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House reviews transportation bill

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by T.W. Budig
ECM Capitol reporter

A momma's-driving-you-to-the-prom or graduated driver's license provision sparked lengthy debate when the House took up its transportation policy bill on Thursday (April 24).

The license provision restricts provisional license holders from having more than one passenger under age 20 in the car who is not a family member while driving.

The restriction lasts for the first six months.

For the second six months no more than three passengers under 20 who are not family members can drive with the novice driver under the provision.

Additionally, late night vehicle operating restrictions are put in place for the first six months.

While one Greater Minnesota lawmaker criticized graduated driver's license as ending teen double-dating — the first six months' midnight to 5 a.m. driving restriction as forcing mom behind the wheel on prom night — others saw value in the proposal.

Rep. Lynn Wardlow, R-Eagan, a former driving instructor, recalled that as a teen he had driven 110 mph with the car besides him driving faster.

Teenagers can do foolish things, he argued.

"(It) just seems some of the stuff they do seems stupid," he said of teen behavior.

Wardlow, a former driving instructor, supported the provision.

Others did not.

Rep. Mark Buesgens, R-Jordan, spoke of the long arm of state government taking the rightful role of parents.

"We are instituting a statewide curfew," argued Rep. Sarah Anderson, R-Plymouth.

"That's what we're doing here," she said.

Other lawmakers argued the provision was confusing.

"The kids are going to need a New York attorney or (Representative) Tom Emmer to figure this out," quipped Rep. David Dill, DFL-Crane Lake.

Emmer, of Delano, is an attorney and Republican House Deputy Minority Leader.

During floor debate the graduated driver's license provision was divided into two sections and voted on separately.

But in both cases attempts to remove the language failed.

Another section of the bill sparking debate was the so-called "get your stuff back" provision that would allow the homeless, the poor, or those receiving government relief to gather personal belongings from impounded vehicles.

Rep. Tom Hackbarth, R-Cedar, attempted to strike the provision, arguing towing companies will stuck with junker cars if owners are



allowed to collect personal belongings from them.

Towing company will be forced into "mini welfare programs," Hackbarth argued on the House floor.

"We should just take this out of the bill," he argued.

Anyway, many towing companies already allow people to gather needed items from impounded cars, provision opponents argued.

But supporters countered by arguing that junker cars have value to recyclers.

Further, low income people are not exempt from paying impound fees, said House Transportation and Transit Policy Committee Chairman Frank Hornstein, DFL-Minneapolis.

The can simply get their stuff, he explained.

Hackbarth's amendment failed by a wide margin.

Other features of the bill include a ban on text messaging while driving and also provisions dealing with school bus driver training.

The bill passed the House on a 82 to 44 vote.

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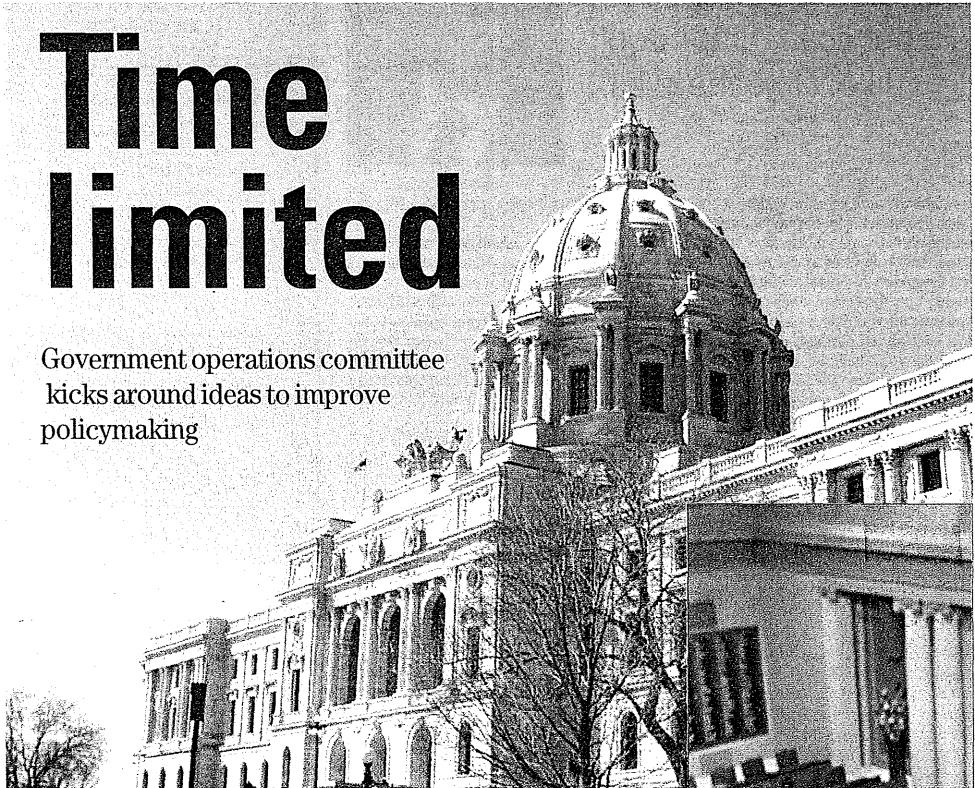
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Time limited

Government operations committee
kicks around ideas to improve
policymaking



BY CHARLEY SHAW
Staff Writer

Members of a state House panel are debating legislative reforms that include limiting the amount of time legislators can debate bills on the floor.

"It's not responsible serving the people if we debate a bill for 12 hours," said Rep. Alice Hausman, DFL-St. Paul, during a Thursday hearing.

Hausman is a member of the Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee that's mulling several significant changes to the rules of the House. The issue of time limits has come up after recent legislative sessions in which lawmakers have debated large omnibus bills into the wee hours of the morning, a practice some say leads to errors or bad policymaking.

Operations | pg 16

1 STPAUL LEGAL LEDGER JULY 14, 2008

Operations Pelowski: "When you're pushing those kinds of hours, what are you accomplishing?"

Continued from page 1

Limiting debate on the floor, however, is a controversial topic.

✓ **Rep. Sarah Anderson, R-Plymouth**, said limiting debate on major omnibus bills would hinder members' ability to represent their constituents.

"When it comes down to shutting down the voice of Minnesotans, that is wrong," Anderson said.

✓ **Rep. Tom Emmer, R-Delano**, said time limits on floor debate would result in "muzzling the minority [party]."

The committee has been meeting about every two weeks this summer to craft a set of rules for consideration by state lawmakers in the 2009 legislative session.

✓ **Chairman Gene Pelowski, DFL-Winona**, said the committee will hold at least two more hearings before it finalizes its recommendations to the Legislature. The potential proposals run the gamut from formal rule changes to establishing new norms of common courtesies.

Committee members Thursday discussed floor procedures like time limits and the legislative process at the end of session. In addition to time limits, legislators talked about requiring floor amendments to be filed at least 24 hours before the day's session. Lawmakers on the committee also floated the idea of passing finance bills earlier in the legislative session.

But time limits drew the most passion from legislators.

✓ **Rep. Mindy Greiling, DFL-Roseville**, said she isn't convinced time limits will be effective. "To try to have rules that some members would get around anyway, I'm leery of," she said.

✓ **Rep. Pat Garofalo, R-Farmington**, said there's a big difference between a time limit that is imposed by the majority and a time limit rule that is agreed upon by members of both parties.

✓ **Rep. Will Morgan, DFL-Burnsville**, said he supports bipartisan time limits on debate.

"I think we can make our floor work to be more efficient ... if we have mutually agreed to time limits," Morgan said.

Hausman said the lack of a time limit results in some members monopolizing floor debate.

"Lack of a time limit in a debate gives more power in the legislative process to

the person who dominates," Hausman said.

Pelowski said time limits, which some states have, would prevent the errors and poor policy-making that occur when the Legislature meets into the wee hours of the morning.

"When you're pushing those kinds of hours, what are you accomplishing?" Pelowski asked.

✓ **Rep. Laura Brod, R-New Prague**, said that legislators should complete finance bills early in the session.

"It seems to me that when you build a house you have to know where the money is first," Brod said.

✓ **Rep. Steve Simon, DFL-St. Louis Park**, said he supports a rule that would require more advance notice of floor amendments before they are introduced and debated on the floor.

"A lot of people from other states can't believe we don't have a notice rule on amendments," Simon said.

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