporting our troops on Memorial Day and beyond

By Rep. Lyle Koenen
DFL-Clara City

Since the late 1800s, and officially since 1971, our country has set aside the last Monday in May to honor those who have died in all of America's wars. As this

Memorial Day approaches, I want to take the opportunity to recognize all of the young men and women bravely serving our country overseas, and to thank the veterans who have served our country in years past.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the Minnesota National Guard has mobilized over 11,000 soldiers to 30 countries. On March 2 of this year, 2,600 Minnesota National Guard Soldiers left Camp Shelby, Miss., for Iraq, the largest mobilization of the Minnesota National Guard since World War II.

Whatever your views on the war, we can all agree on the need to support our Minnesota soldiers. This year's legislative session has been marked by broad bipartisan agreement on several proposals to do just

that.

First, we provided funding to expand the State Soldiers Assistance Program, providing a safety net to Minnesota veterans and their families facing hardship. We authorized the creation of Higher Education Veterans Assistance Office, which will help ease the transition for new veterans seeking higher education onto college campuses. Finally, we approved a new "one-stop Web site" for Minnesota veterans, offering one place veterans can go to learn about programs and benefits they are eligible for.

This year the Legislature authorized funding to ensure that the five Minnesota Veteran's Homes across the state receive the resources to continue offering the highest quality of care to our aging veterans. This new legislation will also require public and private employers to provide unpaid leave for family members of soldiers who are killed or injured in the line of duty. And, as a result of recent demonstrations at military funerals, it is now a misdemeanor to protest within 500 feet of a gravesite, funeral facility, or memo-

rial service.

Minnesota is currently fourth in the nation in the number of our citizens serving overseas, even though we rank only 19th in total population. While other states have struggled to meet recruitment goals, the Minnesota National Guard has consistently met or exceeded its goals, reflecting the value Minnesotans put on military service. Our soldiers and military families have courageously volunteered to serve our country. It's up to us to thank them for their service in every way we can.

It's easy to get caught up in traditional start-of-summer picnics, backyard barbecues and end-of-the-school-year plans during the Memorial Day weekend. But this year, more than in years past, perhaps we should take some time to remember, reflect and honor those who have given their all in service to their country, and to pray for the safe return of our brave Minnesota soldiers serving overseas.

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INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
FRIDAY 7,904
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Van Binsbergen will challenge Koenen in 20B

Longtime Montevideo businessman Scott Van Binsbergen has filed for the state Legislature in District 20B as a Republican.

He will challenge incumbent DFLer Rep. Lyle Koenen of Clara City.

The district includes Chippewa, Renville and part of Yellow Medicine counties.

In a news release, Van Binsbergen talked about his rural ties.

"I have grown up in rural Minnesota, went to high school in Montevideo, graduated from Moorhead State University, worked on our family farm and I own a business on main street," he said. "I know the importance of a strong, rural Minnesota, and my candidacy will be dedicated to our rural way of life."

In his news release, he cited education, transportation, providing affordable healthcare, and improving the agricultural and rural business economy as his top priorities.

"These issues are the key to keeping our small towns vibrant and prosperous," Van Binsbergen said. "As a state representative, I believe I would be able to use my experience and knowledge to make an immediate impact in these areas."

Van Binsbergen is the co-owner of several different businesses based out of Montevideo, his news release said.

20B

INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
WEDNESDAY 7,904
APR 26 2006



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Medicare enrollment deadline quickly approaching

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By Rep. Lyle Koenen
DFL-Clara City

There has been a lot of talk in the news over the past few months about the new Medicare prescription drug coverage, better known as Medicare Part D. This plan, which started on Jan. 1, is available to everyone who is on or qualifies for Medicare and is designed to help with the high cost of prescriptions. Many of you have made your choice and already enrolled; for those of you who have yet to sign up, I would encourage you to act soon as the deadline is May 15.

Everyone with Medicare is eligible for Medicare Plan D, regardless of income and resources, health status or current prescription expenses. It is offered by Medicare — approved insurance companies and other private companies and varies in cost, the drugs covered, and the pharmacies used. For this reason, it can be confusing to know what plan is best for you. Fortunately, there are many sources of good information about the new

Medicare prescription drug benefit available. I encourage you to take some time to review all available information and contact the resources to get all of your questions answered.

ENROLLMENT

Enrollment in a Medicare prescription drug plan began last November and ends May 16, 2006. Enrollment is voluntary, but if you enroll before May 16, you will immediately qualify and pay a lower premium. After May 16, higher premiums will be charged. There is an exception to the rule

for people who do not enroll because they currently have other creditable drug coverage but later lose that coverage. You should contact your current plan to determine if you should enroll during the initial enrollment period.

After 2006, you will be able to change prescription plans once a year between Nov. 15 and Dec 31. There are also special circumstances that allow people to change plans during the year.

PLANS OFFERED

There are two ways to get Medicare prescription drug cov-

erage. You can join a Medicare prescription drug plan or you can join a Medicare Advantage Plan or other Medicare Health Plans that offer drug coverage.

Like other insurance, if you join, you will pay a monthly premium, which varies by plan, and a yearly deductible (no more than \$250 in 2006). You will also pay a part of the cost of your prescriptions, including a co-payment or coinsurance. Costs will vary depending on which drug plan you choose. Some plans may offer more coverage and additional drugs for a higher monthly premium.

There is extra help for people with limited income and resources. Almost one-in-three people with Medicare will qualify for extra help and Medicare will pay for almost all of their prescription drug costs. You can apply or get more information about extra help by calling Social

Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) or visiting www.socialsecurity.gov.

To get more information and to review and compare plans, go to www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE. The Senior LinkAge Line at 1-800-333-2433 is also a good resource in Minnesota.

Medicare prescription drug coverage can help provide peace of mind by protecting you from unexpected drug expenses. Even if you don't use a lot of prescription drugs now, you should still consider joining as added protection from unexpected drug costs in the future.

Please feel free to contact me with your suggestions and feedback. I can be reached by phone at 1-800-341-5897, by mail at 337 State Office Building, 100 Martin Luther King Blvd., St. Paul, Minn. 55155 or by e-mail at rep.lyle.koenen@house.mn.

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INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
THURSDAY 7,904
APR 13 2006



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Property tax relief fairness needed

By Rep. Lyle Koenen
DFL-Clara City

Over the past three years, budget cuts that were passed by this administration have created financial shortfalls in our towns and cities. Most notable were the cuts to Local

Government Aid, as well as county and school funding cuts. To make up for these losses, property owners have stepped up and paid the price. In fact, over the past three years, property taxes have increased by over \$1 billion, and could increase by as much as \$588 million in 2006.

On Monday, the House Republicans introduced their plan to offer property tax relief. They are proposing a property tax rebate, which sounds pretty good at first glance. However, under further examination, I cannot consider this rebate to be a fair and reason-

able solution, for a lot of reasons.

First off, it's another stab at Greater Minnesota. Despite the fact that the most significant cuts in LGA were made in rural Minnesota, 68.7 percent of the property tax rebate money is going to the metro area. For example, the average homeowner in southwest Hennepin County will receive a \$400 rebate, while the average homeowner in our part of the state will get \$114. Rural Minnesota suffered the pain of the LGA cuts and yet the relief goes to the wealthy suburbs. The plan also completely ignores renters, who have paid more than their share in property taxes as part of increasing rents.

Another problem with this rebate is that it's contingent on the cigarette "fee" that was passed last session. If the Minnesota Supreme Court upholds the current ruling that this fee is illegal, the rebate plan is out the window. In other words, don't celebrate yet — there is a very good chance that instead of a surplus

in the tax relief account, we'll be facing a large deficit left by the loss of the tobacco tax.

Finally, this is a one-time solution that fails to address the long-term problem that led to skyrocketing property taxes in the first place. I am a strong supporter of property tax relief and I would love to send money back to our residents. But, this needs to be done in a fair, responsible way that addresses permanently the underlying causes of the property tax increases — inadequate school funding and the payment shifts onto counties and cities for state services.

Please feel free to contact me with your suggestions and feedback. I can be reached by phone at 1-800-341-5897, by mail at 337 State Office Building, 100 Martin Luther King Blvd., St. Paul, Minn. 55155 or by e-mail at rep.lyle.koenen@house.mn.

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INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
WEDNESDAY 7,904
MAR 8 2006



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Koenen backs proposal to fund nursing homes

By Rep. Lyle Koenen

DFL-Clara City

In response to the dire financial needs of nursing homes and other long-term care providers throughout the state, I recently co-authored legislation to increase their state funding. The bill proposes a 5-percent funding increase over the current budget and would generate about \$193 million in additional revenue for nursing homes in the next year; two-thirds of this is earmarked for staff. The increase would be funded by closing some corporate tax loopholes, a plan that met with opposition from the governor last session.

Funding for our nursing homes has been

drastically slashed in the last few years. In fact, two years ago, the state Legislature froze the payment rates to nursing homes because of a massive budget deficit.

In addition, another \$32 million was trimmed from other nursing home payments. Largely because of these cuts, one in four of Minnesota's nursing homes is at risk of closing; nine closed last year alone and more than 30 closed in the past 10 years.

We tried last session to restore some of these cuts. I supported an amendment that would have provided a 5-percent increase in each of the next two years for nursing homes. The amendment failed by a vote of 66-59, resulting in a final bill that provided less than a 2-percent increase, which doesn't even

cover inflation.

The staff members at our area nursing homes are dedicated and compassionate and they care deeply about the residents. These cuts have had a big impact on them. There are fewer staff persons with greater responsibility and greater numbers of residents to care for; improvements to buildings and equipment are also delayed due to lack of funding.

This session, we again have the opportunity to increase funding for nursing homes. During these first days, there has been a lot of talk of cooperating to get the important work of the state done. I am hopeful that this spirit of cooperation will prevail and result in a significant funding increase for the nursing homes in Minnesota.

20B

Candidates' fundraising all over the board

By Carolyn Lange
clange@wctrib.com

Local candidates range from being flush with cash to being a shade away from being in the red when it comes to campaign funds.

Candidates were required to file reports with the Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board detailing how much they had raised and spent between Jan. 1 and Aug. 21.

The reports were made public this week.

There is a wide spread in funds in the three area Senate races.

The most cash-rich candidate at this point is incumbent Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, who has a cash balance of \$63,309.

Kubly had \$41,914 in the bank at the end of 2005 and has raised another \$32,015 so far this year. He's spent \$10,619 on his campaign in District 20.

Kubly's opponent, Republican Roger Dale of Hanley Falls, raised \$9,866 as of Aug. 21. The report says he has a cash balance of \$9,094 but he has nearly \$3,000 in unpaid campaign expenses.

District 13 incumbent Sen. Dean

Johnson, DFL-Willmar, follows Kubly when it comes to available cash on hand.

The report puts Johnson's cash balance at \$38,950. He had \$18,672 in the bank in 2005 and raised \$29,975 so far this year. He's spent \$9,696.

Michael Cruze of Willmar, who is challenging Johnson in the DFL Primary, has raised \$8,275 and has total expenditures of \$10,938. About half of those expenditures are listed as "unpaid" in the report.

Finance/ Page A2

Finance

Continued from A1

The Republican candidate for District 13, Joe Gimse of Willmar, has raised \$29,988 this year, which is almost penny-for-penny what Johnson has raised.

Gimse has spent \$4,920 so far, which is about half as much as Johnson has spent. But Gimse had less than \$200 in the bank at the end of 2005, which puts his current cash balance at \$25,261.

The lowest-priced Senate campaign so far is in District 18, according to the reports.

Incumbent Sen. Steve Dille, R-Dassel, has \$4,816 cash on hand.

Dille's DFL opponent, Hal Kimball from Annandale, raised \$6,930 this year but has spent a good chunk of it. He has \$1,446 left in his bank account.

There is also financial disparity among House candidates.

Challenger Bonnie Wilhelm, a Willmar Republican, has a clear lead over incumbent Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar, when it comes to campaign funds in the District 13B race.

Wilhelm has raised more and spent less than Juhnke.

Wilhelm added \$13,536 in new money to her existing \$9,675 bank account. She has spent \$4,771 so far this year, leaving a cash balance of \$18,734.

Juhnke has raised \$9,990 this year. He had \$3,376 remaining from 2005 and has spent \$5,837 leaving a cash balance of \$7,328.

In District 13A, incumbent Rep. Bud Heidgerken R-Freeport, has out-raised and outspent his DFL opponent, Bruce Shuck of Sunburg, on a nearly 6-to-1 ratio.

Heidgerken has a cash balance of \$16,180. Shuck, who is facing Heidgerken for the third time, has \$2,392 available.

Incumbent Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Appleton, and his Republican opponent Michael Bredeck of Madison are raising and spending money on a fairly even level in their District 20A race.

Peterson has a cash balance of \$20,808 and Bredeck has \$17,364.

Bredeck, however, started his fundraising efforts without anything in the bank. Peterson had a balance of \$6,249 remaining from 2005, giving him a head start with fundraising this year.

In District 18B, incumbent Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City, has a cash balance of \$11,505. His DFL opponent, David Detert of Litchfield, has a cash balance of \$15,127, but also has a \$5,000 loan listed on the report.

In District 20B, incumbent Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, is lagging behind with a cash balance of \$5,052. His Republican challenger Scott Van Binsbergen of Montevideo has \$9,506 in the bank.

WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN
SATURDAY 16,927
SEP 2 2006

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WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE *Online*

Editorial: In 20B - Van Binsbergen

Tribune Opinion

West Central Tribune - 10/31/2006

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House 20B voters have a choice between DFL incumbent Lyle Koenen of Maynard and GOP challenger Scott Van Binsbergen of Montevideo. This is a choice between legislative experience and business-public affairs experience.

Koenen is a quiet farmer who likes to work behind the scenes to accomplish things. While he has supported rural energy efforts and has concerns about cuts in local government aid and K-12 funding, he is not an outgoing legislator.

Van Binsbergen is a successful businessman with a decade-old company now employing more than 140 people. He has public affairs experience from working for U.S. Rep. Vin Weber and Sen. Rudy Boschwitz. He also ran in 1994 for a Minnesota House seat, losing to Doug Peterson.

A candidate who turns 36 on Election Day, Van Binsbergen has the energy and leadership necessary to be an outgoing, dynamic representative for his district. His business experience will be beneficial in helping meet the economic needs of this district. He would bring needed change to this district's representation.

The West Central Tribune endorses the election of Van Binsbergen in House 20B.

20B

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INDEPENDENT
MARSHALL, MN
THURSDAY 7,904
OCT 19 2006

FRONT PAGE

Making Minnesota work

■ Speaker of the House Steve Sviggum was at SMSU on Wednesday to talk about the state of the state and his views on campaign issues

By Deb Gau
dgau@marshallindependent.com

MARSHALL — When asking a question of Minnesota, Speaker of the House Steve Sviggum, students at a meeting of Southwest Minnesota State University's College Republicans could expect two answers — one dealing with policy, and the other with politics.

"I believe good policy and good politics go hand in hand," Sviggum told a small group of students. "The day I stop believing that, I'll go back

to the farm."

Sviggum, R-Kenyon, was in Marshall on a short campaign stop hosted by District 21A Rep. Marty Seifert, R-Marshall. Sviggum took audience questions and shared both his own views and the GOP's on several different campaign issues.

Sviggum emphasized that



Sviggum

"Minnesota does work," citing positive factors like the state's budget surplus and high standardized test scores. However, he added that political balance is needed to keep Minnesota working — in particular a Republican-controlled House of Representatives to balance out DFL influences in the state Senate.

Tax reforms are one major area of concern for the Republicans, Sviggum said.

Sviggum PAGE 6A

Sviggum FROM PAGE 1A

The party would like to see reduced education levy mandates, military pension exclusions, tax credits for Minnesota dairy farmers and other forms of tax relief.

Senate leaders stopped several of those bills, Sviggum said.

"They wanted to keep the campaign issue alive," he said. "That sounds really cynical to me."

Other key issues for Sviggum include transportation, health care reform and educational funding and equity.

One audience member asked Sviggum for his take on the state's transportation amendment, which will be on the ballot this November.

"I do not think it is great," Sviggum said. "I do believe it is good. It's better than nothing."

The amendment would set aside \$300 million per year for transit, roads and bridges in Minnesota, Sviggum explained.

Of that funding, at least 40 percent is supposed to go toward transit systems, which would mainly benefit the Twin Cities area, and the remaining 60 percent toward roads and bridges in greater Minnesota.

Sviggum said the House had wanted hard numbers in the amendment to ensure 60/40 funds distribution, but the Senate again would not agree.

"(The voters) have got to make a decision

whether it's better than nothing. I think it's better than nothing," Sviggum said.

Equity in funding for education was also something Sviggum said he would like to see in Minnesota.

"So schools in Marshall would get the same amount per student as schools in, say, Hopkins," Sviggum said.

However, Sviggum noted that it would probably never work to achieve equity by cutting the state funds received by Twin Cities area schools. Instead, he suggests allocating general fund dollars to help rural schools. State finances are currently stable enough to do that, he said.

In the case of college tuition, Sviggum said students should expect some tuition increases to account for inflation. However, he added, "The good thing about Minnesota is that we've increased grants and scholarships as well."

Although Sviggum isn't a local representative, he says there are still some excellent Republican legislative candidates in the region, like Mike Bredeck in District 20A and Scott Van Binsbergen in District 20B. In his view, Sviggum said it seems likely that the House will go to the Republicans this year.

That would be a good thing for the balance of power in the state, he said.

"We need Republicans to represent southwestern Minnesota," Sviggum said.

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INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
WEDNESDAY 7,904
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**Legislative candidates forum
Thursday night in Granite Falls**

A legislative candidates forum is planned from 7-9 p.m. Thursday at the Kilowatt Community Center in Granite Falls.

• It will feature House and Senate candidates from District 20.

The Senate candidates are Sen. Gary Kuhl, DFL-Granite Falls, and Roger Dale, R-Hanley Falls.

• The House District 20A candidates are Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Appleton, and challenger Mike Bredeck, R-Madison.

• The House District 20B candidates are Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, and challenger Scott VanBinsbergen, R-Montevideo.

The forum is sponsored by the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

20B

FRONT PAGE

District 20 candidates discuss social services

By Robert Wolfington III
rwolfington@marshallindependent.com

GRANITE FALLS — Social services issues took center stage during a candidates forum in Granite Falls on Thursday.

Candidates in the District 20 Senate and District 20B legislative races discussed their positions on social services issues and learned a little bit more about the concerns of local residents on the subject.

Sen. Gary Kubly, DFL-Granite Falls, and challenger Roger Dale, R-Hanley Falls, along with Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, and challenger Scott VanBinsbergen, R-Montevideo, addressed the room of social service workers and local citizens during the forum.

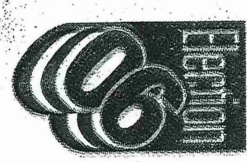
"During my first two terms I've served, I put in to be on the health and human services committee," said Koenen.

Koenen hasn't yet been accepted on the committee, but he said he feels strongly about the issues addressed Thursday.

VanBinsbergen, a business owner in Montevideo, said one of the four entities in his business focuses on health care issues.

VanBinsbergen said in greater Minnesota, issues aren't between Republican and Democrat.

"Out here it's not about Republican vs. Democrat," said VanBinsbergen. "When I go to St. Paul I see where the money is going, and where it's not going out here."



Candidates FROM PAGE 1A

Kubly said it's important to restore some of the Minnesota Care benefits.

Dale said there are programs available that have been helpful to Minnesota residents.

While those programs are doing good things, Dale said there are those who are abusing the programs, something he said needs to be looked into.

Peggy Heglund, Yellow Medicine family services director, gave the candidates a packet on subjects she believed were important to work with.

Heglund said child support and county single health plans were two issues the candidates need to follow.

When asked where social service issues fell on the list of each candidates priorities, the all said it was high on the list — but not on the top of their agenda.

"It's not going to be a top issue," said Dale. "But it's going to be up there."

While each candidate said it is important to look at the money allocated to social service issues, they were asked if they would be willing to raise taxes in order to cover the costs.

Koenen said if loopholes allowing individuals to avoid some taxes were eliminated, there would be enough money

to fund such programs.

"I believe there is some room," said Koenen. "I would call it fair taxes."

Dale said there should be a way to find the money through current taxes.

"There should be a way to find some money," said Dale. "The state is doing well now."

VanBinsbergen said he was asked to sign a "no new taxes pledge" when he decided to run.

According to VanBinsbergen, he did not sign it.

"I want to analyze the issues on a case by case basis," said VanBinsbergen.

Kubly said with recent tax cuts, he wouldn't be opposed to revisiting those cuts to determine if there a slight tax increase would be appropriate.

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INDEPENDENT
MARSHALL, MN
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OCT 14 2006

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20B

VanBinsbergen eager to provide leadership

Successful business career has led to Republican being highly regarded by GOP

FRONT PAGE

By Tom Cherveney

tomc@wctrib.com



lection

MONTEVIDEO — Scott VanBinsbergen and his father, Gene, joined as business partners in 1996 and now oversee companies employing 140 people in the Montevideo area.

Candidate Scott VanBinsbergen credits their success to being smart enough to "hire good people."

Being surrounded by talent isn't hurting his campaign to unseat Lyle Koenen for the Minnesota District 20B House seat, either. Former Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn., and House Majority Leader Steve Svigum, R-Kenyon, were among those who joined for a recent campaign event in Renville County to support him.

It's no secret that the state's Republican Party views VanBinsbergen, who will turn 36 on Election Day, as an up and

coming leader. Along with his business success, VanBinsbergen offers experience in public affairs.

After graduating from college, VanBinsbergen took on roles in Washington, D.C., working first for Congressman Vin Weber and later for Boschwitz. He returned home to join his father in business and Southwest Minnesota Entrepreneur of the Year in 2004.

House/ Page A10

House

Continued from A1

VanBinsbergen ran unsuccessfully against Doug Peterson for a House seat in 1994. VanBinsbergen said he learned from that experience and is campaigning harder this time around.

He's maintained an aggressive campaign that's gone beyond the requisite door knocking. In hopes of capturing attention, he walked 40 miles in two days along U.S. Highway 212 from Buffalo Lake to Montevideo, where a caravan welcomed him to town.

"We need to see action, we can't stand still," said VanBinsbergen of his desire to represent the area. "Someone has to beat the drum for this area."

He repeats his campaign themes like a steady drum beat too. At every opportunity, he makes leadership and support for a "citizen legislature" his topics.

VanBinsbergen charges that the incumbent has not stood up for the rural area or forged the relationships in St. Paul to develop the clout needed to be



VanBinsbergen

effective.

"Number one is we have to have a strong leader willing to speak up for the people in this region," he said.

He wants voters to know that he is a leader who would "make things happen for this area."

VanBinsbergen said that while his Republican credentials are well known, he wants voters to know him as someone who can work with people on both sides of the aisle.

He said voters tell him that the rural area is up against the seven county metro area in the Legislature, and he agrees. VanBinsbergen said rural legislators of both parties need to work together, but it will take more than that to accomplish things in the Legislature.

He said he can also work with the suburban legislators who wield increasing power in the Legislature.

He would work most of all for jobs. "We need jobs and some good jobs," he said.

VanBinsbergen said getting jobs and growth will require putting together all of the pieces.

He supports the current JOBZ program, but said that economic development will also require building a better transportation system in the rural area and supporting quality education. He also supports the

development of trails in the region and other opportunities to enhance the quality of life and attract visitors.

He also believes rural areas must do more to tap its human capital as well. As a legislator, he'd like to bring entrepreneurs in the area together to develop strategies for economic growth.

He sees opportunities for rural growth, especially in agriculture. He'd like to continue to encourage the development of ethanol and other, renewable energy.

He also believes small business owners and workers need help with rising health care costs. He argues for ending what he calls discriminatory tax policy towards the uninsured and self-employed; he'd make the total cost of health care insurance fully tax deductible. He also argues for incentives to attract health care providers to rural areas.

He argues that the rural district will see growth if it works and fights hard, and has a leader willing to speak up for its needs.

"The bottom line out here, is we have to figure out a way to get jobs in this area," said VanBinsbergen. He said his business experience proves he knows how to create jobs, and wants the opportunity to go to St. Paul and make things happen for the district.

1200DU Fagen, pair of mayors, throw support VanBinsbergen's way in District 20B

By Dana Yost

dyost@marshallindependent.com

Republican challenger Scott VanBinsbergen said Monday he has picked up three key endorsements in his attempt to unseat incumbent state Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

VanBinsbergen, R-Montevideo, is running in the House District 20B election that includes much of Yellow Medicine County.

Ron Fagen, the owner of the Granite Falls construction company Fagen Inc. — one of the area's biggest employers — has distributed a letter endorsing VanBinsbergen. In a separate letter, the mayors of Montevideo and Olivia also have endorsed VanBinsbergen.

"I was very honored that these people came forward on this," VanBinsbergen said. "They asked what they could do ... and I feel pretty honored."

Fagen's letter says both VanBinsbergen and Gov. Tim Pawlenty have shown "deep commitment to keeping our small towns strong and preserving our rural way of life."

Fagen credits VanBinsbergen's background as a Montevideo native who owns his own business that employs 150.

"Scott's goal is simple: Create good jobs to keep people living here, in western Minnesota, instead of moving to the city," Fagen said. "More folks in our small towns mean more kids in our schools, more people shopping on Main Street, a healthy business climate and good roads."

Fagen's company is also the nation's largest builder of ethanol plants, and he said he believes VanBinsbergen understands the link between value-added agriculture products like ethanol and boosting the area's economy. VanBinsbergen said Fagen's support of and investment in ethanol is important to the area and nation, providing good jobs, and investment opportunities regionally and a chance to ease America's dependence on foreign oil.

"I recognize the importance of ethanol," VanBinsbergen said. "I'm proud of that company (Fagen) and what they've done for the area."

"(Fagen and the mayors) are on my team because the recognize the need to start creating jobs in rural Minnesota if our towns are going to survive. I think renewable fuels and

renewable energy are just the tip of the iceberg, and rural Minnesota is going to be a leader."

Montevideo Mayor Jim Curtiss and Olivia Mayor Bill Miller said they endorsed VanBinsbergen because they see him as a "strong voice" for rural issues.

"Scott's passion is to see a greater Minnesota with vibrant main streets, bustling schools, profitable family farms, a healthy business climate and good roads," the mayors' letter said. "Scott has the energy, the business experience and the commitment we need to turn those dreams into reality."

The mayors' letter also said Koenen "is not getting the job done for us. We believe it's time for a change."

In an interview, Koenen defended his record in St. Paul. He also said he, too, supports the growth of renewable fuels in the area.

"The job growth stuff, of course I support it," Koenen said. "I supported the bonding bill, which provided a lot of good jobs for the area, which are good-paying jobs, which is important."

"Also, I see renewable energy and alternative fuels as an excellent opportunity for economic development in southwest Minnesota. It has provided a lot of opportunities for new

markets for farmers, provides good-paying jobs for people in the field, is a good investment, and, of course, has advantages to the environment."

Also on the economy, he also said it was wrong for Pawlenty to have vetoed a transportation bill that was passed by both the House and Senate; the bill would have helped rural businesses and workers. And he said education needs better funding than what's been provided in order to turn out an educated and well-trained workforce capable of filling good-paying jobs.

Koenen said actions by Republican leaders in St. Paul have hurt rural Minnesota.

"As for representing the district, there's no doubt in my mind I represent the district," Koenen said. "When I've been down there (in St. Paul), especially in my first session, you look at what Gov. Pawlenty and the Republican majority in the House did — everything tilted in favor of outer-ring suburbs and against rural Minnesota."

"The no-new-tax pledge, what really happened with that was a shift to property taxes and fees, and that shift hit us a lot harder than the metro area. Rural Minnesota ended up paying more for less, and for the outer-ring suburbs, it was just the opposite. I'm working to level the playing field."

INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
TUESDAY 7,904
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MINNESOTA CLIPPING SERVICE

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Our picks in District 20: Senate: Kubly

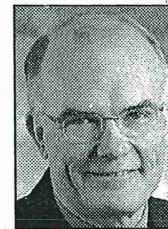
Senate 20 voters have a choice between DFL incumbent Gary Kubly of Granite Falls and Republican challenger Roger Dale of Hanley Falls. This is a choice between legislative experience versus farm group experience.

Dale is a farmer with leadership experience with Farm Bureau, soybean and corn associations. However, he has not made a convincing case for ousting his experienced opponent.

Kubly served three terms in the Minnesota House prior to being elected senator in 2002. An Air Force veteran, Kubly was been a Lutheran pastor for more than 30 years.

Through his legislative career, he understands the need to build coalitions to help meet the needs of his district, such as disaster relief following the 1997 and 2001 floods and the 2000 tornado in Granite Falls. He understands the importance of education and transportation, especially in rural Minnesota, and the need to invest in both.

The West Central Tribune endorses the re-election of Gary Kubly in Senate 20.



Kubly

20A: Peterson

House 20A voters have a choice between DFL incumbent Aaron Peterson of Appleton and GOP challenger Mike Bredeck of Madison.

Bredeck is a longtime teacher and wrestling coach at Madison and Lac qui Parle Valley high schools. While he has an education background, he has not displayed sufficient knowledge on other critical issues in the district.



Peterson

Peterson has served two terms, developing both experience and some seniority. As a land-use consultant, he is knowledgeable about environment needs and the agriculture industry.

He carries an intense passion and knowledge about renewable energy — the vital and important industries of ethanol, biodiesel and wind power for the district.

He has also focused on the nursing home industry — a critical industry in an aging district.

He also has the will to fight for the rural people of 20A on education, health care, fairness and other issues.

The West Central Tribune endorses the re-election of Peterson in House 20A.

20B: Van Binsbergen

House 20B voters have a choice between DFL incumbent Lyle Koenen of Maynard and GOP challenger Scott Van Binsbergen of Montevideo. This is a choice between legislative experience and business-public affairs experience.

Koenen is a quiet farmer who likes to work behind the scenes to accomplish things. While he has supported rural energy efforts and has concerns about cuts in local government aid and K-12 funding, he is not an outgoing legislator.



Van Binsbergen

Van Binsbergen is a successful businessman with a decade-old company now employing more than 140 people. He has public affairs experience from working for U.S. Rep. Vin Weber and Sen. Rudy Boschwitz. He also ran in 1994 for a Minnesota House seat, losing to Doug Peterson.

A candidate who turns 36 on Election Day, Van Binsbergen has the energy and leadership necessary to be an outgoing, dynamic representative for his district. His business experience will be beneficial in helping meet the economic needs of this district. He would bring needed change to this district's representation.

The West Central Tribune endorses the election of Van Binsbergen in House 20B.

WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN
TUESDAY 16,927
OCT 31 2006

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House District 20B

Koenen re-elected

By Robert Wolfington III
rwolfington@marshallindependent.com

Incumbent Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, has won re-election for House District 20B.

Koenen defeated Republican-endorsed candidate Scott VanBinsbergen of Montevideo.

Koenen said this year's race was the toughest he has been through.

"It feels pretty good because this was probably the toughest election that I have gone through," said Koenen. "As far as money coming in and being spent here and all the negative stuff kind of wears on you after a while."



Koenen said he hopes it was his message that helped get him elected.

"It would be nice to say it was the message," said Koenen. "We just kept close to the core basics; the health care, education, property tax relief, transportation, rural development and of course renewable fuels and alternative fuels."

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EDITORIAL ✓

Editorial
**An election
night full of
change**

Election tides come and go, riding the cycles of the times and affected by the major events of the times. Voters tire of those in power. Those in power make mistakes and unpopular calls, big and small — the running of the war in Iraq, Judi Dutcher's E-85 blunder, Mike Hatch's temper tantrum, budget cuts to rural schools and cities — and voters make them pay.

At least those are some of the issues exit polling and pundits are citing as reasons behind Tuesday night's election outcomes.

Voters wanted sweeping change at the national level, most likely as a referendum against the Bush administration's handling of the war in Iraq. Bush must now make some course adjustments, and come asking a Democrat-led House for funding on the war. One of those adjustments occurred already Tuesday with the removal of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, someone clearly not favored by the new Congress and also so closely pegged to the war failures. Other changes likely will come if Bush is to find cooperation with a House motivated by public unease.

Within Minnesota, Democrats now control both the House and Senate — perhaps a sign of unhappiness over the legislative response to the state's budget problems in recent years. You have to wonder if DFLer Hatch wouldn't also be governor had it not been for his campaign's final-week blunders.

The exact reasons behind the outcome will take days of debate and more studying of the numbers before they completely emerge. However, for this reason, the bigger question is really this: How will the changes affect southwest Minnesota? Some will be good, some bad and some, well, will simply be interesting.

Here are some observations on the broadest areas of impact:

■ **COLLIN PETERSON'S VICTORY IS IMPORTANT:** Of all the individual outcomes Tuesday, this race is perhaps the most significant to the area. The veteran DFL congressman won a landslide Tuesday night in the 7th District, but not only that, now appears on the verge of becoming one of the most pivotal ag leaders and policy shapers in the country.

With Democrats taking control of Congress, Peterson is in line to become the chairman of the House ag committee, giving him real clout in the shaping of federal farm policy and giving this area a tremendous voice on ag issues.

INDEPENDENT

MARSHALL, MN
THURSDAY 7,904
NOV 9 2006

■ **GOOD AND BAD IN THE LEGISLATIVE RESULTS:** There will be a significant change for Republicans in the House, flipped from the majority to a deep minority. That will affect Rep. Marty Seifert, but the question may be how much. He'll lose a committee chairmanship and a position as a leader — the whip — of the majority, where he could shape voting. That'll hurt this area, one would think. Yet, political science professor David Sturrock doesn't think Seifert will be marginalized. He said the new makeup of the House will require Republicans to be creative to be heard, and "Marty Seifert is about as capable of that as anyone I can think of."

The loss of Seifert from House majority leadership roles isn't the only blow to rural Minnesota leadership: Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson, DFL-Willmar, lost his election Tuesday night, setting off a scramble for leadership in the Senate. For this area? Johnson recognized the need for a four-lane Highway 23 in rural Minnesota and supported SMSU.

On the good side of the legislative outcome? There are many upticks if you are rural city or school official who has struggled with funding cuts from the state, or if you are interested in rural economic development and believe the DFL's proposals are better than what's happened lately.

The DFL campaigned heavily on strengthening state financial support to rural areas and local governments, and now must deliver on that promise — and find specific and reasonable ways to pay for it. Tough task, but it will be expected now.

In addition, it's likely the DFL will push very hard for continued state support of alternative energies, especially wind power, said Sen. Gary Kubly of Granite Falls. And it'll push hard on wider health care issues. Both good things.

With the change in leadership in the House, there will now be new burden on incumbent DFL Reps. Aaron Peterson and Lyle Koenen to step up as effective voices for southwest Minnesota.

Both were re-elected Tuesday, and they are the only DFL House members from this whole region. To wide extent, they will have to carry the area's agenda in the House. That not only means being vocal about it, but *understanding* what matters, building coalitions, becoming allies of major corporate players like the Schwan Food Co., and SMSU.

Boil it all down, and there's one word for what happened Tuesday night: Change.

Voters wanted it, and they got it. But what doesn't change are the challenges faced by a rural part of Minnesota, where economic development, population decline, schools' futures, and transportation remain major concerns.

No matter who's in charge, we need solutions on those issues. Let's hope new leaders deliver.

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WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN
WEDNESDAY 16,927
NOV 8 2006



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FRONT PAGE

Koenen holds off 'toughest challenge' ever; will return for third term in 20B

By Tom Cherveney

tomc@wctrib.com

Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, held off a tough challenge by Scott Van Binsbergen, R-Montevideo, to return to the state House of Representatives for District 20B, according to unofficial results available as this edition went to press.

Koenen held a 7,832 to 6,033 vote advantage over Van Binsbergen with 97 percent of precincts reporting, according to unofficial numbers from the Minnesota Secretary of State's office as of about 12:30 a.m.

Koenen described the election as his "toughest ever," and



Koenen



Van Binsbergen

pointed to an aggressive campaign by his opponent. He noted that Gov. Tim Pawlenty, Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn., and former U.S. Sen. Rudy Boschwitz were among those who made appearances in the district on behalf of his opponent. "You just never know how it is all going to play out,"

said Koenen. The Clara City Democrat said he did his best to counter the campaign with lots of door knocking and hard work.

Koenen said he worked to promote "just the basics," citing the issues of education, health care, transportation, jobs, renewable energy and property taxes as most important to constituents.

Koenen, 49, will return for his third term to represent the district.

A dairy farmer and trucker, Koenen also campaigned on a demand for "fairness" for rural areas.

20B/ Page A2

20B

Continued from A1

The district includes all of Chippewa and Renville counties, the eastern third of Yellow Medicine and western edge of McLeod counties.

Van Binsbergen marked his 37th birthday on Election Day while waiting for the election results.

Van Binsbergen said he couldn't help but feel disappointed by the loss, noting that he had worked hard and had found lots of support from people.

He said he probably suffered from a voter trend against many Republican

candidates. "It obviously was not a good year for Republicans," Van Binsbergen said.

Van Binsbergen is in a business partnership with his father, Gene, and oversees companies with 140 employees in the Montevideo area. He ran an aggressive campaign based on the need for jobs and economic development in the district.

He touted his ability as a leader, and said the district needed a stronger voice in St. Paul. He told voters that he could put party differences aside and forge the relationships with suburban lawmakers to get things done.

Koenen said he is looking forward to the upcoming legislative session. He said

gains made by the DFL in the House will allow him to pursue a variety of efforts. He'd like to see a shift toward greater state support for rural education needs and property tax relief in rural areas. Koenen said he also wants to push toward making health care more affordable and accessible to people in the district. He said it will take time to achieve the changes but feels that progress can be made.

Koenen has been part of the minority party in the House during his first two terms and said it has been largely a matter of playing "defensive." Now, Koenen said, he looks forward to a more proactive role.

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WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN
MONDAY 16,927
NOV 27 2006



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Lawmaker wants freshmen legislators to tour state

By Don Davis
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ST. PAUL — Minnesota Rep. Bud Heidgerken dreams that rookie legislators will know all about the state.

He sponsored a bill that failed to pass that would have provided new lawmakers a tour of the state. Now he hopes the new Democratic House leadership will adopt the concept.

"I think it is a good idea to get freshmen legislators in tune with how the economy is driven," the Freeport Republican said.

City legislators would learn about ships working the Duluth harbor, ethanol production in farm country

and other things they otherwise may never see, he added. Lawmakers could visit state facilities such as prisons.

"There are a lot of things within the state of Minnesota that bring a lot of money into the state and there are a lot of entities that spend a lot of money," Heidgerken said.

The lawmaker stole the idea from Missouri. He and his wife went to the music city of Branson after winning his first election in 2002. Missouri lawmakers were meeting in his hotel on a similar tour — stopping in Branson to learn about tourism.



Heidgerken

Quiet leader

One of the Minnesota Legislature's quietest members will have a voice on veterans' issues next year.

Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, was named chairman of the Veterans Affairs Division, which will consider veterans-related policy proposals in the House.



Koenen

House Speaker-designate Margaret Anderson Kelliher said committee chairmanships were based on seniority, geographical balance and experience.

"He does have a quiet style of leadership," Kelliher said of Koenen, a farmer. "But I think that's a nice match with veterans' issues."

Kelliher said Koenen's personality makes him a good fit to handle issues facing Minnesota soldiers returning from overseas deployment in the coming years.

Coleman opposition

U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman does not agree with a colleague who says the U.S.

should reinstitute the draft.

"Preserving a volunteer system is essential to the health and vitality of our armed forces," the Minnesota Republican said. "... While I understand the concerns regarding the overextension of our forces, we are on course to meet re-enlistment goals."

Even most Democrats appear to oppose a new draft,

as proposed by Rep. Charles B. Rangel, D-N.Y.

— Reporter Scott Wente contributed to this report.

POLITICAL NOTEBOOK

WEST CENTRAL TRIBUNE

WILLMAR, MN
TUESDAY 16, 927
NOV 21 2006

Juhnke is appointed ag division chairman for House

Legislator from Willmar
will have oversight of
estimated \$200 million
agricultural budget that
pertains to major issues
FRONT PAGE



Juhnke:
Has degrees in
soil science and
agronomy and
currently owns
and operates
an ag appraisal
business.

By Carolyn Lange
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ST. PAUL — State Rep. Al Juhnke was handed a prime committee chairmanship Monday by House DFL leaders.

Juhnke, DFL-Willmar, was appointed chairman of the Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division for the House.

As chairman, Juhnke will have oversight of an estimated \$200 million agriculture budget that will pertain to major issues like ethanol and the Rural Finance Authority, as well as smaller committees dealing with the Animal Board of Health and the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute.

Juhnke

Continued from A1

Juhnke, who represents District 13B — the southern two-thirds of Kandiyohi County including Willmar, has been on the agriculture committee since being first elected to the House in 1996.

"I've been involved with agriculture all my life, so this is a natural for me," said Juhnke in a telephone interview.

Juhnke has degrees in soil

science and agronomy, worked at the University of Minnesota in ag research, worked in the commercial ag industry and currently owns and operates an ag appraisal business.

He said he wants to be a strong voice for agriculture and said a new focus on renewable energy has made this an exciting time to create a partnership with the state, farmers and private industry to "move forward in a real positive way in rural Minnesota."

He will also have oversight of budgets for various veterans

programs, "which is good for our community," Juhnke said.

The state is considering locating a new veterans nursing home in Willmar. Juhnke won't have control of that budget issue, but his leadership position will give him opportunities to lobby for the project to happen here. "I want to see that come to fruition," he said.

"With the war in Iraq, we also need to pay close attention to the needs of our returning veterans and veterans' issues," Juhnke said in a pre-

pared statement.

Other local legislators were also given leadership assignments.

Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, was named chairman of the Veterans Affairs Division, which is a subcommittee of the Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs committee.

Rep. Aaron Peterson, DFL-Madison, was elected as one of six assistant majority leaders for the House. He is one of two rural legislators who will serve in that capacity.

Gas tax hike possible

On transportation, Minnesota lawmakers look to previous plan

By Scott Wente

Pioneer Capitol Reporter

ST. PAUL — Transportation funding advocates at the Capitol have been traveling in virtual circles the past few years, looking for a route leading to more highway and transit money.

In 2005, Minnesota lawmakers turned onto the path of gasoline tax increases. That proved to be a dead end when Gov. Tim Pawlenty vetoed their bill after offering numerous signs warning he would do just that.

Last session, in a non-budget-setting year, transportation-minded legislators couldn't find a compromise direction. They vowed to return in 2007 knowing the correct avenue toward more transportation dollars.

Lawmakers appear poised to continue their debate when they return to St. Paul Jan. 3 in the same spot they left off, considering a higher gasoline tax.

"That's exactly what's going to happen," said Rep. Bernie Lieder, one of Legislature's transportation experts.

Leaders in the DFL-controlled House and Senate plan to begin this year's transportation funding discussion by again heading down the path of a gasoline tax increase, knowing Pawlenty has said he still opposes that option.

"I'm not proposing and won't be proposing tax increases of any sort," the Republican governor told Capitol reporters.

"As we introduce the bill, I'm sure that it will have some gas tax component in it," Sen. Steve Murphy, DFL-Red Wing, said. "What the bill looks like when it comes out of committee is anybody's guess."

Transportation: See Page A7

Murphy, the Senate's transportation leader, and his House counterpart, Lieder, say raising the gas tax would help get the state closer to funding its trans-

portation needs, which experts estimate would cost up to \$2 billion annually.

"Nobody likes to increase taxes," said Lieder, DFL-Crookston. "It just appears there has to be something done."

Sen. Keith Langseth, DFL-Glyndon, predicted lawmakers will settle on a 5 cent or 6 cent increase in the gasoline tax, and it could withstand a veto by Pawlenty.

A nickel-a-gallon tax increase would provide \$160 million more transportation funding annually, Langseth said.

Not all lawmakers are ready to back a gas tax increase, one of several taxes and fees being considered as additional revenue sources.

Rep. Bud Heidgerken, R-Freeport, said he is wary of voting to raise the tax because in the past it hasn't been popular back home. Sixty-seven percent of constituents who responded to Heidgerken's legislative issues survey opposed paying more at the pump, he said.

"I would have to really seriously look at it," he said, noting that many other states increased their gas tax since Minnesota last raised its tax in 1988.

Assistant House Majority Leader Frank Moe, DFL-Bemidji, said passing a gas tax increase will be tough. Moe said his reaction is to scale down the dime-a-gallon increase that passed — and Pawlenty vetoed — before.

Using part of the \$1 billion in one-time surplus money for transportation is possible, Moe said, although a long-term solution is needed.

"The need isn't just \$1 billion

once," House Majority Leader Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, added.

Sertich said he would not reveal DFL plans, but said Minnesotans should expect transportation to be examined early in 2007. "You will hear some really important hearings right off the bat in the first month."

The state's highways and transit systems are guaranteed an influx of new dollars even if lawmakers can't agree on other funding sources. Voters decided in November that tax revenue from the sale of new and used vehicles should be constitutionally dedicated to transportation.

Pawlenty said how lawmakers decide to divide that money between highways and transit "is going to be at issue" during the session.

That revenue will be phased in over five years, but even when fully implemented lawmakers say the \$300 million annually won't be enough.

"When you look at the overall need, it doesn't get us a quarter of the way," Murphy said.

In past years, Pawlenty has proposed borrowing money to pay for transportation improvements, saying that the state uses bonds to fund many other projects. DFLers have opposed that, arguing the state should pay up front for highways and transit.

Pawlenty has not released his 2007 transportation funding plan, but said it will include a pilot project to "start replacing the gas tax" with alternative funding sources.

In 10 or 15 years, Pawlenty said many Minnesotans will be driving vehicles that run on



20B

alternative fuel sources, such as hydrogen. Gas tax revenues are already beginning to decline, he said.

"It is not the horse to ride beyond the near and intermediate future," he said.

Langseth, long one of the Legislature's top transportation funding advocates, rebutted Pawlenty's argument that gasoline taxes will fall because of more fuel-efficient cars and other forms of fuel becoming popular.

"They have said for 20 years that the gas tax will go down," Langseth added, "but I think it probably still will be the base of our funding for the next decade."

The state will continue to rely mostly on gas tax revenue to pay for road projects, some legislators said.

"You can make the assertion that the gas tax isn't producing as much as it used to, but it still is the main revenue source for highways," Sen. David Tomassoni, DFL-Chisholm, said.

Borrowing money to improve roads is not a good idea, he added, because that is "taxing our children and our grandchildren," who would have to repay the bonds.

With U.S. Rep. Jim Oberstar of northeastern Minnesota chairman of the House Transportation Committee, the state needs to begin providing its share of money to match federal funds. Hundreds of millions of dollars of federal money has not come to Minnesota because the state did not provide its share for projects, Tomassoni said.

"We better darned well fund the projects coming out of Washington," the senator said. "He (Oberstar) could be a huge part of solving the problem."

Sertich agreed and said he thinks all sides will agree that federal money should be matched so state dollars go further.

Tomassoni is not sure a gasoline tax increase will pass this year. He said many people may

think that since voters approved a constitutional amendment in November dedicating all motor vehicle sales tax money to transportation uses, there will be less interest in increasing the gasoline tax.

"There is a case to be made for maybe it is time to increase the gas tax," Tomassoni said, but "raising the gas tax is a difficult, difficult decision."

Another option lawmakers could explore, Lieder said, would be to consider replacing the gasoline tax with a mileage tax based on the distance driven.

"We think that's going to be the alternative a few years down the road," he said.

Lawmakers also are expected to debate whether the state's new highways should be built to withstand heavier vehicles. Some want new roads to accommodate 10 tons of weight per vehicle axle. Currently, roads are built to a 9-ton standard, Lieder said.

Opponents say that costs more and will result in fewer miles of new highways. Lieder said he used to be against a 10-ton limit because of funding concerns but now supports the higher standard.

Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, said the state should adopt the 10-ton limit. Manufacturers and farmers are using bigger vehicles, he said.

"Let's face it. The heavy trucks are here and they're not going away," he said.

In addition to discussing basic transportation funding needs, lawmakers are poised to place greater emphasis on improving the state's transit systems. Legislative leaders in the House and Senate have created transit subcommittees.

Sen. Tom Saxhaug, DFL-Grand Rapids, said he likes the idea of allowing Twin Cities voters to decide on increasing their sales tax a half cent per dollar. In part, that would free up money for rural needs.

"We would not continue to

compete as violently with the transit people because they will have their own pot of money," he said.

Transit debates often focus on rail and bus lines in the Twin Cities area, and both transit subcommittee chairmen are from Minneapolis. However, Murphy said there are numerous interest groups who will advocate for improvements to bus and rail service outside the Twin Cities.

"The transit people are not looking out just for the metro area," he said.

Pioneer Capitol Bureau reporter Don Davis contributed to this story.

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Outdoors issues

Minnesota lawmakers long have debated whether to dedicate part of the state sales tax to natural resources needs. Likewise, every year they discuss how much to restrict all-terrain vehicles and four-wheel drive trucks on state land. Both topics will be on their agenda again in 2007. See story on page A11.



FORUM

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Lawmakers primed for game time

By Don Davis
Pioneer Capitol Reporter

ST. PAUL — Players are preparing for the biggest game of their career.

"This is akin to a day before the football game," Tom Saxhaug said. "Your stomach is gnawing. All you want to do is to get onto the field and play. It is nerve wracking."

These days, Sen. Saxhaug of Grand Rapids and his fellow players don't dress in uniforms and cleats as he did when he played pulling guard for St. Olaf College. They wear suits and dress shoes when going to their jobs as Minnesota legislators.

The 201 player-legislators are primed for game time — noon Jan. 3, when the 85th Legislature convenes in St. Paul.

Their goal is passing a two-year state budget that could run \$33 billion.

In order to score, these players must make it through a series of plays that will decide the fate of issues like property tax relief, education, health care and transportation.

Making pre-session prognostications is as difficult as talking about a college team headed into a rebuilding year. A quarter of the players are new, as are their captains. Many predict the legislative game will get off to a slow start because so many people need to learn their positions.

DFL lawmakers take over control of the House Jan. 3 — Republicans have run things since 1999. Democrats now outnumber Republicans 85-49, giving them the right to appoint chairmen for the chamber's 35 committees and assuring them power to decide what bills have a chance.

The DFL's takeover means all new leaders will be in charge, most of whom never have served in a House with their party in control.

In the Senate, DFLers expanded their domination to 44-23, but also field new leaders and many new committee chairmen.

With so many new leaders and members, the first few weeks of the legislative session may be a bit slow as they work out the kinks. Even beyond that, however, it is hard to predict what will happen.

Lawmakers: See Page A6

"I think we will have a statewide smoking ban; I think we will change the gift card law," said Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker, who is entering his fifth term. "Beyond that, I don't think anything is a given."

Legislative leaders and Gov. Tim Pawlenty have been reluctant to get into specific proposals. However, they appear to agree on the need to work on issues such as health care, education, property taxes, transportation and energy.

Committees, especially in the House, are expected dig deeper into the state budget than ever.

"We want to start at zero with the budget," House Majority Leader Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, said. "There are no assumptions being made. It is important to go into this without bias."

While lawmakers will discuss money items from Day 1, they won't actually come out with their budget proposals until after a late-February report on state finances. Pawlenty, on the other hand, is required to submit his budget blueprint to lawmakers in the third week of January.

In odd-numbered years, the primary job of legislators is approving a budget. Much of the work before the May 21 adjournment deadline will center on money — how to spend it and how to raise it.

Money talk didn't wait until Jan. 3. A late-November report showed what Pawlenty administration officials called a nearly \$2.2 billion surplus.

Many legislators are warning that such a surplus really doesn't exist.

About half of the so-called surplus is in money available just in the budget ending June 30. The rest is money that will continue in the budget, but it could mostly be needed just to pay for higher wages, health

Worthington
Daily globe
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insurance and other inflationary needs.

With all the issues budgeters must address, no one is talking much about what could happen this session.

"Everyone is holding their cards close to their vest," Howes said.

One of the problems in drawing up a budget is illustrated by Howes and another northern Minnesota lawmaker — Rep. Brita Sailer, DFL-Park Rapids. Howes said he would like to see \$250 million of the \$1 billion one-time surplus go to the state's reserve fund, with another \$400 million used for transportation projects.

Sailer said she disagrees with only using the money for a couple of major projects: "I would like to spread it around a little more."

Rep. Frank Moe, DFL-Bemidji, said the public may not give legislators enough credit.

"The sacrifice that a lot of us make going down there — we don't do it just for appearances," Moe said.

While the public wants lawmakers to get things done, Moe said, they should not be rushed. "We want to do them sooner rather than later. But I would settle for May rather than February if that is what it takes to get it done right."

Money may be more readily available than it appears, said Moe, a House assistant majority leader. He said he is optimistic tax collections will improve as the economy gets better.

Still, there are more requests than there is money.

"When it comes down to how much money we have to work with, we are going to have to make some tough choices," Moe said. "We are committed to living within our means."

Democrats will work with the governor, he added.

"In the end, the governor has got the veto," Moe said. "He has said he is wanting to work with us and we acknowledge he has got to sign the legislation. So we will work with him; we don't

have a choice. We are going to have to pass sensible, more middle-of-the-road spending bills and tax bill in order to get his support."

Leaders on tax issues, such as Rep. Paul Marquart, DFL-Dilworth, want to use a chunk of the one-time money to begin lowering property taxes.

Count Rep. Bill Hilty, DFL-Finlayson, as one of those who wants to be sure the state has a financial cushion.

"The prospects of the next biennium are not all that rosy," Hilty said. "In light of that, it would be very prudent to dedicate some of the current surplus to budget reserves."

Some DFLers talk quietly about tax increases. But many say they could consider it only if all else fails. Others say they see no reason to raise taxes.

Rep. Kent Eken, DFL-Twin Valley, doesn't mind talking about a tax increase.

"This surplus actually is relatively small in relation to the overall budget, and the needs are great," Eken said. "There has been a lot of pent-up demand created over the last several years."

He added that if the public knows new taxes are going for something needed, "I think the people are willing to support it."

Saxhaug said the state could need a tax increase after plugging a nearly \$4.6 billion budget deficit four years ago. But like other Democrats, he said if there is a tax increase in one area, it should be accompanied by a decrease elsewhere — like raising the income tax while lowering property taxes.

Pawlenty staunchly opposed raising taxes, which is bound to be a place where he and some DFLers split ways.

However, Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, said Pawlenty has forced fees, tuition and other expenses up, while saying he opposes tax increases.

"I think it is important for Democrats ... to say this four-year scam is over," Rukavina

said. "He can call them fees, he can call them fee-fie-foe-fum, it is \$1 billion in tax increases."

How the new DFL-controlled Legislature gets along with Republican Pawlenty is one of the big questions for 2007.

Observers will have to wait until top lawmakers and Pawlenty enter budget negotiations in late spring to decide whether they are working together, said Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

"If you listen to (the legislative) leadership and the governor, it all sounds a lot better this time than I heard in my first two terms," said Koenen, who recently was elected to a third two-year term. "The real test is at the end of the session. Up until then, it's going to be a little hard to tell."

The new House speaker, Margaret Anderson Kelliher, said she and Minority Leader Marty Seifert will get along, even if they disagree on policy.

"Marty and I have found a lot of common bonds growing up in greater Minnesota," the Minneapolis DFLer said.

Saxhaug said without a strong GOP Legislature, Pawlenty is forced to compromise. In his first four years, Pawlenty and the House held a 2-1 advantage over Democrats.

"It seems to me he is changing his tune on a lot of things — and rightly so," the senator said. "You heard the expression two against one. Well, it is two against one again."

Saxhaug knows about double-teaming from his football days. At as the session nears, he especially knows one thing — it is time to start the game.

"I don't like just sitting and watching," he said.

Pioneer Capitol Bureau reporter Scott Wente contributed to this story.

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On transportation, lawmakers look to previous plan

By Scott Wentz

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ST. PAUL — Transportation funding advocates at the Capitol have been traveling in virtual circles the past few years, looking for a route leading to more highway and transit money.

In 2005, Minnesota lawmakers turned onto the path of gasoline tax increases. That proved to be a dead end when Gov. Tim Pawlenty vetoed their bill after offering numerous signs warning he would do just that.

Last session, in a non-budget-setting year, transportation-minded legislators couldn't find a compromise direction. They vowed to return in 2007 knowing the correct avenue toward more transportation dollars.

Lawmakers appear poised to continue their debate Jan. 3 when they return to St. Paul in the same spot they left off, considering a higher gasoline tax.

"That's exactly what's going to happen," said Rep. Bernie Lieder, one of the Legislature's transportation experts.

Leaders in the DFL-controlled House and Senate plan to begin this year's transportation funding discussion by again heading down the path of a gasoline tax increase, knowing Pawlenty has said he still opposes that option.

"I'm not proposing and won't be proposing tax increases of any sort," the Republican governor told Capitol reporters.

"As we introduce the bill, I'm sure that it will have some gas tax component in it," Sen. Steve Murphy, DFL-Red Wing, said. "What the bill looks like when it comes out of committee is anybody's guess."

Murphy, the Senate's transportation leader, and his House counterpart, Lieder, say raising the gas tax would help get the state closer to funding its transportation needs, which experts estimate would cost up to \$2 billion annually.

"Nobody likes to increase taxes," said Lieder, DFL-Crookston. "It just appears there has to be something done."

Lawmakers/ Page A2

Sen. Keith Langseth, DFL-Glyndon, predicted lawmakers will settle on a 5-cent or 6-cent increase in the gasoline tax, and it could withstand a veto by Pawlenty.

A nickel-a-gallon tax increase would provide \$160 million more transportation funding annually, Langseth said.

If Pawlenty won't support a legislative proposal similar to the one he rejected in 2005, maybe lawmakers should consider a smaller increase in the gas tax, said Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

Rural Minnesota needs more transportation money because its roads are plowed less frequently in the winter and they have become more dangerous, Koenen said.

"The roads are just plain falling apart, to put it bluntly," he said.

Not all lawmakers are ready to back a gas tax increase, one of several taxes and fees being considered as additional revenue sources.

Rep. Bud Heidgerken, R-Freeport, said he is wary of voting to raise the tax because, in the past it hasn't been popular back home. Sixty-seven percent of constituents who responded to Heidgerken's legislative issues survey, opposed paying more at the pump, he said.

"I would have to really seriously look at it," he said, noting that many other states have increased their gas tax since Minnesota last raised its tax in 1988.

Assistant House Majority Leader Frank Moe, DFL-Bemidji, said using part of the \$1 billion in one-time surplus money for transportation is possible, Moe said, although a long-term solution is needed.

"The need isn't just \$1 billion once," House Majority Leader Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, added.

Sertich said he would not reveal Democrats' plans but said Minnesotans should expect transportation to be examined early in 2007. "You will hear some really important hearings right off the bat in the first month."

Lawmakers from outside the Twin Cities area said they will oppose any transportation funding plan that shortchanges greater Minnesota. Heidgerken, whose legislative district is mostly rural, said previous proposals took money from roads in his area for use in the Twin Cities.

"I will not support anything that changes the formula as it is," Heidgerken said of the distribution of gas tax revenue.



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A new funding package must address rural needs, Heidgerken said.

"Our roads are older roads," he said. "We've got all the old infrastructure out there and it's getting to be very difficult to maintain."

The state's highways and transit systems are guaranteed an influx of new dollars even if lawmakers can't agree on other funding sources. Voters decided in November that tax revenue from the sale of new and used vehicles should be constitutionally dedicated to transportation.

Pawlenty said how lawmakers decide to divide that money between highways and transit "is going to be at issue" during the session.

That revenue will be phased in over five years, but even when fully implemented, lawmakers say the \$300 million annually won't be enough.

"When you look at the overall need, it doesn't get us a quarter of the way," Murphy said.

In past years, Pawlenty has proposed borrowing money to pay for transportation improvements, saying that the state uses bonds to fund many other projects. Democrats have opposed that, arguing the state should pay up front for highways and transit.

Pawlenty has not released his 2007 transportation funding plan but said it will include a pilot project to "start replacing the gas tax" with alternative funding sources.

In 10 or 15 years, Pawlenty said many Minnesotans will be driving vehicles that run on alternative fuel sources, such as hydrogen. Gas tax revenues are already beginning to decline, he said.

"It is not the horse to ride beyond the near and intermediate future," he said.

Langseth, long one of the Legislature's top transportation funding advocates, rebutted Pawlenty's argument that gasoline taxes will fall because of more fuel efficient cars and other forms of fuel becoming popular.

"They have said for 20 years that the gas tax will go down," Langseth added, "but I think it probably still will be the base of our funding for the next decade."

Another option lawmakers could explore, Lieder said, would be to consider replacing the gasoline tax with a mileage tax based on the distance driven.

"We think that's going to be the alternative a few years down the road," he said.

Lawmakers also are expected to debate whether the state's new highways should be built to withstand heavier vehicles. Some want new roads to accom-

modate 10 tons of weight per vehicle axle. Currently, roads are built to a 9-ton standard, Lieder said.

Opponents say that costs more and will result in fewer miles of new highways. Lieder, the top House member on transportation issues, said he used to be against a 10-ton limit because of funding concerns but now supports the higher standard.

Koenen said the state should adopt the 10-ton limit. Manufacturers and farmers are using bigger vehicles, he said.

"Let's face it. The heavy trucks are here and they're not going away," he said.

— Capitol Bureau reporter Don Davis contributed to this story.

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Twins take leap toward new ballpark

Key House committee OKs stadium plan,
sending it closer to likely final approval

BY ARON KAHN

Pioneer Press

PIONEER PRESS APR 22 '06

The Minnesota Twins won their most important victory in years Friday when the House Taxes Committee approved their plan to move from the Teflon-shrouded Metrodome to the natural grass of a new ballpark in the Warehouse District in downtown Minneapolis.

Passage of the measure on a 15-13 bipartisan vote all but assured a vote next week on the floor of the House, where leaders from both parties recently said there were enough supporters to approve the bill.

The relief of Twins officials was palpable after 11 years of seeking a workable ballpark plan, intended to increase team revenues by \$40 million a year, enough to support an average major league payroll, officials say.

The Twins' current payroll of \$63 million ranks 19th of 30 teams.

"I think I'm going to have a good weekend," said Twins ballpark point man Jerry Bell. "I feel pretty good right now."

✓ House Speaker Steve Sviggum, a ballpark supporter, said the bill likely would be heard Monday night in the Ways and Means Committee and Wednesday on the House floor. He expected close votes

WHAT'S NEXT

The Twins stadium bill likely will be heard Monday in the House Ways and Means Committee and on the House floor Wednesday. It must also go to the Senate.

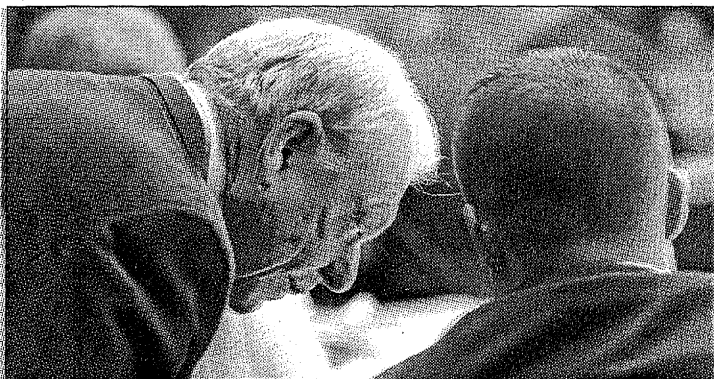
THE PLAN

Stadium: 42,000-seat open-air ballpark to be finished by Opening Day 2010 in Warehouse District of downtown Minneapolis. Site is now a parking lot.

Cost: \$522 million for ballpark and other expenses, such as infrastructure improvements.

Funding: \$130 million from Twins; \$392 million from a 0.15 percent Hennepin County sales tax, if approved. Tax is 3 cents on a \$20 purchase, except for clothing, grocery food, medical supplies and cars.

TWINS BALLPARK, 11A



BRANDI JADE THOMAS, PIONEER PRESS

Minnesota Twins stadium point man Jerry Bell, left, confers with Rep. Brad Finstad, R-New Ulm, during Friday's proceedings before the House Taxes Committee.

Twins ballpark

(continued)

on both occasions — and in the Senate, also — but predicted the bill would survive.

Under one of the few amendments that passed Friday, no smoking would be allowed in the ballpark, even though it would not be roofed.

The Taxes Committee's approval of the bill was vital because it allowed the measure to proceed with an exemption from a state law requiring a Hennepin County referendum on a proposed 0.15 percent county sales tax that would pay for three-quarters of the \$522 million project.

The Twins and their partner, the Hennepin County Board, had said they would ditch the plan if a ballot issue were mandated. They contend such a vote would create delays and greater expense, while opponents claim the ballpark boosters' real worry is that the tax would be voted down.

Should the bill be passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who favors the plan, a 42,000-seat open-air ballpark would open in the spring of 2010 on what is now a surface parking lot 10 blocks west of the Metrodome and two blocks northwest of Target Center.

Citing Minnesota's cold weather in the spring and fall, Rep. Ron Erhardt, R-Edina, attempted to change the bill by providing for a retractable roof.

"We should own up to what has to be done here, and do it," Erhardt said, predicting the Twins would be back at the Legislature in a future session asking for money to cover the stadium.

But Bell said designing the ballpark to be "roof ready" would be too expensive.

"We will not be back asking for a roof," said Bell, president of Twins Sports Inc., the Carl Pohlad company that owns the team.

Rather, Bell said architects



SHERRI LAROSE, PIONEER PRESS

Rep. David Dill, DFL-Crane Lake, rests his eyes for a moment during Friday's debate over the proposed Minnesota Twins stadium, which is pictured in a background architectural rendering. Seated next to Dill were fellow House Taxes Committee members Rep. Joe Atkins, DFL-Inver Grove Heights, at left, and Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

Should the bill be passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who favors the plan, a 42,000-seat open-air ballpark would open in the spring of 2010 on what is now a surface parking lot 10 blocks west of the Metrodome and two blocks northwest of Target Center.

are exploring designs that would protect many of the seats from precipitation and heat some seats and gathering areas with energy produced by the county's nearby garbage recycling plant.

Because a roof would add roughly \$115 million to the project, Erhardt's amendment would have changed the county tax to a state tax, thereby raising more money and relieving Hennepin County businesses and residents from the burden of supporting the project.

Because a variety of proposed state taxes for a ballpark have been defeated by lawmakers over the years, the bill's

sponsor, Rep. Brad Finstad, R-New Ulm, reminded colleagues that heading in that direction again would kill the bill. Erhardt's amendment was soundly defeated.

In addition to the sales tax, estimated to generate about \$29 million in the first year, the county would be responsible for contributing \$1 million a year for ballpark improvements, and funding the budget of a public ballpark authority that would own the stadium.

The Twins would get all the revenue from the ballpark, including those from naming rights. In return, the team would guarantee that it would

play in Minnesota for 30 years, and pay \$130 million upfront toward construction costs.

The team also would pay an estimated \$10 million a year in ballpark operating expenses, \$1 million a year for ballpark improvements, \$250,000 a year in contributions to youth and amateur sports activities, and would continue to provide family and student discounts.

If team owner Pohlad sells the team after the ballpark is approved, he must give the public 18 percent of the proceeds from the sale — a percentage that would decline over 10 years. The latter provision, unique in the nation, is based on the assumption that his sale price would rise substantially because of the new ballpark.

Forbes magazine reported Thursday that the Twins are worth \$216 million, a 21 percent increase over last year. Pohlad bought the team in 1984 for \$38 million.

During nearly six hours of debate, committee members offered amendments aimed at changing a variety of the bill's elements.

After lawmakers from Hennepin County tried to change several financial components negotiated between the Twins and the Hennepin County Board, Rep. Dan Dorman, R-Albert Lea, suggested glibly that if they don't want the ballpark, the Legislature should keep the Hennepin County tax but require the ballpark to be built in St. Paul.

Many Hennepin legislators have been wary of the bill, out of a concern that constituents would vote them out of office because of the tax. Indeed, all six lawmakers from the county voted against the measure Friday.

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Proposal leaps ahead in House

• After clearing a critical committee, the Twins' stadium plan may be headed toward a quick approval in the full House.

By MIKE KASZUBA
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STAR TRIBUNE APR 22 '06

Fresh off three narrow political victories in four days, the Minnesota Twins' proposal to build a \$522 million stadium in downtown Minneapolis might be on the verge of House approval within less than a week.

The stadium's improbable success continued Friday when the House Taxes Committee voted 15 to 13 to approve the 42,000-seat open-air facility. The vote came one day after the committee narrowly approved a move to use sales taxes in Hennepin County to build the stadium without requiring a referendum, and just three days after the Hennepin County Board reaffirmed its support of the stadium by just a one-vote margin.

As Friday's nearly seven-hour hearing ended, House Speaker Steve Sviggum predicted that the stadium plan would pass a vote of the full House on Wednesday.

Stadium continues: Twins got a little lobbying help from Vikings. A8

Twins ballpark could clear House next week

STADIUM FROM A1

"It's not going to be an overwhelming vote," he cautioned, but "I think it's in the best interests of the state of Minnesota."

No action is yet scheduled in the Senate, where the plan has cleared one committee.

With the Legislature just a month from adjourning, the Twins' success suddenly brightened the prospects that two stadiums might be headed for overall approval — one for the Twins and the other an on-campus football stadium for the University of Minnesota.

The Minnesota Vikings are also seeking legislative approval for a new stadium in Blaine, and a Vikings official disclosed Friday that the team had worked during the past two days to lobby the House Taxes Committee for the Twins stadium in the belief that the Twins' success would aid the Vikings' chances.

Clearing the House Taxes Committee, which is chaired by Rep. Phil Krinkie, a leading critic of the project, was a major accomplishment for the Twins stadium's supporters.

"We're ready to keep moving," said a relieved Rep. Brad Finstad, R-Comfrey, the stadium plan's chief House author. "When it comes to stadiums, it doesn't get much tougher than the House Taxes Committee."

Krinkie, a Republican from Lino Lakes, afterward shook hands with Jerry Bell, the lead stadium negotiator for the Twins. "You're farther on down the road now," Krinkie told Bell.

But Krinkie said that nothing had persuaded him to drop his opposition and that taxpayers in Hennepin County were being unfairly asked to pay the bulk of the stadium's cost without being able to vote on the plan. "Those people who go to the ballpark should pay for the ballpark," he said.

The stadium plan overcame its toughest hurdle late Thursday when the commit-

HOW THEY VOTED

The Minnesota Twins stadium proposal is on the legislative fast track to a full floor vote after narrowly winning approval from the House Taxes Committee Friday afternoon. Committee members approved the bill 15 to 13. Here's how each committee member voted.

	Yes	No	Absent
Krinkie, Phil (R-Lino Lakes, Committee chair)		✓	
Abrams, Ron (R-Minnetonka)		✓	
Anderson, Irv (DFL-International Falls)	✓		
Atkins, Joe (DFL-Inver Grove Heights)	✓		
Bernardy, Connie (DFL-Fridley)		✓	
Brod, Laura (R-New Prague)	✓		
Dauids, Greg (R-Preston)	✓		
Davnie, Jim (DFL-Minneapolis)		✓	
DeLaForest, Chris (R-Andover)			✓
Dill, David (DFL-Crane Lake)	✓		
Dorman, Dan (R-Albert Lea)	✓		
Erhardt, Ron (R-Edina)		✓	
Howes, Larry (R-Walker)		✓	
Jaros, Mike (DFL-Duluth)		✓	
Knoblach, Jim (R-St. Cloud)		✓	
Koenen, Lyle (DFL-Clara City)	✓		
Kohls, Paul (R-Victoria)		✓	
Lanning, Morrie (R-Moorhead)	✓		
Lenczewski, Ann (DFL-Bloomington)		✓	
Lesch, John (DFL-St. Paul)	✓		
Marquart, Paul (DFL-Dilworth)	✓		
Mullery, Joe (DFL-Minneapolis)		✓	
Nelson, Peter (R-Lindstrom)	✓		
Rukavina, Tom (DFL-Virginia)	✓		
Sieben, Katie (DFL-Newport)	✓		
Simpson, Dean (R-New York Mills)	✓		
Vandever, Ray (R-Forest Lake)		✓	
Westerberg, Andy (R-Blaine)	✓		
Zellers, Kurt (R-Maple Grove)		✓	
Totals	15	13	1

Source: Minnesota House of Representatives

tee, after a raucous public hearing in a school auditorium in Bloomington, voted 15 to 13 to allow Hennepin County to levy a 0.15 percent sales tax without holding a referendum as required by state law.

An estimated 700 people crowded into the school for the hearing, and stadium opponents were largely jeered as they testified against the project.

Under the plan, Hennepin County would contribute \$392

million to the stadium's construction, with the Twins adding the remaining \$130 million.

A move to add a retractable roof — and to widen the sales tax statewide to pay for it — was defeated Friday.

Rep. Ron Erhardt, R-Edina, said adding a roof to the stadium only made sense. "The Twins are going to be back here looking for a roof," he said. "Everybody in this room knows it."

But Bell insisted that would

STADIUM BILLS' PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

Three stadium proposals are under consideration by the Minnesota Legislature this year. Here's where they stand in the legislative process:

University of Minnesota football stadium: Passed the House. Waiting for Senate approval.

Minnesota Twins outdoor ballpark: Cleared the House Taxes Committee on Friday, considered a key milestone toward approval. Headed to the House Ways and Means Committee on Monday. Then, a House floor vote on Wednesday.

Minnesota Vikings stadium: The proposed project in Blaine is waiting for House committee hearings.

not happen. "We will not be back," he said.

The Twins' success was watched closely by the Vikings and Anoka County, whose proposal for a \$675 million football stadium in Blaine is also before legislators. Anoka County — like Hennepin — is asking for an exemption to state law that would allow it to levy a sales tax to help pay for the stadium without being required to have a referendum.

The Vikings in fact did more than watch.

Lester Bagley, the Vikings' vice president of public affairs and stadium development, said the team used its internal database to contact Vikings fans, asking them to call members of the House Taxes Committee and urging them to approve the Twins' plan.

"We weren't just sitting around watching. We were working," he said. "This is a big step in getting all three stadiums done this year."