

Lawmakers from across region buzz over news of gov.'s plans

Anderson calling the news 'reality check' for GOP'; Juhnke says all signs of decision were visible during session

By Tom Cherveney
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WILLMAR — Gov. Tim Pawlenty's announcement he will not seek a third term didn't really catch area legislators by surprise, but its timing has them buzzing.

"It's a reality check for those of us in the Republican party," said Rep. Paul Anderson, R-Starbuck. He pointed out that as the minority party, the governor's veto "was the only power we had."

Anderson is concerned Pawlenty's early announcement will weaken his role and that of the party overall.

Anderson gives Pawlenty high marks for his performance as governor and believes like many others that his announcement opens the way for a run for national office.

"He's got what it takes. He's got charisma. He's young enough," Anderson said.

State Sen. Joe Gimse, R-Willmar, believes the announcement benefits the many Republicans in the state who are hoping to put

together campaigns for the governor's office.

Gimse said he was only somewhat surprised by Pawlenty's announcement.

Reaction/ Page A2

"From my perspective, he's been doing a good job," Gimse said.

He calls the governor "a man of his word," and appreciates his commitment to reducing government spending.

Gimse believes the announcement offers Pawlenty more options in deciding on his national aspirations. DFL legislators said Pawlenty's unwillingness to negotiate a budget deal convinced them early in the legislative session that he had his sights on national office.

"He's been kicking the can down the road with our budget and leaving a mess for the next person in office," said Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar.

"He didn't really solve the budget problems," said Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City. "They are still hanging out there."

Koenen said the governor's expressed willingness to use his power to unallot left him and other DFLers with only one question: When will he announce for national office?

Koenen said he believes the early announcement gives Pawlenty more opportunity to court the national Republican party's base and its call for no new taxes.

Juhnke said he has watched Pawlenty emerge from a quiet legislator in the second from last row of the House to a national party contender, and doesn't believe any of it is by accident. Juhnke said he is convinced that Pawlenty is studying his national options and is willing to bide his time.

Pawlenty might be poisoning himself as a Republican

candidate for national office in 2016, after a popular President Obama has served two terms, Juhnke said.

Juhnke pointed out that ever since Minnesota made the governor's term four years, no one has successfully won a third term. Nor has anyone launched a successful campaign for national office after losing out in a race for governor. Pawlenty avoids both of those dilemmas with his announcement now, Juhnke said.

But he said it comes at a cost to the party. Juhnke said his surprise over the announcement is the timing, noting that Pawlenty will be a lame duck for 19 long months.



Juhnke



Gimse



Koenen



Anderson



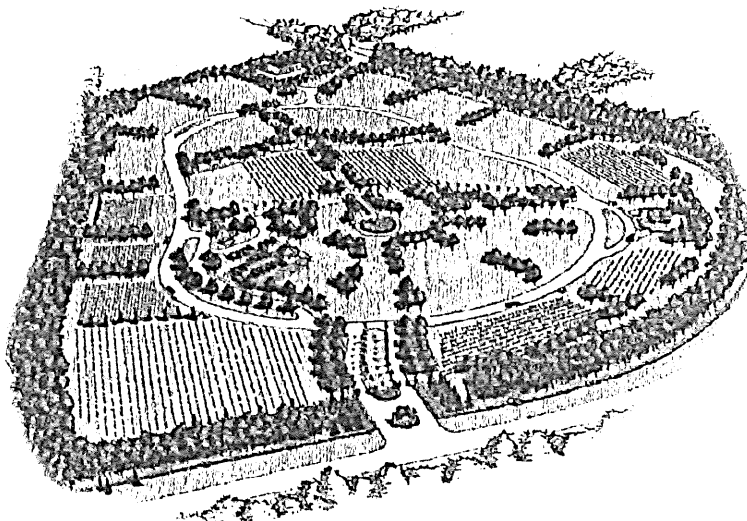
Area lawmakers announce funds for veterans cemetery

Sens. Dennis Frederickson, R-New Ulm, and Jim Vickerman, DFL-Tracy, along with Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, announced in a news release Wednesday that \$1.5 million was recently included in the Capital Investment bill to establish a new State Veterans Cemetery in the Redwood Falls area and another cemetery in northeastern Minnesota.

The funding includes up to \$500,000 for land acquisition, and additional monies for pre-design and design of the cemeteries, the release said.

The total amount of the Capital Investment bill is \$361 million, the news release said. The bill will now go before the full Senate and House for votes before it is presented to Gov. Tim Pawlenty.





MINNESOTA STATE VETERANS CEMETERY
LITTLE OLGA, MINNESOTA

This was one of the proposed designs for a Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery in Jay Cooke State Park. The plan fell through after an engineering firm determined an access road was inadequate, and the state Veterans Affairs Department could not convince nearby property owners to sell part of their land. *2008 file / News Tribune*

Willmar veterans home clears House bonding bill

Lawmakers give approval to send millions to Willmar for construction of 90-bed facility for veterans with mental illnesses



Gimse

Juhnke

By Carolyn Lange

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ST. PAUL — A proposal to build a 90-bed nursing home in Willmar for veterans with mental illness cleared the Minnesota House on Monday.

As part of the \$200 million bonding bill, \$5 million was included for the Willmar veterans home.

"It went through and it's in the bill heading to conference committee," said Rep. Al Juhnke, DFL-Willmar.

"Everything on the House side is very good, and we hope we can get some affirmation in the Senate," he said.

Juhnke said he's confident Gov. Pawlenty will approve the project. "We just have to get it to his desk."

So far the Willmar project isn't in the Senate bonding bill, but Sen. Joe Gimse has secured a hearing date for April 14 in the veterans and agriculture committee.

"We're lining up the testifiers," said Gimse.

Gimse said Willmar City Councilman and veteran Jim Dokken and Kandiyohi County Veterans Service Officer Trisha Appeldorn are expected to testify, as well as Steve Renquist, economic development director for Kandiyohi County and the city of Willmar.

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Each will get "five minutes to tell their story," Gimse said. "It's going to be heard. We're going to fight for it," he said. "It's a worthwhile project and it'll be good for our community."

Gimse said he's "always optimistic" the project will get funded but said he's also a "realist" given the tight budget and economy.

He said lawmakers will have to weigh other funding priorities, such as flood relief, when deciding what will end up in the final bill.

Gimse said he'll request \$7.9 million in bonding money for the Willmar veterans home.

The House bill would require about \$3 million in local funding, Juhnke said.

The differences could be worked out in conference committee.

There are other proposals from a number of communities for veterans homes.

"I'm going to be pulling for the project in Montevideo," said Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City.

He doesn't think the Senate will agree to add the Willmar veterans project this year and that the real discussion on which veterans home will get funded won't happen until next year when the state takes up its major bonding bill.

Koenen said he's been "bombarded" with questions about the competing veterans home projects and he'll be talking to community leaders about the Montevideo proposal when he's home on Easter break. "I do know that Montevideo has a good proposal," he said.

Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City, said he supports the Willmar veterans home project and it was one reason why he voted for the \$200 bonding bill.

But he said he wishes the bill had included more money for colleges and universities and for flood relief.

The House bill includes \$12.7 million for flood mitigation.

"Frankly, I was hoping for a better bill," said Urdahl. "I wanted more money for floods."

■ The House bill included a total of \$895,000 for Ridge-water College for building repairs and elevator modifications. Juhnke said he didn't know if that allocation would be divided between the Willmar and Hutchinson campuses.

■ The House bonding bill included \$11 million for local bridge replacement. Nearly every area county



will receive money to
replace bridges, said Koe-
nen.



Koenen



Urdahl

Frederickson, Koenen propose new Veterans Cemetery

Sen. Dennis Frederickson, R-New Ulm, and Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, have introduced companion bills in the Legislature to establish a new State Veterans Cemetery in the Redwood Falls area.

In a report requested by the 2008 Legislature, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs determined that the Redwood Falls area is the center of large veteran populations.

"Placing a new State Veterans Cemetery in the Redwood Falls area would place the major veteran population concentrations of 14 counties within a 50-mile radius and provide a Veterans Cemetery option to an estimated 22,789 veterans," the report said.

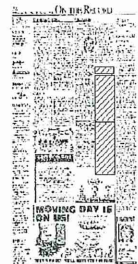
"Many veterans would like the honor of being buried in a Veterans Cemetery when

they pass on," said Frederickson. "But the cemetery needs to be within 50-miles of the veterans' homes to be an option for most veterans and their families."

"A Veterans Cemetery in our area would have a powerful meaning for many veterans who live in our area," said Koenen. "I know the community veterans organizations would take great pride in making it a very special place recognizing the service to our country by veterans."

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) provides grants for the construction of new State Veterans Cemeteries. The grants provide for 100 percent of the cost of construction plus initial basic equipment needed for operation.

The state has a long-term obligation in providing for annual operational costs of the cemetery and is responsible for obtaining the land for a potential cemetery.



Public speaks, legislators listen

■ Lawmakers gathered in Marshall on Friday to hear about pressing issues from the public during town hall meeting

By Deb Gau
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MARSHALL — The suggestions on how to fix the state budget shortfall were varied, but the theme of comments to Minnesota legislators at a Friday town hall meeting was consistent: Be careful what you cut.

"I see the faces of some of the people whose survival depends on (state) programs" like medical assistance, said Celeste Lasich, pastor of Christ United Presbyterian Church in Marshall.

More than 100 people from across southern and southwestern Minnesota were packed into a lecture hall at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall. Their testimony included pleas for lawmakers to consider the effect of proposed budget cuts on rural health care, education, business and infrastructure.

Present at the meeting Friday was a panel of 10 state legislators, including Jim Vickerman, DFL-Tracy, Marty Seifert, R-Marshall, Paul Torkelson, R-LaSalle, and Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City. Legislators gave few comments, except to moderate comments from the public.

"This is a listening session," Vickerman said. "We're trying to find, in the least painful way, what and where we can make some cuts."

Individual speakers' testimony tended to fall into several key areas:

• Local Government Aid

Cuts in state aid to cities would have a much more harmful effect in rural Minnesota, several local city officials said.

Granite Falls Mayor Dave

Smiglewski said county seat towns like Granite Falls and Marshall provide vital services. "And yet these towns are asked to bear a burden that's bigger than cities with a much greater property tax capacity."

Marshall City Administrator Ben Martig said that while Marshall is making cuts to brace for reductions in state aid, in 2010 the city would still be losing a dollar amount equal

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to the cost of its entire library program, or the salaries of 16 city employees.

"On the short-term, it's really painful," Martig said.

He suggested making cuts more gradually over a period of time.

• Health Care

Representatives from area health care services said they were concerned about how state budget cuts could affect everything from hospitals to nursing home and mental health care.

Mary Pauluk, chaplain at St. John Lutheran Home in Springfield, urged lawmakers to allow nursing homes to re-base the rates they charge for resident care.

"St. John has no control over the prices we charge," she said. While state prices for care remain fixed, St. John Lutheran is able to provide less for its residents. "We're forced to try to find money elsewhere."

Rick Nordahl, CEO of Sanford Tracy Medical Center, said state cuts would be especially harmful to hospitals, which are seeing an increase of charity care and bad debt costs.

"We would not be able to maintain our services if the (budget) proposals would be enacted," Nordahl said.

• Education

Several speakers, including local high school and university students, testified that the state should keep its focus on education as an investment for the future.

Public school officials, like Marshall Superintendent Klint Willert, said legislators need to address unfunded mandates that increase costs in school districts.

They should also reconsider the costs of testing mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act, Willert said.

In the case of higher education, legislators were urged to allow colleges and universities to manage their own resources more efficiently, instead of making cuts that result in the loss of staff and programs. Rick Shrubbs, president of Minnesota West Community and Technical College, said the state could "remove barriers" to colleges sharing their resources.

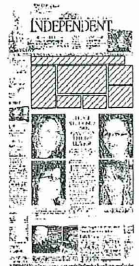
"Rather than fight over the one dollar we have left, I'd like to see us find a way of sharing that dollar," Shrubbs said.

• To tax or not to tax?

While some area residents called for the state to look at increasing revenues through income and other taxes, business owners said tax increases would be fatal to small businesses.

Dennis Wild of Floyd Wild Trucking, said tax increases "would put us out of business."

Allowing slot machines in bars would be one possibility of increasing state revenue without increasing taxes, business owners said.



MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE

Different time, but LGA target for cuts

By Don Davis

State Capitol Bureau

Bill Clinton was president. Arne Carlson was governor. Gasoline was \$1.15 a gallon. Six more years of new television episodes were in "Friends" future. Google was two people in a garage.

And Minnesota cities received \$368 million in Local Government Aid.

Fast forward a dozen years and all that has changed, except LGA could still be at \$368 million.

That is how Steve Peterson of the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities sees the situation as Gov. Tim Pawlenty proposes to chop local government aids by 25 percent as part of his budget-balancing plan.

"It is a change in policy and a retreat in policy," Peterson told the House Property Tax Committee Wednesday.

But there is little choice other than to make the cuts, Revenue Commissioner Ward Einess told committee members.

"The governor is very sensitive to local aid reductions," Einess said.

However, Einess asked:

"Is it a higher priority than other issues?"

"In no way," he added, "is it an indictment of the cities."

Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City, opposes the cuts, like other rural lawmakers whose cities' budgets depend on local aid. But he said that he understands why local aids must be cut — they are the third largest part of the budget, behind education and health programs.

The state faces a budget deficit of nearly \$5 billion, but most policymakers predict that will soar to up to \$7 billion when a new

LGA: See Page 5

economic report is issued early next month.

Rep. Morrie Lanning, R-Moorhead, said he disagrees with fellow Republican Pawlenty on this issue.

Lanning said state government agencies would take a 5 percent cut in Pawlenty's budget plan, compared to about 25 percent for local aids.

"I would look more closely at state government,"

Lanning said, adding that the local cut percentages

should be closer to state cuts.

Property Taxes Committee Chairman **Paul Marquart**, DFL-Dilworth, said Local Government Aid will be a major issue in budget-balancing talks.

"LGA is the great equalizer," Marquart said of the program's founding purpose — to provide communities with less ability to raise property taxes enough funds to adequately serve their residents.

"My concern is disparity," he said, when rural cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul take most of the cuts when suburbs are little affected.

However, many suburbs get little state aid, so there is little to cut, Einess said. "We spend a lot of time looking at the geographic impact."

Einess said the Pawlenty administration did all it could "to spread the pain around." However, he added, "there really is no other alternative."

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