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Committee agendas were full as the Legislature worked toward an early March adjournment. Here's a brief capsule overview of some of the legislation moving through the legislative process in February.

in committees...



Agriculture

A bill that would set state policy to preserve farmland, conserve soil and water resources, and encourage growth and development planning in rural Minnesota was on the committee agenda Feb. 10.

HF1919 (Kalis, DFL-Walters) would prohibit state agencies from using prime farmland for projects such as highway construction and waste disposal sites and would allocate state cost-sharing funds for soil erosion and water control problems.

The policy-setting measure came to the committee from a joint House-Senate panel that studied the farmland preservation issue over the interim. Committee action, Feb. 10: recommended to pass; rereferred to Appropriations.

A bill to set minimum prices for farm products brought a standing room only crowd to the Feb. 15 meeting. The bill, HF1942 (Hauge, DFL-Glenwood), would allow the state commissioner of agriculture to set the minimum price of farm products such as soybeans, corn, wheat, and other grains after 70 percent of the states producing these products have passed similar minimum price laws.

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Under the bill, the price would not be less than 80 percent of parity. Parity means equality in value—it is a ratio derived from the relationship of the costs of production to the prices farmers get for products.

Farmers testifying in favor of the bill said the farm picture is bleak: farm foreclosures are up, and many crop prices are down. Farmers need to earn the cost of production plus a fair profit to stay in business, said Leo Zimmerman, a farmer from Little Falls.

Businesses opposing the bill said Minnesota must market surplus grain outside the state at prices that compete with the rest of the world. Committee action, Feb. 19: recommended to pass.

On Feb. 19 the committee approved a bill that would add a tax on capital gains from farmland sales. The bill, HF1099 (Ogren, DFL-Aitkin), would establish a sliding scale, on the basis of length of ownership, to determine the tax.

Because family farms (agricultural homesteads a person has owned for at least 2 years) are exempt from the tax, supporters say the bill helps family farms and the rural communities by discouraging speculators from short-term investment and discouraging absentee landowners. Committee action, Feb. 19: recommended to pass; rereferred to Taxes.

Also approved: bills that would require farmers to store milk in a milkhouse (HF1717); set standards of proof to settle livestock claims against endangered species (HF1941); regulate apiary inspection accounts (HF2028); change licensing requirements of grain inspectors (HF2139); update Minnesota seed law (HF1428); consolidate laws providing farm products research (HF1018).



Appropriations

The capital bonding bill, which funds state building construction and maintenance until 1983, got a recommendation to pass on Feb. 16. Division chairmen presented portions of the bill that came out of the Education; Health, Welfare, and Corrections; Semi-state; and State Departments Divisions of the Appropriations Committee.

The bill (HF2136, Sieben, M., DFL-Newport) includes funds for roof repairs for a number of buildings around the state, heating plant and fire safety improvements at Mankato State University, health and safety improvements at Red Wing and Sauk Center correctional facilities and an air pollution control system for the heating plant at St. Paul's University of Minnesota campus.

A proposal for funding for a new women's correctional facility at Shakopee lost on a 10-19 committee vote, but the bonding bill does include funds to plan for remodeling or replacement of the facility. Committee action, Feb. 16: recommended to pass. House Floor action, Feb. 24: passed (81-31).

Budget cuts at the University of Minnesota may mean tuition hikes 12 percent above the expected tuition levels, and possible shut-downs or reduction of programs, starting in the 1982 summer school session.

Dr. Ken Keller, vice president of academic affairs at the University of Minnesota, reviewed for the Education Division of Appropriations on Feb. 18 some of the options the Board of Regents has been discussing. One plan calls for reducing the Agricultural Engineering Department and transferring some of its functions to the Institute of Technology, and eliminating the Library School.

Nursing students don't have the freedom to transfer to other learning institutions to further their nursing degrees without losing credits. The credit transfer problem was the reason the 1980 Legislature authorized the Nursing Articulation Task Force to study state nursing programs.

On Feb. 10, the task force outlined for the Appropriations Committee, a strategy for solving the credit transfer problem.

By the 1983 academic year, registered nurses would need to take no more than two-thirds of the nursing coursework schools require of other nursing students in a B.A. program; licensed practical nurses would take no more than two-thirds of the nursing coursework other nursing students take in an associates degree program; and governing boards would initiate and approve articulation agreements among institutions so that nursing students get appropriate credit and/or advanced placement.



Commerce & Economic Development

Workers' and unemployment compensation changes top the list of priorities Minnesota's small businesses want the Legislature to work on, according to Gene Wright, chairman of the Minnesota Commission on Small Business.

At a Feb. 2 committee meeting, Wright reviewed 10 high-priority issues which delegates to the Minnesota Small Business Conference voted on in November.

Some other legislative recommendations small business owners made at the conference were: reduce corporate and personal income tax rates; place limitations on product liability; establish a "right-to-work" policy so employees could choose whether or not to be union members; tie state spending to specific revenue sources; increase tourism funding and expand tourism advertising to cover all four seasons of the year.



Criminal Justice

Drug dealers can make a huge profit selling legal substances such as caffeine as controlled drugs according to Rep. James Swanson (DFL-Richfield). Swanson testified on Feb. 1, on behalf of his bill to prohibit the sale of substances that manufacturers package to look like illegal drugs, but which are not.

In Minneapolis alone, Swanson said look-alike speed sent 74 people to hospitals during the first nine months of 1981. Look-alike drugs cause law-enforcement problems, and help to encourage the drug culture, according to Swanson.

Swanson's bill would set up a penalty of up to three years in jail and/or a fine of up to \$10,000 dollars. Committee action Feb. 1: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 11: passed (124-0).

Minnesota's laws could get tough for juvenile offenders and their parents under a bill that has approval of the Criminal Justice Committee.

If the bill (HF1610, Kelly, DFL-St. Paul) becomes law, fifteen-year-olds would have to face up to their traffic violations in adult court. Parent liability for the action of their kids could go up to \$1000. And anyone providing food, money, or transportation that permits a youngster to run away from home, or anyone allowing a juvenile to stay in his or her home for more than 24 hours would be guilty of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

The bill would also restrict the number of juveniles the state would pay to house in facilities outside of Minnesota. Committee action, Feb. 1: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 11: passed (126-0).

Whether one knows right from wrong would no longer be a factor in determining if someone is mentally ill, under a bill that would eliminate mental illness as a defense in a court of law.

According to Rep. Kathleen Blatz (IR-Bloomington), author of HF1442, if someone pleads insanity in a trial, jurors would try to determine whether the person has the mental ability to form intent to commit a crime, and if they find the person guilty, he or she would serve a prison sentence.

Throughout hearings on the legislation, supporters argued that there is no excuse for committing a crime, and mental illness is an increasingly easy way out, because the length of confinement in a state institution usually is not as long as jail sentences.

Opponents of the bill argue to continue the use of current law and the M'Naghten Rule for determining insanity. Opponents say mentally ill persons may intend their actions, but not have control over them, or know their actions are wrong. Such people, opponents say, need treatment. Committee action, Feb. 8: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 26: passed (92-29).

Black-market sale of children was an issue before the committee on Feb. 19. Rep. Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Mpls) testified on his bill, HF1809, which would make the offense of selling or buying children through the black market a crime equal to kidnapping, with a possible penalty of up to 20 years in jail and/or a fine of up to \$20,000. The legislation would most heavily penalize those who buy or sell for a profit. Committee action, Feb. 19: recommended to pass.

A bill to prohibit the sale of drug paraphernalia (HF 1759, Schreiber, IR-Brooklyn Park) got a hearing on Feb. 19.

Headshops that sell drug paraphernalia, said Rep. Bill Schreiber, give young people the wrong message, the message that drugs are okay.

Twenty-five other states have approved the Model Drug Paraphernalia Act, as has the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals which has jurisdiction over Minnesota. Legislators have watched drug legislation in other states and moved cautiously in Minnesota because in many cases drug legislation has not stood up as constitutional in the courts, according to Schreiber.

Gary Flakne, speaking for United Specialty Association, opposes the bill. He says drug paraphernalia is in the eye of the beholder, a little like pornography. This bill "takes items which otherwise are innocent and ascribes to them by virtue of all kinds of strange circumstantial evidence that they somehow are illegal." Committee action, Feb. 19: recommended to pass.

The "super bullet" or "cop killer bullet" is the greatest threat to law enforcement officers in the 1980s, according to Rep. Shirley Hokanson (DFL-Richfield).

Hokanson is author of HF1704, a bill that she says would protect law enforcement officers by prohibiting the use of the "metal-penetrating bullet" during commission of a crime. The bullet is powerful enough to pass through metal and body armor, or bullet proof vests.

"No one, not even police officers need those kinds of weapons," said Richard Abraham from the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association, "That

bullet is only on the market for one thing, and that's to penetrate. What are we going to penetrate? The criminal element is going to penetrate your soft body armor or automobiles." Committee action, Feb. 19: recommended to pass.

The people who cause drunk driving accidents should pay for them, says Rep. Glen Anderson (DFL-Bellingham). Anderson has authored a bill to put a nickel tax on drinks in restaurants and bars. The bill, HF1374, proposes that the proceeds go to enforce DWI laws, fund alcohol and drug abuse treatment and prevention programs, reimburse local governments and the state for alcohol-related costs, and fund alcohol research, planning and education.

Distributors would collect the tax when they sell liquor to retail establishments. The rate would be 5 cents per ounce of hard liquor, 12 ounces of beer, or 4 ounces of wine. Committee action, Feb. 15: recommended to pass; rereferred to Appropriations.

Sexual abuse of children is a problem that's been under cover for many years and is only now beginning to surface," Hennepin County Attorney, Bill Neiman, told a House Criminal Justice subcommittee on Feb. 17. Neiman spoke in favor of HF1764 (Levi, IR-Dellwood), a bill addressing the child pornography issue.

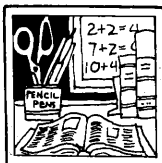
HF1764 would make it a felony to distribute or possess pictures and films that use child models. To further protect the victims, the legislation would not allow publication or broadcast of names of minor-age victims. In many cases, Neiman said, children or families of victimized children refuse to prosecute offenders because of the fear of publicity. Committee action, Feb 19: recommended to pass.

Three bills to toughen penalties against drunk drivers came out of the committee Feb. 19 with a recommendation to pass.

HF1586 (Anderson B., DFL-Slayton) would set mandatory fines, and allow judges to impose jail sentences and lengthen license revocations for DWI (driving while intoxicated) offenders.

Another bill, HF1744 (Rothenberg, IR-St. Louis Park) which increases fines, jail sentences and license revocation for repeat offenders, also sets rehabilitation requirements and increases length of license revocation for first-time offenders.

A third bill to get committee approval would create a traffic violation of "driving while impaired", with a blood-alcohol-concentration of between .07 and .10. HF1723 (Vellenga, DFL-St. Paul), would set penalties for driving while impaired and restrict ability of persons convicted of driving while intoxicated to get limited licenses.



Education

There are no formal proposals in the House for year-round school or a four-day school week, but the Education Committee took a brief look at the pros and cons of such ideas at a Feb. 3 meeting.

Educators in a rural school district in Colorado claim they've saved about one percent of a year's budget by going to a four-day week. And, according to a local newspaper article, parents, kids, and teachers heartily support the change.

In Minnesota, Mora has year-round school. Kids attend class for 45 days, then have 15 days vacation; then 45 days of class, and so on through the year.

Education Department officials cautioned that the Legislature would have to weigh such problems as teacher contract changes, what to do with kids on the days off, and day care needs of working parents if districts adopted a four-day week.

A bill to limit the appropriation for the interstate tuition reciprocity program which Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Dakotas share got a Feb. 10 hearing. The program allows students to pay in-state fees at out-of-state schools, with the home state paying the difference between resident and non-resident tuition.

The idea worked well when the number of Minnesota students leaving the state equaled the number of out-of-staters coming in, said Rep. Ken Zubay (IR-Rochester), author of the bill, HF1664. But in the 1980-81 school year, according to Zubay, 6000 more students left the state than came in, and Minnesota paid out about \$7 million more in tuition differentials than we took in from other states.

HF1664 would continue the program, but allow for the exchange of only an equal number of students. Committee action, Feb. 10: recommended to pass rereferred to Appropriations. Education Division of Appropriations, Feb. 17: laid over for interim study.

What is a school? On Feb. 17, the Education Committee took a step toward coming up with an answer, recommending passage of HF1459 (Eken, DFL-Twin Valley). The bill lists subjects a school must teach, and requires parents of children who attend non-public school to report to the local superintendents that the school their child attends meets 175 days a year, teaches the required subjects, and has teachers who are "essentially equivalent" to public school teachers.

Brother William Rhode, education director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, supported the bill. "This bill protects the right of parents to educate their children in the manner they wish, and recognizes the legitimate concern of the state in the education of its citizens."

Opponents of the bill said it doesn't sufficiently address the issue of how to determine whether a teacher has qualifications that are essentially equivalent to those of a public school teacher. Committee action, Feb. 17: recommended to pass.

The House version of the school aids bill, HF 1555 (McEachern, DFL-St. Michael), on March 1, was awaiting final action on the House floor, after passing through the Education and Appropriations Committees this month.

Much of this year's school aids bill is a result of the emergency budget bill the House and Senate passed in January's special session. That bill required the Legislature to take a new look at programs and requirements that may be costing school districts more than they can afford.

Some of the cost saving measures include removal of state mandates—some reporting and budgeting requirements, and elimination of mandatory pre-school health screening. However, districts may elect to continue a scaled-down version of the screening program.

Special education changes may save districts money by removing funding for summer school classes for handicapped students at levels one through three (an optional program) and giving that money to summer school for levels four through six (a required program.) Special education class sizes may also float 20 percent, and districts would have to limit administrative salaries to 7.25 percent of the special education salary budget, except where that program employs fewer than 10 people.

The bill would also allow school boards to ask voters to increase property taxes to pay for services they otherwise might have to cut, such as bus transportation for secondary students who live from one to two miles from school, (two miles is the new cutoff for state reimbursement for transportation costs,) and bus transportation for students who would otherwise walk a dangerous route to get to school.

Under HF 1871, (McEachern, DFL-St. Michael) high schools would give the United States Armed Services high-school student mailing lists, unless the parents file a form to object to the release. Currently, some schools, but not all, give the lists to military officers for recruiting purposes. Committee action, Feb 17: recommended to pass.

Also approved: bill that would clarify financial arrangements for secondary school students who attend post-secondary school programs (HF1819).

Heard in committee: bill that would create an AVTI governing board separate from the Department of Education (HF1020); set guidelines for teachers' removal of students from class for disciplinary reasons (HF459).



Energy

HF451 would require the state's utility companies to work with each other to provide power to Minnesota customers. The bill would require the state's energy director to turn down a utility's request for a certificate of need to build a new plant if he determines that power plants elsewhere in the state have excess capacity the petitioning utility could tap into.

Acting Energy Agency Director Michael Murphy said the bill doesn't really change the certificate of need process, it merely emphasizes the importance of one of the factors the agency already considers.

Rep. Ken Nelson (DFL-Mpls) is author of the bill which, as amended in committee, would not affect the certification process for NSP's proposed Sherco Three power plant. Committee action, Feb. 4: recommended to pass. House Floor action, Feb. 26: failed (58-64).



Environment & Natural Resources

Who's liable for cleanup and damage costs of hazardous waste spills? The Minnesota Environmental Response and Liability Act, working its way through the committee process in the House, would establish liability for release of hazardous substances, provide funds from a special tax to allow the Pollution Control Agency to clean up waste problems promptly, and to sue the responsible party after the cleanup.

Rep. Dee Long, (DFL-Mpls), author of HF1176, told the committee the cleanup funds would come from a tax on generators of hazardous substances, and a tax on mixed municipal (solid) waste which haulers deposit in landfills.

Some committee members raised questions about availability of insurance for waste generators and those who haul hazardous waste. They also questioned how the bill would affect garbage collectors who would have to pay a tax to landfill operators. Committee action, Feb. 18: recommended to pass; rereferred to Taxes.

The time to act on the acid rain problem is now Rep. Arlene Lehto (DFL-Duluth) told an Environment subcommittee on Feb. 25. Lehto is author of HF1789, which she says would reduce the amount of pollutants in the environment which cause acid rain.

Acid rain is a by-product of businesses and industry which burn fossil fuels. Burning releases sulfur dioxide waste into the air. Rain or snow then deposits

the pollutants on the land or in water, posing a threat to the environment and human health.

HF1789 would attempt to curb the sources of acid rain in the state and encourage other states, the federal government, and Canada to take steps to alleviate or eliminate the problem of acid deposits. Under the bill the PCA would adopt standards for control and a plan to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions both in and outside of the state. Subcommittee action, Feb. 26: recommended to pass.

Also approved: bills that would raise snowmobile registration fees to fund trail construction and maintenance and safety education programs (HF1477, rereferred to Appropriations); require the commissioner of administration to acquire land for public access sites on Bass Lake and Lake Minnetonka (HF1961, rereferred to Appropriations); make a number of changes to the Waste Management Act (HF1934).



Financial Institutions & Insurance

Approved: bills that would require full auto insurance coverage to include coverage for damage to windshields (HF716); allow an out-of-state bank holding corporation to acquire a Minnesota savings bank to prevent its failure (HF1808, passed both houses); clarify when Minnesota has claim rights to certain unredeemed money orders (HF2060).



General Legislation & Veterans Affairs

Mobile homes aren't so mobile anymore and state laws ought to reflect that, Rep. Donna Peterson told the General Legislation Committee on Feb. 4, when she explained a proposal she's presenting to the Legislature this session.

Peterson's bill is the result of interim hearings throughout the state and would update state laws that govern what the building trade calls "manufactured housing."

The bill clarifies the relationship between home owners and park owners; lists the rights and duties of park residents; forbids park owners from evicting residents for no cause; limits the number of rent increases an owner can enact to two per year; requires the park and the city to have plans for shelter or evacuation of park residents in case of emergency or severe weather. Committee action, Feb. 4: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 18: passed (87-33).

When the United States armed forces used Agent Orange to kill foliage in Vietnam jungles, they may have contributed to cancers, neurological and reproductive problems, and emotional disorders that Vietnam vets now suffer.

The committee on Feb. 18 approved HF1669 (Harens, DFL-St. Paul), a bill that would provide information, referral, and counseling for Vietnam vets who suffer from exposure to the chemical.

Rep. Tom Harens, author of HF1669, said the federal government and the veteran's administration have been slow to recognize the link between health problems and exposure to Agent Orange. So the vets have had little financial or informational help at the federal level.

Harens's bill would provide funds for the state commissioner of veterans affairs to inform Vietnam vets of medical studies on the effects of Agent Orange; direct them to proper treatment for health problems; help them file claims for disability; and get them counseling services. Committee action, Feb. 18: recommended to pass; rereferred to Appropriations.



Governmental Operations

Keeping the state's money out of South Africa might be a way to deal with that country's racism, according to members of the Governmental Operations Committee.

The committee Feb. 18 recommended to pass HF1811 (Staten, DFL-Mpls) which would keep the State Board of Investment from investing state money in corporations and banks that have holdings in South Africa and Namibia, unless those businesses can prove they have fair employment practices regarding race and labor organization.

Everyone who testified on the bill agreed Minnesota should support human rights in South Africa, but some disagreed on whether withholding investments is the way to do it.

"American companies, including 3M, have been and continue to be a major force for social change in South Africa through progress they make through their employees, by serving as a positive example, and by participating in organizations that are absolutely opposed to racial discrimination," according to Donn Osmon, vice president at 3M.

Corporations have no policies on sexual harrassment, said Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Mpls) at a Feb. 19 meeting, or if policies do exist, they don't benefit victims because of lack of enforcement. The committee voted to recommend passage of HF1220 (Clark, K.) which would prevent the loss of unemployment benefits when an employee quits a job because of sexual harrassment.

Pay for female-dominated state jobs is still significantly less than that for male-dominated positions, according to a report from the Council of the Economic Status of Women. On Feb. 18, the committee recommended HF2205 (Simoneau, DFL-Fridley), a bill which would provide funds to help equalize salaries on some jobs which women usually hold in state employment. Committee action, Feb. 18: recommended to pass; rereferred to Appropriations.

Also approved: bills which would create the Local Government Advisory Council to improve intergovernmental communication and cooperation (HF1566, rereferred to Appropriations); delay the sale of Rochester State Hospital (HF1698).



Health & Welfare

Two patient-rights bills, one HF2065 (Clark, K., DFL-Mpls) that would regulate the use of certain behavior modification techniques for mentally retarded people, the other, HF1572 (Byrne, DFL-St. Paul), that would require doctors to give more information on alternative treatments for breast cancer got committee approval Feb. 18. Committee action, HF2065, Feb. 18: recommended to pass; rereferred to Appropriations. HF1572: recommended to pass.

Certificate of need legislation requires hospitals and other health care facilities to go through three hearing and approval steps to get permission to buy costly equipment, or to construct or remodel buildings. Some people say the process keeps health costs from rising by preventing unnecessary expenses.

But other analysts and health care providers believe more competition in the health care market is a better way to hold down costs.

The Health Care subcommittee heard bills that would eliminate the certificate of need requirement, but passed a bill instead that would prohibit repeal of the certificate requirement until after a full study of the effect of repeal.

The bill would raise the expenditure threshold that requires a certificate of need, and would also stimulate competition, according to author Rep. James Swanson (DFL-Richfield), by requiring each hospital to disclose how much it charged the average patient for treatment of certain common illnesses and injuries.

The commissioner of health would draw up the list of common illnesses and injuries, and would be responsible for making the cost information readily available to the public. Committee action, Feb. 18: recommended to pass, rereferred to Appropriations.

Also approved: bills that would regulate optometrist's use of topical ocular drugs, and specify when optometrists must refer patients to a physician (HF275/SF709*, passed House Feb. 26); set nursing home reimbursement rates (HF1404, rereferred to Appropriations); allow competitive bidding and encouraging use of HMO's for medical assistance services (HF2123, rereferred to Appropriations); require physicians to report cases of Reye's syndrome (HF1839); make the Governor's Council on Wellness a permanent board (HF2062, rereferred to Appropriations); prohibit sale of skunks (HF849); establish a work incentive in the AFDC income limits (HF2188, rereferred to Appropriations.)



Judiciary

Your drivers license—is it a right or a privilege? Is it yours or the state's? Committee members debated those questions Feb. 4 when they heard HF1484 (Vanasek, DFL-New Prague).

Under HF1484, drivers who fail the blood-alcohol test or refuse to take the chemical test, would lose their licenses 7 days after they receive revocation notice, with no license extensions. The person officials have charged with DWI would have to file a petition and pay the fees to get a court's review of the revocation.

Rep. Mike Sieben (DFL-Newport) cautioned that the bill is contrary to the judicial process because it takes away licenses before a hearing, assuming the driver is guilty until he or she can prove otherwise. The bill would place the burden of proof on the person who is losing rights, rather than the party that is taking rights away, said Sieben. Committee action, Feb. 4: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 18: passed (125-1).

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to permit the Legislature to establish a court of appeals?" is a question HF1727 (Clawson, DFL-Center City) would put before the voters in the 1982 fall election.

If voters approve the amendment by voting "Yes", they will add a court to the judicial branch of state government which will hear appeals from district,

county, and municipal courts to ease the Supreme Court's heavy caseload. Committee action, Feb. 17: recommended to pass; rereferred to Rules and Legislative Administration.

Also approved: bills which would define civil commitment procedures (HF1499); prohibit children from suing their parents for "wrongful life" (HF1532); clarify that judges may award permanent maintenance after marriage dissolution to certain homemakers (HF450/SF378*); allow doctors to report to the Department of Public Safety names of patients with impaired ability to drive (HF1523); require suspension of drivers license of uninsured motorist who damages another person's car, until the uninsured motorist arranges to pay the court settlement.



Labor-Management Relations

A bill that would give workers the right to refuse to work with toxic or dangerous chemicals was under discussion in a Labor-Management subcommittee on Feb. 1.

Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Mpls), author, said the bill would allow employers 24 hours to give workers information on the chemicals they use on the job and disclose whether those chemicals are potentially harmful.

Opponents to the bill said employers need more than 24 hours to get information to their workers, and that the requirement to reveal ingredients in certain products could give away trade secrets. Subcommittee action, Feb. 26: heard.

Minnesota's workers' compensation system overpays some injured workers, underpays others, and this inequity ties up many cases in court, delaying payments, according to State Insurance Commissioner Michael Markman.

In testimony at a Feb. 9 meeting of a subcommittee on workers' compensation, Markman recommended 44 changes to the state's worker's compensation laws which he said would decrease costs to employers without reducing benefits to most workers. The changes would put Minnesota employers' costs for workers' compensation more in line with surrounding states, according to Markman.

Rep. Jim Rice (DFL-Mpls) disagreed with Markman, saying that Minnesota's workers' compensation costs are higher because medical costs are higher. The proposed changes, he said, would cut too much from benefits and nothing from insurance companies.

Employees have a right to get ample notice that their place of employment is closing or relocating AFL-CIO president David Roe told committee members, testifying in favor of HF542 (Rice, DFL-Mpls).

The bill would require employers to give two-year notice to employees, employee organizations, a state board, and affected communities if the company plans to close down, relocate, or reduce operations.

A 10-member Minnesota Community, Business and Job Preservation Board would conduct studies and collect information on problems that arise from plant closings. The board could also appoint local action committees that would work to relieve or minimize the effects of closings. Committee action, Feb. 24: heard.



Local & Urban Affairs

If Minneapolis has the financial responsibility for the domed stadium for the next 30 years, the city should have the authority to run it, says Minneapolis Mayor Don Fraser. He suggested that the Minneapolis City Council should select the stadium commission's members.

Committee members, however, approved HF1166, a bill from Rep. Bob Ellingson (DFL-Brooklyn Center) that would add two Minneapolis residents to the commission, but keep statewide membership on the board. The Hubert Humphrey Metro Dome, according to Ellingson, serves more than just Minneapolis, so others should have a say in its administration. Committee action, Feb. 4: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 24: passed (82-36).

Also approved: bills that would allow cities to issue loans for rehabilitation of small and medium sized commercial buildings (HF1365); establish a metropolitan water resources board (HF1505, rereferred to Taxes); allow local governments to establish special service districts, with taxing authority (HF1904, rereferred to Taxes).

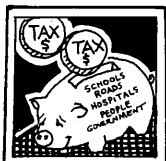


Regulated Industries

Toughman boxing is legalized bar-room brawling, according to Rep. Wes. Skoglund (DFL-Mpls) and it may become illegal soon. The committee approved a bill (HF1732, Skoglund) that would outlaw the amateur contests that Skoglund and Harry Davis, former chairman of the state boxing commission, call dangerous.

Toughman boxing invites untrained people into the boxing ring to fight each other in a two-day tournament. Skoglund cited newspaper reports of one death and a number of serious injuries resulting from matches in other states.

The bill would require any boxer who participates in a match for prize money above \$5 to observe all requirements of the boxing board, to train for at least 90 days before a match, to get a certificate of physical fitness from a doctor, and to wait at least seven days between matches. Committee action, Feb. 8: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 15: passed (119-6).



Taxes

Do professional athletes earn their salaries only when they play regular season games, or are they earning their keep during pre-season training, practice games, and traveling time as well?

That question is the key to the decision on how much Minnesota income tax out-of-state pros owe. A bill, HF1823 (O'Connor, DFL-St. Paul), before the committee on Feb. 18 would have set the taxable income as the percent of income equal to the percent of total season games athletes play here in Minnesota.

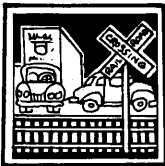
After testimony on Feb. 18, and again on Feb. 25, the committee amended the bill to figure taxable income on the percent of "duty days" or total days in the season the player spends here in Minnesota. Committee action, Feb. 25: approved, added to HF1872, the omnibus tax bill.

HF374 would require all counties to collect a 10-cents-per-cubic-yard or seven-cents-per-ton tax on gravel, sand, limestone or other crushed rock companies take out of Minnesota land.

Bill author Rep. Jim Evans (IR-Detroit Lakes) said the tax makes sense because gravel and other minerals are depletable natural resources, comparable to oil in other states. The tax money would go to reclaim area mines and fix local roads haulers use to move gravel.

Some counties already collect the tax, but Evans says they all do it differently and this bill would bring uniformity and clarity to who pays the tax, when, and how much. Committee action, Feb. 16: approved, added to HF1872, the omnibus tax bill.

Also approved: bills that would extend the tax credit for residential renewable energy equipment (HF1739); set penalties for professional income tax preparers who wilfully misstate information on tax forms (HF1824); tie the interest rate on local government general obligation bonds to the Bond Buyer's Index of 20 municipalities (HF1705); make tax exemptions to municipalities that lease or make installment payments on equipment the same as for equipment purchases (HF1643).



Transportation

Last year a handicapped man from St. Charles, Minnesota used a motorized golf cart to get from his home to the barber shop and to visit his friends, and he broke the law.

Minnesota law says he can't drive his golf cart on roads and streets anywhere in the state. But Rep. Tom Stowell (IR-Lewiston) has a proposal that would permit cities to pass ordinances to allow motorized wheelchairs and golf carts on streets, and let city councils issue permits to handicapped people who need motorized vehicles to get around. Committee action, Feb. 3: recommended to pass. House floor action, Feb. 24: passed (117-2).

Also approved: bills that would tax motorcycle registration fees to fund safety education programs (HF1025, rereferred to Appropriations); remove the prohibition against the Highway 35E connection into downtown St. Paul (HF1939, rereferred to Appropriations); create a special POW license plate for ex-prisoners of war (HF1686, rereferred to Appropriations).