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## Last-minute lake rule looks fishy

Legislator admits to having "egg on my face" after getting special fishing regulations for lake on which he has a cabin.

By **MIKE KASZUBA**, Star Tribune

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It was an unusual move that immediately raised eyebrows.

There was Sen. Satveer Chaudhary, rushing onto the floor of the Minnesota House last Wednesday as legislators were about to approve a complicated fish and game proposal.

Chaudhary kneeled at the desk of Rep. David Dill -- who was presenting the bill at the time -- and whispered an urgent request.

Could Dill quickly insert special language to improve walleye fishing on Fish Lake Reservoir? Although few in the House chamber realized it at the time, Chaudhary owns a cabin on the northeastern Minnesota lake.

Dill agreed, and the bill was adopted. Now the

episode has exploded, inflaming tempers all the way from the State Capitol to northeastern Minnesota and back.

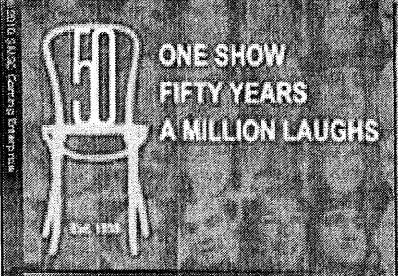
Dill argues he was duped. Chaudhary confesses that he has "egg on my face." The state Department of Natural Resources opposed Chaudhary's request as soon as it found out about it, in the waning hours of the legislative session.

Chaudhary, a DFLer from Fridley who was the chief author of the fish and game bill in the Senate, says he may seek to repeal the Fish Lake Reservoir language, partly because of the criticism aimed at him.

"That was an error on my part," said Chaudhary. He says he was supplied with "completely wrong" information that indicated a large majority of residents near the lake thought the reservoir walleyes were puny and wanted state officials to take action that would improve fishing.

Chaudhary denied he was motivated because he owned a cabin on the lake, where he fishes regularly. "I'm not sure how I benefit from it. I'm not lining my pockets with anything," he said, maintaining he does not have a conflict of interest.

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It is not Chaudhary's first brush with controversy.

Two years ago he was cleared by a Senate ethics panel over allegations that he hosted a cable TV outdoors show and approached Arctic Cat and a carpenters union as possible sponsors. He was backing legislative measures favorable to them at the time. Chaudhary also was sold a snowmobile by Arctic Cat at a discount.

The events at the State Capitol last week involving Fish Lake Reservoir occurred in the blur of the final stages of an almost four-month legislative session. The language amounted to a single paragraph buried in a 59-page bill.

It asked the DNR to adopt special regulations that could restrict walleye catches on Fish Lake Reservoir, a 3,000-acre lake northwest of Duluth. Moments after Chaudhary got Dill to insert the paragraph, Dill persuaded House members to approve the bill.

Three nights later, at 9 p.m. last Saturday, Chaudhary and Dill -- who co-chaired a House-Senate conference panel on the legislation -- presided as the panel gave final approval to the legislation, which included the Fish Lake Reservoir language.

As the meeting was about to end, Chaudhary informed the panel: "My cabin is on Fish Lake Reservoir ... [but] I don't believe it is a conflict."

Chaudhary also reminded panel members that the Fish Lake Reservoir language was added by the House -- and that he was a member of the Senate.


## 'I need you to do this'

"I was standing at my desk on the House floor with the microphone in my hand, and I looked down and Chaudhary is kneeling next to my desk," said Dill, a DFLer from Crane Lake and the chief House author of the game and fish bill. "It looks pretty awkward, really."

He said Chaudhary told him, "I need you to do this Fish Lake amendment." Dill said he inserted the language as a "courtesy" to the senator. But with controversy erupting in northeastern Minnesota, Dill said, he has since talked to Chaudhary and told him the episode "made me look bad."

Dill said he knew Chaudhary owned a cabin on the lake. But, he said, Chaudhary persuaded him that lake residents overwhelmingly favored the amendment. He

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said Chaudhary even showed him an April 1 letter from St. Louis County Commissioner Dennis Fink, claiming that residents wanted the regulations.

But Fink says he pulled back from that assertion when he found that it wasn't necessarily true and says he informed Chaudhary before the legislation was finally passed.

Deserae Hendrickson, the DNR area fisheries supervisor in Duluth, said that a small crowd showed up at a March meeting and that about 60 percent of those favored "doing something" regarding the lake. The legislation itself does not specify what should be done to the lake, but instructs DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten to act by March 2011.

Hendrickson said she doubted that limiting fishing on the lake would help, because Fish Lake Reservoir was only moderately fished to begin with, logging only 26 "angler hours" of fishing per acre per year, compared with a statewide average of 35 angler hours. She said the DNR would have to reduce fishing by as much as 40 percent to make any difference and said the lake was simply a victim of nature. "The fish in this lake just don't grow very fast," she said.

Holsten said the Fish Lake Reservoir language was symbolic of special legislative requests that frustrate him. "This particular conference committee," said Holsten, referring to the panel co-chaired by Chaudhary, "... [made] some very significant changes throughout the entire bill."

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