

A NONPARTISAN PUBLICATION ★ ★ ★

SESSION Weekly

MINNESOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES • PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

MARCH 17, 2000
VOLUME 17, NUMBER 7

In this issue:

FUNDING FOR THE OUTDOORS,

PROFILE CHANGES & TRANSIT SPENDING

HF4089-HF4122

Session Weekly

Session Weekly is a nonpartisan publication of the Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Office. During the 1999-2000 Legislative Session, each issue reports daily House action between Thursdays of each week, lists bill introductions and upcoming committee meeting schedules, and provides other information. The publication is a service of the Minnesota House. No fee.

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Session Weekly (ISSN 1049-8176) is published weekly during the legislative session by the Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Office, 100 Constitution Ave., St. Paul, MN 55155-1298. Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Session Weekly*, Public Information Office, Minnesota House of Representatives, 175 State Office Building, 100 Constitution Ave., St. Paul, MN 55155-1298.

Printed on recycled paper which is 50% recycled,
20% post-consumer content.



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On the cover: The House Civil Law Committee meets in the newly remodeled and modernized Basement Hearing Room in the State Office Building. Three other hearing rooms will be remodeled during the next interim.

—Photo by Tom Olmscheid

Creating a new stream

Plan would devote a share of sales-tax revenue to environmental projects

By MICHELLE KIBIGER

Former Minnesota Vikings coach Bud Grant, who is also well-known as a hunter and fisherman, said recently that he's tired of watching the state allow natural resources to deteriorate because of a lack of funding.

"Many people are envious that I live in the state of Minnesota and am able to take part in what we have," Grant said. "And they're mystified that we have so many problems. I'm tired of hearing so many problems with our (Department of Natural Resources)."

Grant was one of about a dozen people who testified before the House Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee March 14 in favor of a bill that seeks a new stream of permanent revenue for the environment.

The bill (HF3426), sponsored by Rep. Mark Holsten (R-Stillwater), would place a constitutional amendment on the November ballot asking voters whether three-sixteenths of one percent of the state's 6.5 percent sales tax should be dedicated to various natural resources purposes.

The bill specifically states that the funds could not be used as a substitute for any traditional sources of funding.

The committee approved the bill and referred it to the House Rules Committee.

The measure comes in the midst of criticism by members of the House environment committees that the governor did not recommend adequate funding for environmental projects. Furthermore, some argue that there is not enough money to address all the infrastructure needs in state parks.

Many environment and natural resources programs are funded solely by hunting and fishing license fees and could face a shortfall in coming years.

For example, improving water quality, stocking fish and enhancing aquatic vegetation, and increasing public water access are all paid for out of the game and fish fund. Though some federal dollars (25 percent) support the fund, the rest comes from various fishing and hunting license fees.

The Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee approved a separate bill

to increase license fees March 6. However, officials say the Legislature needs to develop a more long-term funding plan to handle needs as they evolve.

Grant agreed. He said the Legislature shouldn't wait for the governor to make natural resources a priority and that the people of Minnesota would stand behind that decision.

"With our lack of leadership at the top, we have an opportunity to take control of this for the people of Minnesota," Grant said. "We can't expect a lot of help (from the governor), but we can from you."

Holsten's constitutional amendment proposal would raise about \$112 million annually, according to current estimates. If the amendment passes, that money would be divided as follows:

- 45 percent of proceeds (about \$50 million) would go to the game and fish fund for activities that improve, enhance, or protect game and fish resources;
- 25 percent (\$28 million) would be dedi-

cated to the natural resources fund for state parks and trails;

- 25 percent of the revenue would be deposited in the natural resources fund for metropolitan parks and trail grants;
- 3 percent (\$3.36 million) would go to the natural resources fund for local trail grants; and
- 2 percent (\$2.24 million) would be deposited in the natural resources fund for the Minnesota Zoo, the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, and the Duluth Zoo.

Judy Erickson, government relations director for the Parks and Trails Council, said there were 8.6 million visitors to state parks in 1999. Though it's a well-used system that does generate revenue for the Department of Natural Resources, a number of facilities are set to close statewide because there's not enough money to keep them going.

Holsten's proposal would go a long way to improve resource management and park development, Erickson said.

Nancy Jobe, from the Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Alliance, and her daughter Alyssa Kerber, 12, both of Eden Prairie, testified that the bill is a good way to address the long-term funding concerns for natural resources.

Kerber said the Legislature needs to take care of the problem now to protect natural resources for future generations to enjoy.

"I think this bill is absolutely essential to protect them," said Kerber. "Otherwise, I'm going to have to come back here in 30 years and fix it and I wouldn't enjoy that."

Rep. Tom Osthoff (DFL-St. Paul) said he was concerned that the number of environmental bills would diminish support for the

constitutional amendment proposal. He asked many of the supporters if they would choose the sales-tax proposal over major initiatives



Bud Grant testifies March 14 in front of the House Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee in support of a bill that would place a constitutional amendment on the November ballot to dedicate a portion of sales tax receipts to natural resources purposes.

such as the so-called "Legacy 2000" environmental bill or a bill calling for increases in fishing and hunting license fees.

He also said Holsten's sales-tax proposal isn't the right solution to the funding crunch.

"We should be taking the surplus dollars and doing the right thing by the environment," Osthoff said.

Earlier this session, the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee recommended spending \$195 million in environment-related capital projects, in a measure known as "Legacy 2000." Ventura had suggested spending \$125 million.

Among criticisms of Ventura's bonding plan was the fact that it didn't take advantage of federal funds available if matched with state funds. For instance, the state will lose funds for the Conservation Resource Enhancement Program, to restore land and habitat along the Minnesota River, if it doesn't match them by September 2002.

The environment bonding recommendations await action by the House Capital Investment Committee.

Several members of the environment policy committee said they wanted to keep Holsten's measure alive, despite their concerns.

Rep. Betty McCollum (DFL-North St. Paul) said she was concerned about the wording of the actual question to be placed on the ballot. She also said she's concerned that creating the dedicated revenue could cause future Legislatures to decrease traditional funding for natural resources because those programs are getting funds this way.


She used the Environmental Trust Fund as an example.

The fund, established in 1988, receives 40 percent of the state's lottery proceeds for environmental projects.

Since the fund was established, general fund spending for the environment has remained steady or increased slightly.

Nevertheless, both Jobe and Grant said Minnesotans would support the amendment.

"If we can get this constitutional amendment on the ballot, I guarantee it'll pass," Grant said.

If the amendment makes it onto the November ballot, it would require a majority of all the people voting in the election. Those who leave the question blank on the ballot would be counted as "no" votes. 

Correction

A story in the March 10 issue of *Session Weekly* incorrectly stated that an abortion consent measure would establish civil penalties against a woman when an abortion is performed without meeting the consent requirements. The bill (HF178) actually would provide that a woman or the parents of a minor could pursue a civil suit against a doctor who performed an abortion without meeting the consent requirements. We regret the error.



No 'plan or purpose'

1909 report decried the troubles of the Legislature

At the root of the debate over whether a unicameral system is better than a bicameral system for Minnesota is the notion that reform is needed in the legislative process.

Proponents of a unicameral model say the current system is too difficult for the average citizen to understand. They also argue that the process allows conference committees too much power.

But those who support the current system say the complexity is necessary because bills should be scrutinized from many different points of view, and it should not be easy to pass new laws.

Such debates over reforming the legis-

lature unless the author were willing to secure votes through log-rolling," Haines wrote. "He would have to support the pet measure of each of a majority of colleagues before he could obtain their support for his bill."

To alleviate the dependence on log-rolling, Haines proposed that the state consider adopting an initiative and referendum system allowing voters to initiate and pass legislation.

"With the power of veto vested in the people, individuals or interests would rarely take the trouble to bribe or coerce a Legislature into the enactment of an iniquitous law," he said.

"It impressed me powerfully to witness how a Legislature could manifest so little of statesmanship, so woeful a lack of patriotic plan and purpose."

—Lynn Haines

lative process are hardly new.

Back in 1909 a man named Lynn Haines produced a scathing report on the activities of that year's House and Senate. Haines, who was described in the foreword to the report as "a distinguished American scholar," later became the editor of "Searchlight on Congress," a publication of the National Voters' League.

In the report, Haines alleged that the major decisions made by the 1909 Legislature were consistently made in the best interests of the major corporations and not the people of the state.

"It impressed me powerfully to witness how a Legislature could manifest so little of statesmanship, so woeful a lack of patriotic plan and purpose," Haines wrote.

He said one of the "pernicious evils in Minnesota lawmaking" was the influence of what was known as "log-rolling." The term applied to the process of trading votes in order to get a measure passed.

"If a bill were introduced to bring Heaven to Minnesota and keep it here, the measure could hardly pass our state Leg-

islature unless the author were willing to secure votes through log-rolling," Haines wrote. "He would have to support the pet measure of each of a majority of colleagues before he could obtain their support for his bill."

While the merits of initiative and referendum are still being debated by today's Legislature, there have been substantial rule changes in the process since 1909. One of the more significant is the requirement that a public record be kept of each committee hearing.

Back in 1909 there was no such requirement, and Haines wrote of the difficulty in ascertaining not only what went on in hearings but how members actually voted on the bills before the committee. Today, minutes are kept and each hearing is audio-taped. Both are available to the public.

Despite Haines' severe criticism of the 1909 Legislature, he didn't see the entire membership as being corrupt.

"Let it be understood that the last Legislature contained some of the ablest and most conscientious citizens of the state," he wrote.

(D. MAEDA)

★ AGRICULTURE

Omnibus spending bill

The House Agriculture and Rural Development Finance Committee approved an omnibus bill that would provide both supplemental and new funding for farm programs and research.

The bill (HF3844), sponsored by Rep. Bob Ness (R-Dassel), would provide supplemental funding for the state's ethanol producer payment program, the Farm Advocates program, state meat inspection, and farm business planning activities.

An increase in maximum state participation in beginning farmer, restructured loan, seller-sponsored loan, and agricultural improvement loan programs would also occur under Ness' bill, which emerged from the committee March 14.

Furthermore, changes to rules regarding eligibility in the restructured loan and livestock expansion loan programs are addressed in the bill.

New funding would be provided for an agro-forestry loan program and run-off pollution research. The agro-forestry loan program would help finance the production of short-rotation wood crops in Minnesota.

The omnibus bill would increase general fund spending on agriculture by \$4.9 million in fiscal year 2001. That includes an appropriation of \$135,000 to the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture for a grant to develop farm business software to complement existing farm management tools.

Eligibility caps for some Rural Finance Authority programs would be increased under the bill, and an increase in Agriculture Chemical Response and Reimbursement Account funding would be provided for farm sites where clean-up activities are particularly expensive.

The bill also includes a resolution asking the state of Iowa to accelerate its program of swine pseudorabies control and eradication.

The House Ways and Means Committee later approved the bill and rolled it into a larger funding measure, which now heads to the House floor.

★ BONDING

Bonding bill unveiled

The House Capital Investment Committee is considering a bonding bill that would spend roughly the same amount as Gov. Jesse Ventura's capital budget plan. But the two proposals have several differences in terms of spending priorities.

The committee discussed the bill (HF4078) March 16, and it was scheduled for a vote that evening (after this edition of *Session Weekly* went to press).

Overall, the bill would spend nearly \$526 million, which includes \$32 million in cancellations from old projects. Of that total, Rep. Jim Knoblach (R-St. Cloud) said the bill would use slightly less than \$400 million in general obligation bonding, \$68.6 million in user-financed bonds, and \$20.6 million from the Trunk Highway Fund.

Ventura's plan calls for \$499 million in capital projects, which includes \$37 million in cancellations. The governor would use \$400 million in general obligation bonding, \$1 million directly from the general fund, \$34 million in user-financed bonds, and \$27 million from the Trunk Highway Fund.

One of the governor's top priorities is to spend \$58 million for a new building for the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. But the bill would spend only \$28 million to build a laboratory facility.

Knoblach, committee chair and sponsor of

the bill, said the governor's recommendation would nearly triple the size of the BCA facility, on top of a recent project for a satellite office in Bemidji. The lab facility is the greatest need, Knoblach said, and the House plan would accommodate that need.

The two proposals also differ in projects for higher education. Both plans allocate \$30 million for maintenance projects throughout the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

Knoblach's plan specifies that that money would pay for several projects that were vetoed by Ventura last year, including a boiler system for Winona State University, demolition of old homes on property owned by Moorehead State University, and the completion of a heating and air conditioning project at the Hutchinson campus of Ridgewater College.

Overall spending for higher education would be \$169.9 million under Knoblach's bill and \$118.3 million under the governor's plan. Included in the House bill is \$2 million for planning costs to replace the Art Building at the University of Minnesota, which received no funding under the governor's plan. The House plan would not fund the St. Paul Microbial and Plant Genomics building at the U of M.

For K-12 spending, Knoblach's bill would spend nearly \$50 million compared to the governor's \$34.1 million.

The bill would spend slightly less than the governor's \$125 million recommended for the Department of Natural Resources and other environment provisions. But the bill would spend more for the Wastewater Infrastructure Fund through the Department of Trade and Economic Development, which improves the environment by helping communities upgrade failing sewer systems.

The bill also would spend \$44 million for bridges throughout the state.

Knoblach urged his colleagues to ask whether the bill is good for the entire state, not necessarily for their specific districts.

"I would hope that we can get away from the philosophy that if you have a project from your district you'll vote for the bill, but if there's not a project from your district you won't vote for the bill," Knoblach said.

HOUSE
COMMITTEE
PROFILE**Capital Investment**

Chair: Knoblach
(R-St. Cloud)

Vice Chair: Dempsey
(R-Hastings)

Minority Lead: Kalis
(DFL-Walters)

Members: 21
(12 R, 9 DFL)

Scope: Reviews and approves capital appropriations for the state; sets policy related to the sale of bonds, debt management, and the manner and form in which capital requests are received; considers bonding requests from state agencies and members of the Legislature; allocates state bond proceeds for capital projects that meet a public purpose and for public facilities owned by public entities, and monitors the construction of all public improvements.

★ BUSINESS

Regulating funeral solicitation

A bill that would regulate solicitation and sale of funeral goods and services stalled in committee because of financial concerns March 15, but a separate provision to satisfy those concerns may keep it alive.

The bill (HF2713), sponsored by Rep. Ann H. Rest (DFL-New Hope), would prohibit funeral providers from soliciting business at a hospital, grave site, or nursing home — particularly when a person's impending death is apparent — when there has been no specific request from the individual.

The bill would allow certain solicitations if the person who is dying made a specific request ahead of time. In addition, those solicitations would require that providers follow set guidelines.

The bill had been approved by the House Health and Human Services Policy Committee, but late concerns about possible costs associated with regulating the solicitation and sale of funeral goods and services had put its future this session in doubt.

The House Ways and Means Committee then included language to address the bill's financial impact in the health and human services omnibus measure (HF2699) March 15. Though the Health and Human Services Finance Committee did not approve Rest's bill, including the financial matter in the other bill gives her proposal new life.

The amendment to the health and human services omnibus bill would appropriate \$90,000 in fiscal year 2001 for the purpose of responding to public complaints about funeral goods and services solicitation.

The amendment also would require that a report be made by Jan. 15, 2001, to the chairs of the Senate Health and Family Security Budget Division and the House Health and Human Services Finance Committee regarding whether there is a need for additional funding.

The House Ways and Means Committee sent the funding plan to the House floor.

★ CHILDREN

Focussing on children

Two former elected officials joined a business executive to discuss family and children issues before a House committee March 15.

Former Republican state legislator Allen Quist along with former Democratic Minneapolis Mayor Don Fraser and General Mills executive David Nasby spoke to the House Family and Early Childhood Education Finance Committee about the need to invest in children.

"We must recognize Minnesota's greatest natural resource, our children," Nasby said.

Though the trio is an unlikely political mix, they stood together behind the principle that public policy should promote strong, supportive families and minimize trends and influences leading to family break-ups.

Nasby told the committee that General Mills corporate headquarters added a child day care center, and employees have reacted positively.

"A return will come through employee loyalty and satisfaction," Nasby said.

The federal Head Start program is helping children learn, but not enough children are gaining these early skills, he said.

"For too many of Minnesota's new generation, there has been no start," he said.

Fraser agreed, saying many children are falling behind.

"When kids come into school and don't know their last name . . . you wonder how they are going to catch up," Fraser said. Many children do not recognize letters nor can they count to 10, he added.

Quist said public policy on early child-care issues should promote strong families.

"We need to be about shaping policy for children that is mostly non-ideological and non-political," Quist said.

Not all education issues, such as child care wages, can be solved by market forces, the speakers agreed.

"I do think there is a case for subsidized day care," Quist said.

Quist cited several recent studies, saying that 40 percent of teen-age women become pregnant by age 20, and current sex education pro-

grams have been unsuccessful in stopping unwanted pregnancies. Quist said the only programs that have curtailed teen-age pregnancy are abstinence-only methods.

"The bottom line is we need something that is effective, something that will work," Quist said.

He quoted another study that said a home without a father is the leading factor for teen-age pregnancy, suicide, crime, and poverty.

★ CRIME

Felony DWI heads to floor

A bill that would make a fourth DWI conviction in 10 years a felony is heading to the House floor.

Rep. Rich Stanek (R-Maple Grove) is sponsoring the bill (HF2745), which would provide for felony charges on a fourth drunken driving violation in a 10-year span.

The House Ways and Means Committee on March 15 rolled it into a larger bill (HF2699).

Rep. Phil Krinkie (R-Shoreview) offered an amendment to require the Department of Corrections to study the use of private services to satisfy the mandatory incarceration sentences provided by the bill. The committee adopted the amendment.

Currently, the bill calls for a minimum sentence of five to seven years for a fourth DWI conviction in 10 years. The bill would allow judges to depart from mandatory sentences and impose jail time and other conditions.

Stanek approved of the lone amendment to the bill.

GOPHER CHECKOFF



Rep. Bob Milbert, left, explains his proposed "gopher checkoff," which would allow taxpayers who file electronically to designate up to 5 percent of their total tax liability to be spent on a program or a category of programs of their choice. He spoke during a March 15 news conference. Also attending the news conference were Reps. Henry Kalis and Kris Hasskamp.

"It fits with the language I already had before," he said.

However, the Senate version does not contain the minimum sentences in the House bill. The Senate version has no mandated minimum sentences, instead giving judges the discretion to determine the sentence for multiple offenders. Stanek said judges have already shown they will not send repeat offenders to prison.

"History tells us that is not going to happen," he said. "Am I supposed to believe that a person who picks up a fourth DWI is going to jail?"

Ready for release?

A bill that would establish a task force to study the state's policies for releasing people from prisons failed to advance out of the House Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs Policy Committee March 10.

Rep. Michael Paymar (DFL-St. Paul) said he and other lawmakers learned about a potential problem with those policies during a recent tour of state prisons.

When inmates have mental illness or are separated from the general prison population due to behavior problems, sometimes they are released at the end of their sentence with little or no effort to reintegrate them to the general population, Paymar said.

The bill (HF3984), sponsored by Paymar, would set up a task force to study and plan for a more gradual release program, so that inmates would not be released into society straight from solitary confinement.

The proposed task force would include four legislators, three people with expertise in mental health issues, and representatives of the Department of Corrections and the ombudsman for corrections.

But several committee members said such a task force could be organized within the Department of Corrections.

The motion to approve the bill failed on a 9-9 vote, so the bill remains in that committee.

Penalties for unsecured trailers

Trailers would be included in criminal vehicular homicide provisions, under a bill heading to the House floor.

Rep. Lynda Boudreau (R-Faribault) is sponsoring a bill (HF2610) that would provide criminal charges for a person whose trailer causes a fatality. The House Crime Prevention Committee approved the measure March 10 and sent it to the floor.

Nancy Sorgatz told the committee that her granddaughter died in an accident near

Waseca in 1997. A trailer broke free from an oncoming truck and struck her granddaughter's vehicle. Two people were killed. The driver of the truck had previously been warned about the chains connecting his truck to the trailer, Sorgatz said.

"Don't anyone ever say this was an accident," Sorgatz said. "It takes eight seconds to attach a safety chain, and it saves lives."

The bill says a driver would be negligent if the driver knows or has reason to know the trailer could cause injury or death.

Rep. Steve Smith (R-Mound) spoke in favor of the bill. He offered an amendment that clarified what qualifies as a trailer, saying he does not want any loopholes created in the bill. The committee approved the amendment.

As a result, anything pulled behind a vehicle is considered a trailer, be it a trailer hauling a boat, a recreational vehicle, a flatbed trailer, or a larger cargo hauler.

Rep. Wes Skoglund (DFL-Mpls) was concerned that the bill would make someone negligent if the chain accidentally fell off. The committee amended the bill to clarify that a person is only negligent if he or she had knowledge or a reason to believe the connection between the trailer and vehicle would fail.

NEWBORN DROP-OFF



Father Andrew Cozzens, right, and Lilly Riordan who established the program for the drop-off of unwanted newborns in Dakota County testified March 10 before the House Crime Prevention Committee for a bill that would create a statewide program. Under the bill, the mother would not face prosecution if the unwanted newborn is dropped off at a hospital.

Funding bill advances

A measure that would appropriate more than \$4 million for new programs and emergency funding was approved March 14 by the House Judiciary Finance Committee.

To make way for that spending and the spending in a separate crime package, the committee decided to cut funding for some programs and transfer \$5.7 million from a special revenue fund.

"We don't have the money that the criminal justice system needs and the criminal justice system deserves," said Rep. Sherry Broecker (R-Little Canada), committee chair.

The bill (HF3981), sponsored by Broecker, includes \$3.8 million in funding for state disaster payments resulting from floods and tornadoes in 1998 and 1999.

It also includes \$79,000 for extraordinary court costs for Carlton County, \$26,000 for a crosswalk awareness and safety program, and \$250,000 to establish a Ramsey County domestic abuse pilot project.

But the real significance of the bill may be what it doesn't fund.

The bill includes a one-time cut of \$234,000 in state civil legal services funding, a base cut of \$25,000 from the Ombudsman for Crime Victims, and a \$5 million reduction in juvenile treatment grants.

The measure also would eliminate the office of Ombudsman for Corrections, an independent agency established in 1972 to investigate complaints by staff, inmates, and others against the Department of Corrections, correctional facilities, or the Board of Pardons.

In addition, the committee voted to transfer a surplus in the special revenue fund from the money raised by the Auto Theft Prevention Board to the general fund so the committee could hit its spending targets.

For fiscal year 2001, there will be approximately \$5.7 million surplus from the theft prevention board. The board collects a surcharge on all auto insurance policies to distribute to law enforcement in the form of block grants to implement auto theft prevention programs.

State law limits the amount the board can spend each year. Several committee members objected to using the funds for other purposes, which are specifically collected for auto theft prevention.

The House Ways and Means Committee later approved the measure and included it in a larger spending bill that now heads to the House floor.

★ DEVELOPMENT

Omnibus measure advances

Workforce development is a major focus of an omnibus finance package approved March 13 by the House Jobs and Economic Development Finance Committee.

The bill (HF4111), sponsored by Rep. Dan McElroy (R-Burnsville), would establish a task force responsible for reviewing recommendations of the governor's mini-cabinet on workforce development. The 20-member task force would develop and propose a cohesive workforce development strategy for the state and prepare recommendations for the 2001 session.

Also included in the bill are a couple of one-time appropriations to address underemployment and training issues.

The Department of Trade and Economic Development would receive \$750,000 for grants to local or regional economic development agencies to identify geographic areas where the local workforce has skills or education that is not being used.

The bill also would appropriate \$50,000 to the Department of Administration for a study to develop a 10-year plan to locate workforce centers on the campuses in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

The growing technology economy is also addressed in the bill. It would appropriate \$1.5 million for grants to local governments to expand Internet access in rural Minnesota. Another \$200,000 would go to Minnesota Technology, Inc. for the e-Business Institute, which would provide assistance to rural businesses to expand their use of technology.

To provide funding for measures in the bill, the committee proposed a transfer of some money, elimination of an existing program, and the use of savings from the merger of the Department of Commerce and the Department of Public Service.

The bill would transfer \$1.8 million from the general fund to the workforce development fund to provide funding for the displaced homemaker's program.

In addition, \$800,000 would be provided by canceling funds for the Pathways Program, a grant program for educational institutions to partner with businesses in developing projects that provide training, new jobs, and career paths for individuals making the transition from public assistance to the workforce.

The program is administered through the Department of Trade and Economic Development.

McElroy, the committee chair, said that department officials said the program has not been used.

The bill moves to the House floor.

★ EDUCATION

Increased adult education funding

Funding for adult basic education would be increased and employment tracking would be provided, under the House Family and Early Childhood Education Finance Committee's omnibus spending bill.

The committee approved the bill (HF4107) March 13. The bill would add \$6.5 million for adult education programs, but would limit future spending for an individual program to 10 percent growth or five percent for all adult basic education programs statewide.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior), also calls for spending an additional \$24.8 million in federal Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) dollars over the next three years.

The bill was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee.

The 1999 Legislature appropriated \$42.6 million to fund adult education programs for fiscal years 2000-01. The new bill would increase funding to \$49.2 million. Adult basic education offers classes to people who do not have high school diplomas. Many of the students are just beginning to learn English.

The bill includes \$900,000 for new programs, most notably \$700,000 for adult basic education supplemental service grants.

Transitional housing projects would receive \$2 million in federal assistance dollars over the next three years. About \$9.3 million in TANF funds would be designated for child-care services.

The bill incorporates a measure that would

require adult education teachers to request that students give their Social Security numbers for economic tracking. Sykora introduced the proposal, which would allow the Department of Economic Security to discern the pay level of graduates to see if the people are earning more after completing the program.

Rep. Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul) spoke against the tracking, saying it would set a bad precedent. He said he feared it would open the door for more programs where Social Security numbers are used.

Sykora noted that people are not required to give their Social Security numbers; they are asked to voluntarily turn them over for the study.

Mariani offered one amendment that outlined an alternative tracking system. He also offered an amendment that would require the Department of Children, Families and Learning to develop its own alternative tracking system. The committee did not adopt either amendment.

The committee did adopt a Mariani amendment that states that future adult basic education funding would not be determined by the percent of students who provide their Social Security information.

Selling surplus computers

A bill that would allow school districts to dispose of surplus school computers without having to auction the property was passed March 13 by the House. The vote was 133-0.

Sponsored by Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka), the bill (HF2598) would allow districts to

SOCCER PITCH



Soccer balls from all over Minnesota fill the rotunda March 15 carrying messages for Gov. Jesse Ventura to support bonding for additional soccer fields around the state. The Minnesota Youth Soccer Association sponsored the rally.

dispose of a computer and related equipment if the school has used the computer for at least three years, has purchased the computer with state or federal funds, and no longer has a need for the property.

Under the bill, districts would have the option of conveying surplus equipment to another school district, the state Department of Corrections, the Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, or the family of a district student whose total family income meets the federal definition of poverty.

Districts wishing to dispose of school computers would be required by the bill to maintain an inventory of the property and reconcile the results of its inventory with property records at least once every two years.

The bill would grant the commissioner of the Department of Children, Families and Learning access to the records.

Abeler's bill now goes to the Senate.

Rules for teacher preparation

A bill that would postpone the ability of the state Board of Teaching to adopt, amend, or repeal rules on institution and teacher preparation programs was passed March 13 by the House. The vote was 122-10.

The bill (HF3436), sponsored Rep. Marty Seifert (R-Marshall), would postpone the board's ability to make changes until Sept. 1, 2002.

Seifert's bill also would require that the Board of Teaching ask faculty and administrators from Minnesota post-secondary institutions with teacher preparation programs for the institutions' opinions on the board's proposed rules for those programs.

The state Board of Teaching would then be required to report to the Legislature by January 15, 2001, on institutions' opinions regarding proposed rules on institution and teacher preparation programs.

The bill now goes to the Senate.

K-12 spending plan

A \$28 million omnibus education spending bill that includes both permanent and one-time funding proposals was approved by both the House K-12 Education Finance Committee March 13 and the House Taxes Committee March 15.

The bill (HF3800), sponsored by Rep. Alice Seagren (R-Bloomington), chair of the K-12 committee, would call for \$11 million in secondary vocational spending for work training programs, \$10 million for technology initiatives, and \$8.5 million in funding for small school districts.

Seagren said the bill is lean compared with

the Senate's \$244 million education bill, but it addresses some of the critical issues that came before her committee this session.

While Gov. Jesse Ventura has said he doesn't

favor any new major spending initiatives this year, earlier this session Seagren said she hoped he would be open to common measures contained in both the House and Senate bills.

The House bill also contains several notable policy measures of note. Provisions to establish a minimum public school year of 173 days and begin a special alternative teaching license for out-of-state teachers who meet certain requirements are included in the measure.

The alternative teaching license provision is an attempt, Seagren said, to address the problem of teacher shortages due to retirements, student enrollment growth, and policies requiring class-size reduction.

Language introduced by House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) that would allow teachers and certain other school employees to use "reasonable force" when disciplining a student is also contained in Seagren's bill.

The bill was sent to the House Ways and Means Committee.

The Senate's plan, backed by Sen. Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Mpls), would provide about \$150 million in permanent funding and more than \$75 million in one-time funding.

★ ENVIRONMENT

Mosquito spraying limited

The House Local Government and Metro Affairs Committee approved a bill March 10 that would give the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) more authority in mosquito control on state-owned land.

The bill (HF3134), sponsored by Rep. Dennis Ozment (R-Rosemount), would repeal the state law that requires the natural resources commissioner to allow the Metropolitan Mosquito Control Commission to enter state property for mosquito control purposes.

Currently the commission is required to get

permission from private landowners to spray for mosquito control on privately owned land.

Officials from the DNR have testified that state land should receive similar treatment and that attention should be paid on the impact of mosquito control on nature's food chain. The chemicals used for mosquito control also kill midges, the insects that are the main food source for ducklings.

Rep. Peg Larsen (R-Lakeland), the committee chair, offered an amendment that was adopted establishing a trial period until July 1, 2002, allowing the natural resources commissioner the ability to deny, modify, or revoke any approval for the commission to operate on state lands.

The bill was sent to the House floor.

Salaries saved, redistributed

Unspent money from job vacancies in state agencies would help pay for shortfalls in other areas, under a bill approved March 13 by the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee.

The bill (HF4080), sponsored by Rep. Mark Holsten (R-Stillwater), would spend \$11.4 million for the current biennium.

A shortfall of about \$410,000 in fiscal year 2001 is projected in the Wastewater Infrastructure Fund, a grant program for small

FIRE FUNDS



Cook County Sheriff David Wirt, left, tells the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee about the need for funds to be ready for possible forest fires in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area after last year's storm that blew over thousands of acres of trees. Also testifying for funding were Lake County Sheriff Steve Peterson, center, and St. Louis County Sheriff Rick Wahlberg.

communities that do not have sewer systems or that have old systems in need of major repairs. The money pays for staff of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to evaluate the environmental aspects of the wastewater systems to be built through the grant program.

The bill would spend \$306,000 for that program and divert the remaining \$104,000 from the agency's current budget.

Holsten said state agencies save money by leaving positions vacant after someone resigns, and some positions are vacant for several months. The money that is saved can be diverted to the \$410,000 shortfall, he said.

The bill also would require the Office of Environmental Assistance to reduce its 2001 budget by \$104,000 through savings from vacancies, but that money would not be reallocated under the bill.

Other spending provisions include \$4 million for costs related to a U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld the hunting and fishing rights of the Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians and others, and \$400,000 for the Board of Water and Soil Resources for costs related to the replacement of wetlands.

And \$5 million would be spent for a new state program similar to the federal Crop Reserve Program. Farmers would be eligible for grants to set aside cropland for three years. Strips of trees would have to be planted on a small percentage of the land that is set aside, which would provide various environmental benefits.

Also, the bill would spend \$1.5 million to pay for anticipated expenses for emergency firefighting in forests. A severe storm in July 1999 knocked down thousands of acres of trees in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, which has increased the chances of a forest fire.

The House Ways and Means Committee later approved the bill and included it in a larger funding measure, which now heads to the floor.

★ **GAME & FISH**

Getting in the hunt

The House passed a bill March 13 that would improve some people's chances of getting a license to hunt moose. The vote was 133-0.

Under the bill (HF2838), sponsored by Rep. Roxann Daggett (R-Frazee), Minnesotans who have applied for and failed to get a license at least 10 times would be able to apply in a separate selection process.

The separate process would make 20 percent of all moose-hunting licenses available to those applicants who have repeatedly failed to win a license.

The state issues a limited number of such

licenses every other year, through a lottery system that includes all applicants in one pool. In 1999, 189 licenses were issued to hunt in northeastern Minnesota. There will not be a moose hunt in 2000.

The bill now moves to the Senate.

Permits for disabled hunters

A special hunting permit would be available to people who have a permanent disability, under a bill the House passed March 13. The vote was 129-2.

The bill (HF2603/SF2346*), sponsored by Rep. Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar), would allow the commissioner of natural resources to issue such permits to people who cannot step from a vehicle without the aid of a wheelchair, crutches, braces, or other means of support. Permits would also be available to people who have heart or lung conditions and require breathing assistance.

The permit would allow people with those types of conditions to use a snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle while hunting in the state's wildlife management areas.

The bill now moves to the governor's desk.

★ **GOVERNMENT**

New budget office proposed

A proposal to resolve disagreements about the fiscal impacts of legislation was approved March 10 by the House Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs Policy Committee.

The bill (HF4073), sponsored by Rep. Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka), would establish a legislative budget office. The office would provide House members and senators with information regarding current and projected state revenue, expenditures, and taxes.

Currently, most of those duties are performed by the state Department of Finance. The bill would reduce that department's budget to pay for the legislative budget office.

The office would be part of the Legislative Coordinating Commission, a joint House-Senate organization.

Abrams described the proposed office as a small operation that would act in concert with the Finance Department.

Rep. Betty Folliard (DFL-Hopkins) said people from school districts have complained that the state uses different sets of numbers related to education funding.

"They're crying out for everyone to be on the same page," she said.

Abrams agreed, and he said that one of the office's main goals would be to achieve that kind of consistency.

"The public is better served if we have one set of numbers," Abrams said.

The bill now heads to the House Taxes Committee.

★ **HUMAN SERVICES**

Omnibus funding plan

An omnibus spending bill that would increase penalties on welfare recipients who don't comply with work requirements and broaden eligibility for the state's senior prescription drug program awaits a vote on the House floor.

The bill was approved by the House Health and Human Services Finance Committee March 14 and by the House Ways and Means Committee one day later.

The bill (HF2699) would also impose a 24-hour "informed-consent" waiting period on women who want to have an abortion, and increase state reimbursement rates for nursing homes, mainly in rural Minnesota, that receive lower reimbursement payments than other homes.

"What this bill does is attempt to address the most drastic needs in our communities, and I believe it does that in a fiscally responsible manner," said Rep. Kevin Goodno (R-Moorhead), sponsor of the bill.

A portion of new spending under the bill would go to measures that would fund the proposed expansion of the prescription drug program, provide local intervention aid to counties for family employment, and increase the wages of personal-care attendants by 5 percent.

But new funding is offset in part by a measure in the bill that would shift a portion of Minnesota's federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds into the general fund, yielding the state a savings of approximately \$71 million.

Rep. Lee Greenfield (DFL-Mpls) suggested that the committee should designate how the transfer of TANF funds should be spent, which the committee did not do.

Greenfield also strongly disagreed with a measure in the bill that would cut welfare benefits from recipients who repeatedly don't follow the state's rules on program participation. He reminded the committee of the potential impact that could have on children and families.

Concern also arose regarding the measure on abortion. An amendment by Rep. Lynda Boudreau (R-Faribault) that would require a woman to be given certain information and to provide written consent at least 24 hours prior to a scheduled abortion was incorporated into the bill. It's considered by some to

be a tough sell with both the Senate and Gov. Jesse Ventura.

The bill also would establish an office of unlicensed and alternative health care that would be housed at the Department of Health.

A proposed amendment to the bill by Rep. Henry Todd Van Dellen (R-Bloomington) to use \$10 million of the state's general fund to pay for diabetes research resulted in a lengthy discussion between members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The committee eventually adopted the amendment after it was altered by House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) to take funds from the state's medical endowment fund instead.

The bill now heads to the House floor. It has become the vehicle for several other finance measures including state government, jobs and economic development, environment and natural resources, judiciary and agriculture.

★ INSURANCE

Loaner vehicle liability

The House passed a bill March 13 by a vote of 131-2 that would shift insurance liability costs on vehicles loaned out by repair shops from the shops to the drivers.

The bill (HF2719), sponsored by Rep. Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston), would require the costs of damages done to a repair shop rental vehicle to come first from the driver's liability insurance coverage. The repair shop's insurance would only pay the amount in excess of what the driver's insurance does not cover.

Many repair shops provide loaner vehicles while servicing their customers' vehicles. But some shops are discontinuing the service because their insurance is responsible for covering the costs if the loaner vehicle is involved in an accident.

Current state law requires that the driver's insurance covers the cost of damages done to rental cars involved in accidents. Consumers are given the option by many rental car companies of purchasing additional insurance coverage in the event of an accident.

The bill now goes to the Senate.

★ LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Township name change

A new state law will help the residents of the township of Lake Edwards in Crow Wing County to drop the "s" from the town's name.

There has been confusion about whether or not the legal name of the township had the

"s" at the end, and the confusion has led to delays when the town has had to file documents with state and federal governments.

Township officials discovered that to legally change the name to the township of Lake Edward would ordinarily require a petition signed by at least 55 percent of the number of residents who voted in the last general election.

For Lake Edwards, a rural township located in the central part of the state with a population of approximately 1,500 people, the costs associated with that process seemed too high.

The new law allows the county board to change the name of the township upon receiving a resolution from the town board requesting the change.

Rep. Kris Hasskamp (DFL-Crosby) and Sen. Don Samuelson (DFL-Brainerd) sponsored the measure. The law is effective upon local action.

HF2521/SF2320*/CH253

★ METRO AFFAIRS

Changing the Met Council

In 1967, the Legislature established the Metropolitan Council, recognizing the need to coordinate and plan the development of the region.

Because the 16-member council is appointed by the governor and has property tax levying authority, there has been continuing debate through the years over the function and scope of the agency.

The council also provides transit and wastewater collection and treatment services.

The House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs committee heard two bills March 10 that take different approaches in addressing the council's authority.

The committee took no action on either measure but

Rep. Peg Larsen (R-Lakeland), the committee chair, said that the discussion on the issues raised by both bills will continue.

One bill (HF532), sponsored by Rep. Myron Orfield (DFL-Mpls), would change the

council from an appointed body to an elected body beginning in 2003.

Orfield said that an elected council would be more responsive than an appointed council. He said his bill is the same as those proposed in the 1960s by Arlen Erdahl, former legislator, secretary of state, and congressman, and by former Gov. Arne Carlson in the 1980s, before he won election to the state's top office. (As governor, Carlson vetoed a similar measure in 1997.)

Orfield said because of the levying authority of the council and because its authority falls somewhere between a local unit of government and a state agency, it is important for its members to be accountable.

The council's budget for 2000 exceeds \$474 million with a property tax levy of more than \$129 million.

Orfield said he supports the current council and its chair, Ted Mondale, but that because of the appointed nature of the membership, there is no guarantee that the philosophy and quality of the current council will continue in the future.

The second bill (HF2697), sponsored by Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Jordan), would take the measure one step further. Buesgens' bill proposes to abolish the council by July 1, 2001.

Buesgens said it is time to take a serious look at whether the council is needed for the metropolitan area. He said the council's authority has evolved over the years and he agrees with Orfield that having a non-elected governing authority is a concern.

"One of the fundamental principles of freedom is no taxation without representation," Buesgens said.

Cash or charge?

Hennepin County taxpayers would be allowed to pay their property taxes by credit and debit cards, under a measure the House passed March 13.

The bill (HF3229), sponsored by Rep. Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka), would give that county's taxpayers the option of using credit cards, debit cards, or electronic or wire funds transfers to make tax payments.

Abrams said the bill would permit the county to establish a service charge for payments made by these methods.

The bill also would authorize the county to use electronic approvals to authenticate and validate county administrative actions, and would direct the county to establish policies and procedures to ensure the validity of electronic approvals.

Under the measure, county officials would also be allowed to use county credit cards for county business.

HOUSE COMMITTEE PROFILE

Local Gov't & Metropolitan Affairs

Chair: Larsen
(R-Lakeland)

Vice Chair: Tuma
(R-Northfield)

Minority Lead: Hasskamp
(DFL-Crosby)

Members: 23
(12 R, 10 DFL, 1 Ind.)

Scope: Examines issues related to all forms of local government — townships, cities, counties, metropolitan agencies, and regional development commissions.

Currently both the Minnesota Department of Revenue and the federal Internal Revenue Service allow taxpayers to file electronically, and thus accept credit card payments.

The bill was passed by a 133-0 vote and now moves to the Senate.

★ RECREATION

New plan for park permits

Annual permits for state park visitors would be valid for one year after the date of purchase, under a bill the House passed March 13. The vote was 134-0.

Currently, annual park permits are only valid for the calendar year, which discourages people from buying them in the late summer or fall, said Rep. Peggy Leppik (R-Golden Valley), sponsor of the bill.

The bill would make the permits good for one year from the date of purchase.

Leppik said the proposal would likely increase the number of annual permits that are sold and encourage more visits to state parks year-round.

The bill (HF2505) now moves to the Senate.

Paintball gun restrictions

Paintball guns may make for fun in the hands of a weekend warrior, but many people believe they can be dangerous in the hands of children.

Rep. Peggy Leppik (R-Golden Valley) is sponsoring a bill (HF3041) that would make it a misdemeanor for store clerks to sell

paintball guns to children under the age of 18 without the written consent of a parent or guardian.

"They look and they sound like toys," Leppik told the House Crime Prevention Committee on March 10. "The problem is they can be very, very dangerous."

The bill was approved and now heads to the House floor.

Paintball guns shoot gas-powered pellets filled with paint. People playing with paintball guns should be wearing eye protection, Leppik said.

"Kids are not aware of the hazards, even though it is printed on the box," she said.

Emergency rooms are seeing an increase of severe injuries from pellets striking people in the eye, Leppik said. She told a story about a 14-year-old boy who was struck near the eye and has now had three eye surgeries. The boy experiences excruciating pain and will likely lose his sight in that eye, she said.

"This is becoming more and more common because this is a popular game," she said.

Leppik said the guns are visibly different from a real gun.

"I don't think this could be mistaken for a real gun. They are big and colorful," she said.

The bill also would ban the use of paintball guns on state property.

★ TAXES

License tab fee reductions

The House Taxes Committee discussed two bills March 14 that would reduce license tab registration fees.

The committee took no action on either measure but both will be considered for inclusion in the omnibus tax bill.

Currently, the motor vehicle registration tax is \$10 plus an additional tax of 1.25 percent on the base value adjusted on a depreciation scale. The minimum tax is \$35.

According to the nonpartisan House Research Department, Minnesota ranks 23rd in the nation on average in license tab fees. In addition, about 38 percent of the motor vehicle owners in the state pay the minimum \$35 fee.

One bill (HF446), sponsored by Rep. William Kuisle (R-Rochester), would change the depreciation schedule to provide for a 10 percent annual depreciation over 10 years. The current depreciation schedule varies in the percentage of depreciation over the 10-year period.

Under Kuisle's proposal, the residents of the state would vote on a constitutional amendment to dedicate 30 percent of the revenue

from the motor vehicle sales tax to the highway user tax distribution fund. The remainder would continue to go to the general fund.

Rep. Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka) the committee chair, said he doesn't favor including bills that propose constitutional amendments in omnibus measures. Proposed amendments should advance on their own, he said.

Rep. Ray Vandeveer (R-Forest Lake), the sponsor of the second bill (HF3967), said that in his bill the license tab tax rate would not change, but the state would pay for a portion of the tax. The bill provides for a credit of 50 percent against license taxes to be applied to the portion of the tax that is between \$35 and \$500.

Vandeveer said that he agrees with the governor in that Minnesota's license tab fee rates do not compare favorably to neighboring states.

He said the advantage of his bill is that there is no need for a referendum and roads would get the same amount of money as they currently do.

★ TRANSPORTATION

'Busways' over light rail

Rather than invest in a light-rail system that is confined to the designated track, Minnesota should consider building a bus-only road in the Hiawatha Corridor, said Rep. Carol Molnau (R-Chaska).

The House Transportation Finance Committee heard testimony on a bill (HF4071) that would replace the \$100 million bonds already appropriated for light rail with \$50 million in bonds and \$50 million in cash for a bus-only road.

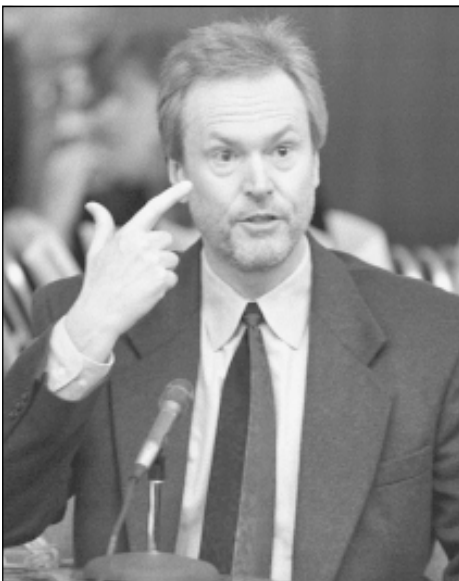
Molnau, the sponsor of the bill, said the bus route, at a cost of \$43 million (according to a 1997 study) is far cheaper than the \$548 light rail line.

"We are proposing a more cost-effective proposal to light rail," Molnau said.

The committee did not act on Molnau's bill, and no vote is expected this year, according to committee staff.

The 11-mile Hiawatha Corridor would connect the airport to downtown Minneapolis.

Peter McLaughlin, chair of the Hennepin County Board, spoke against Molnau's bill. McLaughlin said the state Department of Transportation study that Molnau is referring to only examines a "busway" from the airport to the Metrodome, and does not complete the journey down Fifth Street to Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis. McLaughlin said the final stretch in Minneapolis, featuring several proposed train stops, is where much of the final costs occur.



Dr. David Brown, an ophthalmologist from St. Paul, speaks March 9 in front of the House Commerce Committee in support of a bill that would regulate the sale, rental, discharge, and possession of paintball guns.

"Your product will be cheaper, but it will be inferior," McLaughlin said.

He said costs for the entire busway, from the airport to Nicollet Avenue, could reach as high as \$100 million.

Molnau said the busway would not cause the closure of through traffic on Fifth Street, but a light-rail line would.

McLaughlin said people would use light rail, but would not take a bus.

"This isn't only going to be less desirable, it's going to be slow," McLaughlin said. "You're going to be walking away from \$274 million in federal dollars." The federal money is available for light-rail programs but not bus-only roads.

Molnau countered, saying other U.S. cities have reported that express buses that do not stop at all stations are much quicker than trains, which cannot skip stations.

"If you give them an express route to Minneapolis, you will fill the bus," Molnau said.

Changes in seat belt plan

A plan to allow police more leeway to stop drivers for seat belt violations was significantly altered March 10 in the House Crime Prevention Committee.

The bill (HF857), sponsored by Rep. Lee Greenfield (DFL-Mpls), initially would have allowed police to stop any car if any person in the front seat was not wearing a seat belt.

Rep. Steve Smith (R-Mound) offered an amendment that would make it a primary offense — something police can stop a car for — only for people under age 18 to ride in the front seat without a seat belt. However, there would be no change to the law for people 18 or older. The committee approved the amendment, then sent the bill to the House floor.

Under the amended bill, an officer could issue a \$25 ticket to the driver if the passenger is younger than age 15, or give the ticket to the passenger if that person is 15 to 17 years old.

The original proposal barely squeaked through the House Transportation Policy Committee on March 9 and does not have support from the governor.

Greenfield said he would be happy with incremental change provided by the amendment, although he favors his original bill.

"It's a compromise that still improves the law," Greenfield said.

Kathy Cooper, whose daughter died in a car accident last year, testified in favor of the primary offense language. She said the amended version would change little.

"I'm very disappointed," Cooper said. "I think they've totally confused the issue. It should be straight mandatory. That is the safe way, that is the best way."

The bill still would require all passengers in the back seat up to age 18 to wear a seat belt.

Similar legislation has been discussed several times in recent years, including bills that stalled in 1994 and 1997.

Funds to fight crime

House approves omnibus judiciary finance bill

The House passed an omnibus crime measure March 16 that would deal with sex offenders and criminal justice information. The vote was 134-0.

The measure (HF2688), sponsored by Rep. Sherry Broecker (R-Little Canada), is a combination of five major crime initiatives introduced this session.

It would provide for the integrated criminal justice information systems and a domestic abuse pilot project in Ramsey County. It also would deal with sex offender penalties and registration, community notification about sex offenders, and a reduction in the number of sex offender cases handled by probation officers.

The sex offender measures would require some offenders to register for life, establish a Web site to post the names of all Level 3 sex offenders statewide, and limit sex offenders' ability to change their names.

As passed, the bill would appropriate \$16.5 million for all five provisions in fiscal year 2001. That includes \$7.5 million for the criminal justice information system plan.

Some members were critical of the \$7.5 million appropriation, which calls for local matching dollars, because they say it's too low.

However, House Speaker Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) said earlier that it's important to get the program started even if it means spending more money on it later as it progresses.

"We're going to start this integrated system because we think it's the right thing to do," Sviggum told the House Ways and Means Committee.

A local match is required for grants under this bill. However, the House Taxes Committee limited the grants requiring local match to \$1 million.

On the House floor, Broecker emphasized that the money for the criminal justice system is only to cover the costs for the upcoming year, not for the entire project.

Also included in the bill is \$6.5 million for electronic finger-printing technology to replace the old-fashioned inking method.

Some have estimated that the entire integration project could cost as much as \$100 million to complete.

Rep. Wes Skoglund (DFL-Mpls) attempted to amend appropriations in the bill so that it would provide \$15 million for criminal justice information systems rather than \$7.5 million. But the amendment was blocked on a procedural motion.

Rep. Phil Krinkie (R-Shoreview) introduced an amendment on the floor to require that a risk assessment be conducted for any information systems projects where the state has allocated more than \$1 million. The study would need to be completed before the money is actually spent. It passed by an 89-44 vote.

Profile is no star

An unexpected move on the House floor aims to create a new alternative to the Profile of Learning

By MIKE DeLarco

Nothing is as it seems when it comes to the Profile of Learning. In a surprise move March 16, House members attached a major amendment to a bill that was thought to provide a viable compromise to the Profile, a much-maligned part of the state's Graduation Standards initiative.

The amendment, offered by Rep. Tony Kielkucki (R-Lester Prairie) would create a new option for school accountability called the North Star Standard.

The amendment passed narrowly on a 68-66 vote. The result is a bill that would put the Profile on hold and allow districts to choose if they want to use the North Star Standard.

"My amendment to House File 3618 serves to uphold high standards currently expected of students. It will allow individual districts to implement the North Star Standard or tailor teaching to the needs of their students," Kielkucki said.

have to complete credits in up to 10 learning areas. Teachers would still be able to assign projects designed to test a student's ability to understand and apply subject matter, but such hands-on demonstrations, which are at the heart of the Profile of Learning, would no longer be standard requirements.

Kielkucki told members of the House Education Policy Committee earlier this session that the North Star Standard plan was created in response to critics who chastised House Republicans for trying to scrap the Profile during session last year while offering no clear alternative.



Members of the House Education Policy Committee work late into the evening March 9 crafting a measure that would alter the Profile of Learning.

No final vote was taken on the amended bill, but one is expected to take place within days. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Bob Ness (R-Dassel).

The North Star Standard, Kielkucki said, would steer away from the Profile's practical skills focus. The amendment details rewritten standards in such basics as science, math, English, and history.

Under the North Star plan, students would

A part of the state's Graduation Standards, the Profile of Learning was created to shift learning away from textbooks and lectures and move it in the direction of experiments, teamwork, research, and independent projects.

Under the Profile, students are required to perform various tasks in core learning areas that have practical applications for life beyond the classroom.

However, shortly after the state's teachers

started incorporating requirements of the Profile of Learning into lesson plans two years ago, complaints began to surface.

Last year, the Legislature reached a stalemate over differences about how to fix the Profile and left the initiative intact. This year, talk of retooling the program intensified almost immediately after the beginning of the session — as teachers, students, and parents scurried to offer legislators ideas on a solution.

Not all agree, however, that the North Star Standard is the way to go.

"This bill (as amended) is a train wreck," said Rep. Betty Folliard (DFL-Hopkins). "I do not believe in playing politics with our kids, and that's what this bill does."

Rep. Henry Todd Van Dellen (R-Plymouth) supported the amended bill.

"The time is up, and the compromise is to scrap this failed experiment with our children," he said.


Department of Children, Families and Learning Commissioner Christine Jax testified before the House Education Policy Committee March 9 in favor of retaining the 24 standards currently required of students. Jax said she would prefer to "hold students harmless" for a two-year period by delaying strict enforcement of a minimum standard requirement.

"But I don't want to say we won't be open-minded," Jax said.

Before the Kielkucki amendment, the bill would have cut in half the number of Profile tasks — from 24 to 12 — that students in grades 9 to 12 would be required to complete before graduating. The bill also would have reduced the number of core learning areas from 10 to six, and simplified the description of those learning areas.

Also on the House floor, lawmakers rejected an amendment from Rep. Doug Reuter (Ind.-Owatonna) related to a controversy about writing tests given to all the state's 10th graders in January.

The amendment would have required test booklets to be returned to students after scoring and would have forbidden the test question from being used again.

The question asked students to write something about themselves they would like to change, and it drew fire because of the personal nature of the question. 

Streamlined spending

State government spending measure would give the governor a raise but cut other costs

BY JON FURE

A bill that would give the governor a raise while cutting state spending by nearly \$10 million for the 2000-01 biennium is advancing in the House.

The bill (HF2500), sponsored by Rep. Phil Krinkie (R-Shoreview), would eliminate the Office of Technology, the Board of Government Innovation and Cooperation, and the Office of Citizenship and Volunteer Services.

The bill was approved March 14 by the House State Government Finance Committee, which Krinkie chairs, and won approval in the House Ways and Means Committee one day later.

Under the proposal, fiscal year 2001 spending for Minnesota Planning, a state agency that acts as a long-range planning arm of the administration, would be reduced from \$4.4 million to \$2.4 million.

Those savings would pay for projected shortfalls in other areas, including \$48,000 to the Campaign Finance and Disclosure Board for costs related to an unsuccessful court case and \$90,000 to the Gambling Control Board for a workers' compensation claim.

The bill would increase the governor's salary from \$120,303 to \$150,000. That would allow proportional salary increases for commissioners of state department or other administrators, which are based on a percentage of the governor's salary.

The state recently has allowed exemptions to those limits, such as salaries for school superintendents.

Some other agencies and departments have requested exemptions, because the current limits on salaries for those positions have made it hard to find qualified candidates. The bill would raise the maximum salary for all such positions.

The bill also would repeal the governor's authority to abolish or merge departments in the executive branch. That issue gained notice when Gov. Jesse Ventura decided last year to merge the Public Safety and Commerce departments.

Here are some other key provisions of the bill.

Bleacher safety

The bill would modify a 1999 law that established new safety requirements for all bleachers that are taller than 30 inches. The bill would make those requirements apply only to bleachers standing 55 inches (nearly 5 feet) or higher.

The law requires bleachers to include guardrails or safety nets, and spaces between floorboards, seats, and guardrails cannot exceed four inches.

Those requirements are set to go into effect Jan. 1, 2001. But the bill would delay that effective date to Aug. 1, 2001.

Gov. Jesse Ventura vetoed \$100,000 from the provision in 1999 that would have helped communities comply with the requirements.

The bill would effectively exempt short sets of bleachers that are commonly placed in parks near sports fields, so that local communities and school districts would not be forced to replace them or equip them with safety nets.

Design-build ban

The Department of Transportation would be required to comply with current state law regarding bidding projects, under the measure.

Krinkie said a provision in the 1999 omnibus transportation finance law gave the department an exemption to allow the light-rail transit project along the Hiawatha Corridor to use a design-build method.

That method allows the state to use a single contractor for the design and construction of the project, instead of awarding separate bids for design and construction.

The bill would prohibit using the design-

build method for any state construction project, until specific policies and regulations can be established for that method.

Secretary of state funding

A provision in the bill would allow the Office of the Secretary of State to keep revenue from Uniform Commercial Code transactions.

Those transactions involve pledging personal property for collateral. People who file the transactions currently pay \$15, plus additional costs if the form exceeds nine pages. That money goes to the general fund.

But Krinkie said the revenue was originally intended to pay for upgrades to the computer system that is used for those transactions. Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer estimated that the transactions generate about \$2.3 million per year in revenue, while the office's costs of administering the transactions are only about two-thirds of that amount.

The bill would allow the revenue to be spent on upgrading that system, and would reduce the secretary of state's general fund support by \$2.3 million per year.

Office of Technology abolished


The Office of Technology is one of three small departments that would be eliminated under the bill. Its projected budget is \$2.7 million for 2001 and \$5.4 million for the following biennium.

Krinkie said the office's ability to review technology-related projects is limited. The office does not have jurisdiction over constitutional offices, the judicial branch, the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, or local units of government.

Also, the office has not been able to prevent excessive spending by reviewing technology-related legislative proposals, he said. One current legislative proposal would establish a statewide criminal justice information system, but Krinkie said there is little information on how it would work and how much it would cost.

"If you have a big enough truck, you can just blow through the check point," Krinkie said.

Commissioner of Administration David Fisher disagreed. The office's role is merely advisory, because nothing in state law gives it any regulatory authority, he said. But the office has had success in its advisory role.

"Technology budgets had no oversight until we got involved," he said. 

A taxing dilemma

Lawmakers debate whether it's more important to reduce property taxes or income taxes in the search for meaningful reform

By DAVID MAEDA

Though much of the attention surrounding tax discussions this session has focused on issues such as permanent income tax cuts and reductions in license tab fees, a significant property tax reform plan follows closely behind.

The governor's tax plan proposes to carry over about \$855 million from the current budget surplus into the next biennium for potential reforms to the state's complicated property tax system.

Some lawmakers feel there is still room for property tax reform this year.

The House Taxes Committee's Property Tax Division discussed two bills this week that would continue property tax reform initiatives that began in 1997.

No action was taken on either bill but both will be considered for inclusion in the omnibus tax package, along with nearly 50 other property tax measures.

One bill (HF4030), sponsored by Rep. Ron Erhardt (R-Edina), the division chair, would exempt residential homestead, agricultural, and seasonal recreation homestead property from the state-determined general education levy.

During a March 13 hearing on the bill, Erhardt said although he supports efforts to cut income tax rates, his proposal is an attempt to refocus some of the discussion on property tax reform.

Currently, county auditors determine the general education homestead credit for each homestead by calculating 83 percent of the general education tax rate applied to net tax capacity.

The bill proposes providing the exemption by first determining each property's tax in the present manner, then reducing that amount by an exemption amount equal to the general education tax upon the property.

Erhardt's bill, which the Department of Revenue estimates would cost more than \$775 million over the next biennium, also would reduce class rates for nearly all classes of property except first-tier homes.



Kent Warden, executive director of the Greater Minneapolis Building Owners and Managers Association, testifies March 15 before the Property Tax Division of the House Taxes Committee in support of a measure that would reduce property taxes and ease the burden on commercial properties.

Some feel such property tax relief is crucial. Richard Nelson, a Burnsville clergyman who owns a cabin in outstate Minnesota, said that the bill provides much needed "mercy" for Minnesota cabin owners.

Nelson said that his family's cabin was built in 1948 and cost about \$3,000. He said last year he paid more than \$3,000 in property taxes for the cabin that is now valued at around \$113,000.

Others like Glenn Dorfman of the Minnesota Association of Realtors feel income tax cuts would provide greater benefit.

Dorfman said that the state's high home ownership rates prove that a strong economy is more important for home ownership than lower property taxes are.

Though he said he supports continued compression of property tax rates, Dorfman said discussion of cutting property taxes should make it clear to taxpayers that to achieve such reform will inevitably require higher income and sales taxes.

"Income tax cuts give people money back to pay property taxes which will go up whether you cut them or not," he said.

Another bill (HF4089), sponsored by Rep. Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka), would compress class rates for all property classes with a rate over 1 percent. It also would reduce — from 8.5 percent to 7 percent — the limitation on the amount a property's market value may grow from one year to the next.

Abrams told the committee March 15 that the bill is the final piece of reform that began in 1997. However, that doesn't mean other property tax reform isn't possible or necessary.

The bill would reduce the rate for commercial/industrial properties valued over \$150,000 from 3.4 percent to 3 percent and for those properties under \$150,000 the rate would be reduced from 2.4 percent to 2 percent.

The Department of Revenue estimates Abram's bill would cost around \$308 million over the next biennium.

Kent Warden, the executive director of the Greater Minneapolis Building Owners and Managers Association, said past property tax relief provided by the Legislature has helped Minnesota businesses. But he said that the state still has the third-highest property taxes in the nation.

He said high tax rates mean higher rent rates for businesses and ultimately higher prices for consumers. In 1999, an average tenant company located in downtown Minneapolis paid \$9.12 per square foot, compared to \$3.35 per square foot for a comparable office space in Des Moines, Iowa, and \$1.93 per square foot for an office in Seattle, Washington, according to information provided by Warden.

Tom Casper, owner of Ciatti's Restaurant in Woodbury, said the state's high property tax rates place a great burden on "mom and pop" businesses like his own.

"My property tax bill for a 7,000 square foot building is \$54,000 a year or \$4,600 a month," Casper said. "We all love spaghetti. I'm concerned the day will come when I'll have to charge \$29.95 for a plate of spaghetti." 🍝

Seeking a cure for congestion

A \$425 million transportation spending measure would address metropolitan bottlenecks and reverse light-rail funding

By CHRIS VETTER

State legislators are considering a plan to eliminate future funding for light-rail transit projects and request that any unspent money for the line be returned to the state.

The proposal is included in the House Transportation Finance Committee's omnibus bill (HF2891), which would spend \$350 million in road improvements from the general fund and another \$75 million from the Trunk Highway Fund.

The committee narrowly approved the omnibus bill March 15 and sent it to the House Ways and Means Committee. Rep. Carol Molnau (R-Chaska), sponsor of the bill, said it would make a strong commitment to improving roads and eliminating "bottlenecks" in the metro area.

"It's been a long time since we've had an emphasis on transportation," Molnau said. The omnibus bill is in addition to the \$382 million bonding recommendation the committee approved earlier this session.

A provision in the bill would require the Department of Transportation to return the unspent portions of the \$100 million the Legislature previously approved for light-rail transit along the Hiawatha Corridor. Current estimates show \$90 million to \$92 million has not been spent.

Rep. Phil Krinkie (R-Shoreview), who is suing the governor for not doing a proper cost-benefit analysis of the light-rail proposal, backed the plan, which would effectively stop the current light-rail project.

"The governor and the commissioner (of transportation) would have you believe this is a done deal," Krinkie said.

However, it is not too late to reverse the bonding from the past two years, he said.

Rep. Dan Larson (DFL-Bloomington) said the decision to move forward on light rail was made last year and the committee should not be debating a project that is already approved.

"I'm wondering why we are spending all this time, when the governor has promised a veto,"

Larson said. "The time has come to move on."

Krinkie said his major concern is that future Trunk Highway Fund dollars will be used on light-rail transit upgrades instead of on roads. He contends that people who would use light rail are people who are already using transit systems.

"This is not going to move a significant amount of new riders, no matter what they try to do," Krinkie said.

David Strom, legislative director of the Taxpayers League of Minnesota, told the committee that the Department of Transportation keeps changing its cost estimate of the project. Last year, the project was estimated to cost \$446 million; a recent study hiked the cost to \$548 million. A long-term cost study says the



Leslie Davis, president of Earth Protectors, testifies March 13 in opposition to a proposal to cancel the unspent remainder of the state funds for light-rail transit in the Hiawatha Corridor.

project could total more than \$700 million.

"Light-rail proponents have been fundamentally dishonest" about the costs, Strom said. "The light-rail system they are talking about now is not the system they presented to the Legislature."

Although project costs have climbed, Strom noted that the proposed length of the line was shortened, stops were removed, and the number of rail cars was reduced.

Molnau said the size, scope, and cost of the project is largely different from last year, which makes it worth debating.

Elwyn Tinklenberg, transportation commissioner, said the department told legislators repeatedly last year that its cost analysis was based on 1997 dollars, and inflation has caused the cost estimates to climb.

One of the main objectives of the omnibus bill is to resolve traffic congestion in other ways. The committee adopted an amendment that would split the general fund and Trunk Highway Fund money so \$201 million would be spent on Interstates 494 and 694 or congested roads linking those highways, while another \$201 million would be used for inter-regional corridors across the state.

Larson spoke against the amendment, saying the Twin Cities area could receive a majority of the money if the Transportation Department chooses projects in the seven-county metro area that are not inside the 694/494 loop.

A plan that would ban the department from planning commuter rail without legislative approval was also rolled into the omnibus bill. Molnau, who offered that proposal, said she prefers that local communities look at the upgrades and decide what is best for them.

The committee approved an amendment offered by Rep. Ray Vandever (R-Forest Lake) that would allocate \$500,000 to the University of Minnesota to study personal rapid transit. The proposed system would place small, computer-controlled vehicles on elevated guideways as an alternate means of transit.

The omnibus bill also includes a proposal to study the effectiveness of ramp meters. Rep. Tom Workman (R-Chanhassen) proposed the study, arguing Minnesotans should see if the system is needed. 🐼

Education innovation

Nearly a decade later, charter schools are a growing part of Minnesota's K-12 landscape

By MIKE DELARCO

City Academy on St. Paul's East Side has no plush classrooms or spacious auditoriums like other schools. Driving past the underused, city-operated recreational building, the world would never recognize the school as a place of learning.

Yet every day for more than eight years, students have listened daily to lessons about algebra, the periodic table, grammar, and government. Most who attend class are between the ages of 18 and 21. All come to City Academy to learn in an environment that encourages creativity while stepping beyond the bounds of "traditional" public schools.

Over the past several years, many other communities have caught on, and as a result, charter schools like City Academy can be spotted with greater frequency both in Minnesota

example.

The charter school movement began in 1988 when Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, called for the reform of public schools by describing what he referred to as "charter schools."

The basic concept behind charter schools was simple: a group of teachers or other would-be educators would approach a particular school district for permission to open a school. The school would then operate under a charter, or contract, with the local school

board or the state.

The schools would receive state funding to operate, just like other public schools, but would have to come up with their own start-up capital and location.

In addition, charter schools would have authority to act independently of surrounding public schools and could move forward with the design and implementation of innovative teaching and learning programs.

The Minnesota Legislature passed its charter school law in 1991. The law allowed for the formation of eight results-oriented, student-centered charter schools and spelled out precisely how those schools should operate.

Many at the forefront of education reform at

the time expressed excitement over the possibilities sure to result from passage of the charter school legislation. Most legislators voting in favor of the bill shared that excitement.

"What we should do is bust open the old norms and let the teachers and students engage in new ways in a totally new structure, governed more by the learning opportunities than by the traditions of the past," former Rep. Ken Nelson (DFL-Mpls) was quoted as saying.

Over the past five years, the charter school movement has experienced significant growth. The state currently has 65 charter schools that are approved to operate during calendar year 2000. Among them are seven schools set to open this fall.

The Center for Educational Reform in Washington, D.C., reports there are nearly 1,700 charter schools operating nationwide in 31 states, serving approximately 350,000 students.

Of the schools that have been approved to operate since legislation on charter schools in the state of Minnesota became law, only three have closed for one reason or another, said Traci LaFerriere, charter school coordinator for the state Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Two additional schools — one being a school for the blind in St. Cloud — remain on the bubble, LaFerriere said.

"You're going to find that the schools that fail are ones having management trouble, and often the trouble can be traced to finances," she said.

But by and large charter schools in Minnesota have found a way to survive and in many cases thrive.

Under state law, a charter school must be formed either as a cooperative or nonprofit corporation. Once this is done, a governing body for the new school must be established. In Minnesota, teachers must form a majority of a school's governing board.

Until the bylaws of the charter school organization indicate the procedure for electing a permanent Board of Directors, a provisional board may act in its absence. This temporary board can write the contract, hire teachers, and take on other duties that are necessary to get the school up and running.

In addition, charter schools must be designed specifically to fulfill one or more of the following purposes: improve pupil learning and increase learning opportunities, use different and innovative teaching methods, use



Kindergarten students from Success Academy and their teacher visit with House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty (at center in background) and other legislators March 14 to demonstrate how kindergartners are reading at and above the first-grade level. The visit was part of an effort to voice concern over funding needs for charter schools.

and in states across the nation.

Founded in 1992 and recognized as the nation's very first charter school, City Academy's structure and the faculty's commitment to young people continue to make the school a place people near and far use as an

different and innovative tools to measure learning, establish new forms of accountability, and create new professional opportunities for teachers.

Many of these goals are currently priorities for the 2000 Legislature. In fact, the current Legislature has been discussing ways to improve accountability systems in all public schools.

And faced with a significant potential teacher shortage in the coming years, legislators are also looking into various incentive plans, including increased teacher development.

While a charter school is exempt from most state and local laws and regulations, the school must show proof that students have acquired the educational skills specified in the initial contract for the charter to be renewed.

In Minnesota, charter school instructors are required to be licensed teachers, and they are entitled to retirement benefits under the letter of the school's charter.

Regarding curriculum, it's true charter schools have flexibility in what lessons are taught to students, but the state still sets minimum requirements for the subject matter that must be covered during the course of a year. Charter schools are also subject to the same periodic testing and public reporting as all public schools.

A 1998 report by the Humphrey Institute's Center for School Change titled *Making a Difference? Charter Schools, Evaluation and Student Performance* found that 21 out of 31 charter schools studied reported gains in student achievement after administering the same test at least twice.


According to *Minnesota Charter Schools: A Research Report*, parents of children who attend charter schools list small class size, challenging curriculum, good teachers, and greater opportunity for parental involvement as positive aspects of charter schools.

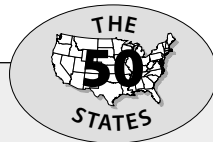
Some of the problems associated with charter schools have included the cost of start-up,

difficulties with student transportation, inadequate facilities, limited special education programming, and a difficult relationship with the school's sponsoring district.

State government has attempted to address the problem of start-up costs by offering \$50,000 start-up grants to qualifying schools. A limited amount of federal charter school funding can also be applied to a school's start-up cost.

Since charter schools were first established in Minnesota, their numbers have increased every year and will likely continue to grow. Lt. Gov. Mae Schunk has voiced the administration's support for charter schools.

Rural Minnesota is apparently ripe for growth in charter schools. Statistics show that about two-thirds of all existing charter schools are located in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. 



Calling for safety

Some lawmakers want motorists to hang up and drive

By the end of this year, more than 80 million people will be using cellular phones in the United States, according to the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association.

Though cellular phones are often considered a staple of 21st century life, using them can become a safety issue when people dial-up while behind the wheel.

During 1999, legislators in 15 states considered bills to limit or prohibit cell phone use by drivers. None of those measures passed, but at least five states have such legislation pending this year.

The proposals range from a complete ban of cell phone use in a moving vehicle to guidelines for use. No proposals regarding this issue are currently before the Minnesota Legislature.

Proponents of regulating cell phone use say drivers are distracted and don't respond as quickly to road conditions. Opponents say that cell phones are no more of a distraction for drivers than the radio, eating food, or using vanity mirrors. And, they say, cell phones are often used to seek help during road emergencies.

Currently no state has laws specifically regulating cell phone use in automobiles, but all states have laws addressing careless or reckless driving.

The city of Brooklyn, Ohio, became the first jurisdiction in the country to significantly restrict cell phone use inside vehicles by passing a hands-free ordinance in March 1999.

The ordinance makes it a misdemeanor

to use a cell phone while driving unless both hands are on the steering wheel.

Though devices are available so drivers can keep their hands on the wheel, studies show they don't necessarily increase safety.

A 1997 study by the New England Journal of Medicine concluded that cell phone users were four times more likely to have crashes than non-users. And the study found that cell phone units that allow the hands to be free offer no safety advantage over hand-held units.

At least seven countries — England, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, Israel, Italy, and the Republic of Singapore — restrict or prohibit cell phone use while driving a motor vehicle.

(D. MAEDA)

Monday, March 13

HF4089—Abrams (R)

Taxes

Property tax class rates reduced, education homestead and agricultural credits modified, limited market value modified, mining tax distributions deduction eliminated from levy limit calculation, and levy limits extended.

HF4090—Abrams (R)

Taxes

Public finance provisions modified and money appropriated.

HF4091—Lenczewski (DFL)

Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs

Statutory cities authorized to elect council members by wards.

HF4092—Lenczewski (DFL)

Crime Prevention

Criminal and juvenile justice information policy group membership modified, data group created, technology infrastructure improvements authorized, and money appropriated.

HF4093—Lenczewski (DFL)

Taxes

Disabled persons reduced class rate homesteads market value increased.

HF4094—Johnson (DFL)

Transportation Policy

Photo identification equipment purchased and maintained by the state for existing driver's license agents, and money appropriated.

HF4095—Lenczewski (DFL)

Taxes

State individual income tax add-back calculation provided.

HF4096—Trimble (DFL)

Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs

St. Paul Port Authority industrial development powers clarified.

HF4097—Leppik (R)

Higher Education Finance

Technical college printing and publishing programs created, and money appropriated.

HF4098—Johnson (DFL)

K-12 Education Finance

Detached and annexed land alternative bonded indebtedness allocation method created.

HF4099—Rest (DFL)

Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs

Tax increment financing powers and procedures modified.

HF4100—Swenson (R)

Health & Human Services Finance

Rural hospital capital improvement grant and loan program established, and money appropriated.

HF4101—Osskopp (R)

Environment & Natural Resources Finance

Great River Ridge trail constructed, bonds issued, and money appropriated.

HF4102—McElroy (R)

Taxes

Multi-state sales and use tax collection system development authorized.

HF4103—Otremba (DFL)

K-12 Education Finance

Residential academy grants modified.

HF4104—Entenza (DFL)

Family & Early Childhood Education Finance

Kids capacity initiative pilot program grant authorized, report required, and money appropriated.

Wednesday, March 15

HF4105—Krinkie (R)

Taxes

Individual income tax rates reduced, married filing jointly brackets expanded, marriage penalty repealed, property tax class rates reduced, MinnesotaCare subsidized health insurance account created, and premium and provider taxes repealed.

HF4106—Seifert, M. (R)

Jobs & Economic Development Policy

Yellow Medicine County economic development authority authorized and powers provided.

HF4107—Sykora (R)

Ways & Means

Adult Basic Education programs, child care licensing and inservice training requirements, individual development accounts eligibility, and child care assistance requirements modified; energy assistance transferred; and money appropriated.

HF4108—Lenczewski (DFL)

Governmental Operations & Veterans Affairs Policy

Veterans preference termination rights expanded to include state employees.

HF4109—Abeler (R)

Health & Human Services Policy

Nursing facilities financial crisis to be addressed when developing policies related to long-term care services and nursing home rates.

HF4110—Abrams (R)

Taxes

Luggage cart and baby stroller rentals sales and use tax exemption provided.

HF4111—McElroy (R)

Ways & Means

Economic development supplemental appropriations bill.

HF4112—Krinkie (R)

Taxes

Circle Pines levy limit increased.

HF4113—Hasskamp (DFL)

Taxes

Sales and use tax rate reduced.

HF4114—Milbert (DFL)

Taxes

Legislative bill revenue estimate requirements modified.

HF4115—Milbert (DFL)

Taxes

Department of Revenue taxable sales interpretation instructions clarified.

HF4116—Leighton (DFL)

Environment & Natural Resources Policy

Coni-bear trapping restrictions imposed.

HF4117—Gunther (R)

Environment & Natural Resources Policy

State and county environmental partnership program created for Individual Sewer Treatment System (ISTS) improvements, and money appropriated.

HF4118—Milbert (DFL)

Taxes

Income taxpayers electronically filing tax liability designation authorized and special accounts created.

Thursday, March 16

HF4119—Tunheim (DFL)

Environment & Natural Resources Finance

Red Lake watershed district flood analysis grant authorized and money appropriated.

HF4120—Abrams (R)

Taxes

Taconite production tax rate to remain the same for one year.

HF4121—McElroy (R)

Taxes

Nonresident income tax credit authorized for taxes paid in state of domicile.

HF4122—Hasskamp (DFL)

Taxes

Property tax market value increases limited.



It's not easy to amend the Minnesota Constitution, but that wasn't always the case. From 1857 to 1898, amendments required only a simple majority — more 'yes' votes than 'no' votes — at the polls.

That changed by way of a constitutional amendment approved in 1898 requiring a majority of all voters who went to the polls for that election. That means leaving the question blank counts as a 'no' vote.

The 1898 measure was known as the "brewer's amendment" because it was intended to make it more difficult for prohibitionists to ban liquor.

MONDAY, March 20

8 a.m.

ETHICS

10 State Office Building
Chr. Rep. Elaine Harder
Agenda: Ethics complaint regarding Rep. Arlon Lindner.

Note: The committee may possibly reconvene 15 minutes after session in Room 10 of the State Office Building.

10 a.m.

TAXES

Basement Hearing Room
State Office Building
Chr. Rep. Ron Abrams
Agenda: Omnibus tax bill presentation. Summary by House Research.

11 a.m.

RULES & LEGISLATIVE ADMINISTRATION

400S State Office Building
Chr. Rep. Tim Pawlenty
Agenda: Calendar for the Day for March 20.

1 p.m.

The House meets in session.

TUESDAY, March 21

9 a.m.

TAXES

Basement Hearing Room
State Office Building
Chr. Rep. Ron Abrams
Agenda: Public testimony on the omnibus tax bill.

1 p.m.

The House meets in session.

WEDNESDAY, March 22

8 a.m.

TAXES

Basement Hearing Room
State Office Building
Chr. Rep. Ron Abrams
Agenda: Mark-up of the omnibus tax bill.

10 a.m.

HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCE

300S State Office Building
Chr. Rep. Peggy Leppik
Agenda: Higher Education Services Office (HESO) presentation.

1 p.m.

The House meets in session.

THURSDAY, March 23

TAXES

Chr. Rep. Ron Abrams
Agenda: Time, room, and agenda to be announced.

1 p.m.

The House meets in session.

FRIDAY, March 24

TAXES

Chr. Rep. Ron Abrams
Agenda: Time, room, and agenda to be announced.

10 a.m.

The House meets in session.

Reflections

When the House goes “under call” for all members to vote on a crucial bill, the speaker directs the sergeant-at-arms to find and escort all members back to the chamber. Often, House business does not proceed until all members are at their desks.

Old stories prevail around the Capitol about the procedure. The one about the chief sergeant who had to drive miles out of town to bring a member back is an example.

Another is about the search to find Joe Rolette back in 1857 after he stole the bill that was to make St. Peter the state capital. So the story goes, the sergeant did find Rolette, but was coerced to sit and play cards until three days transpired for the bill to die.

Not all bills come under the Call of the House rule, but one of note is an 1881 controversial tonnage tax on the value of ore up on the Iron Range. The bill hung around in some form for 40 years as it was passed, repealed, vetoed, passed again, and amended. In 1909 for example, Gov. John Johnson vetoed a bill that would put a levy on the gross value of ore.

Then, during the 1921 session, a bill for

a tonnage tax on iron ore resurfaced with an amendment that levied tax on the occupation of ore mining. One lawmaker who voted for the occupation tax was Rep. Henry H. Emmons from Emmons Township on the Iowa State line.

Worth noting is his father, H.G. Emmons, who served in the Legislature for two terms in 1877 and 1878. The elder Emmons helped to pass a bill for legislative sessions to become biennial, and another for funds to pay for the cost of the capture of the Northfield bank robbers, the Jesse James-Cole Younger Gang.

H.H. Emmons’ time at the Capitol is also noteworthy in many aspects, but mostly because of how he kept a pledge to his constituency in Freeborn County to vote for the tonnage or occupation tax. This was not as simple as it sounds.

Emmons was very ill at the opening of the 1921 legislative session. So strongly was he committed to his lawmaker role, he traveled back and forth between treat-

ment at Rochester’s Mayo Clinic and St. Paul to execute his duties.

Emmons was present in session off and on for only 22 days. He returned on the 45th Day. On the morning of March 11 — the 47th Day of session — he arose from his deathbed, dressed, and went to the Capitol.

Emmons rested on a couch in the chamber lobby until a Call of the House was requested for the tax bill. He made his way to his desk, then voted when his name was called. This was his last official act. Henry H. Emmons died on March 31, 1921.

A week later, his colleagues read a resolution into the House Journal for “his untiring energy, zeal and conscientious application of his work in the Legislature.”

Emmons’ great granddaughter, Leah Cook, followed a Call to the House some 70 years later as a high school page. After college, she served as a legislative assistant and lobbyist in Maryland.

— LECLAIR GRIER LAMBERT

How a Bill Becomes

Idea

1 A bill is an idea for a new law or an idea to change an old law. Anyone can suggest an idea for a bill — an individual, consumer group, professional association, government agency, or the governor. Most often, however, ideas come from legislators, the only ones who can begin to move an idea through the process. There are 134 House members and 67 senators.

Legal form

2 The Office of the Revisor of Statutes and staff from other legislative offices work with legislators in putting the idea for a new law into proper legal form. The revisor's office is responsible for assuring that the proposal's form complies with the rules of both bodies before the bill can be introduced into the Minnesota House of Representatives and the Minnesota Senate.

Authors

3 Each bill must have a legislator to sponsor and introduce it in the Legislature. That legislator is the chief author whose name appears on the bill along with the bill's file number to identify it as it moves through the legislative process. There may be up to 34 co-authors from the House and four from the Senate. Their names also appear on the bill.

General Register

7 In the House, the General Register serves as a parking lot where bills await action by the full body. Bills chosen to appear on the Calendar for the Day or the Fiscal Calendar are drawn from the General Register.

In the Senate, a different procedure is used. Bills are listed on the General Orders agenda. Senate members, acting as the "committee of the whole," have a chance to debate the issue and offer amendments on the bill. Afterwards, they vote to recommend: passage of the bill, progress (delay action), or further committee action. And sometimes they recommend that a bill not pass. From here, the bill is placed on the Calendar.

Calendar for the Day

8 In the House, the Calendar for the Day is a list of bills the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee has designated for the full House to vote on. Members can vote to amend the bill, and after amendments are dispensed with, the bill is given its *third reading* before the vote of the full body is taken. The House also has a Fiscal Calendar, on which the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee or House Taxes Committee can call up for consideration any tax or finance bill that has had a second reading. The bills are debated, amended, and passed in one day.

In the Senate, bills approved by the "committee of the whole" are placed on the Calendar. At this point, the bill has its *third reading*, after which time the bill cannot be amended unless the entire body agrees to it. Toward the end of the session, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration designates bills from the General Orders calendar to receive priority consideration. These Special Orders bills are debated, amended, and passed in one day.

A bill needs 68 votes to pass the House and 34 votes to pass the Senate. If the House and Senate each pass the same version of the bill, it goes to the governor for a signature.



a Law in Minnesota

Introduction

4 The chief House author of the bill introduces it in the House; the chief Senate author introduces it in the Senate. Identical bills introduced in each body are called *companion* bills. The bill introduction is called the *first reading*. The presiding officer of the House then refers it to an appropriate House committee for discussion; the same thing happens in the Senate.

Conference

9 If the House and Senate versions of the bill are different, they go to a conference committee. In the House, the speaker appoints three or five representatives, and in the Senate, the Subcommittee on Committees of the Committee on Rules and Administration selects the same number of senators to form the committee. The committee meets to work out differences in the two bills and to reach a compromise.

Committee

5 The bill is discussed in one or more committees depending upon the subject matter. After discussion, committee members recommend action — approval or disapproval — to the full House and full Senate. The House committee then sends a report to the House about its action on the bill; the Senate committee does likewise in the Senate.

Floor

10 The conference committee's compromise bill then goes back to the House and the Senate for another vote. If both bodies pass the bill in this form, it is sent to the governor for his or her approval or disapproval. (If one or both bodies reject the report, it goes back to the conference committee for further consideration.)

Floor

6 After the full House or Senate accepts the committee report, the bill has its *second reading* and is placed on the House agenda called the General Register or the Senate agenda called General Orders. (A committee can recommend that non-controversial bills bypass the General Register or General Orders and go onto the Consent Calendar, where bills usually pass without debate.) After this point, House and Senate procedures differ slightly.

Governor

11 Once the governor has the bill, he or she may: sign it, and the bill becomes law; veto it within three days; or allow it to become law by not signing it. During session, the House and Senate can override a governor's veto. This requires a two-thirds vote in the House (90 votes) and Senate (45 votes). The governor also may "line-item veto" parts of a money bill, or "pocket veto" a bill passed during the last three days of the session by not signing it within 14 days after final adjournment.



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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE: STEVE SVIGGUM
MAJORITY LEADER: TIM PAWLENTY
MINORITY LEADER: THOMAS W. PUGH

MINNESOTA INDEX

School district data

Percentage of growth in public school enrollment, 1989 to 1999	17
Students enrolled in public schools, 1989	727,000
In 1999	851,000
Percentage of districts with declines in enrollment, 1989 to 1999	38
Percentage of districts projecting enrollment to fall between 1998 and 2000	63
1999 school district general fund spending, in billions	\$5.4
in 1989	\$3.3
Percentage of inflation-adjusted growth in districts' general fund revenues per student, 1989 to 1998	16
Percentage of inflation-adjusted growth in districts' general fund spending per student, 1989 to 1998	9
Districts with statutory operating deficits, 1989	40
In 1998	10
In 1999 (preliminary figure)	22
Average teacher's salary, 1999	\$41,163
In 1989 (in 1999 dollars)	\$42,815
Average administrator's salary, 1999	\$65,811
In 1989 (in 1999 dollars)	\$63,889
Percentage of teachers with less than 10 years experience, 1999	38
In 1989	23
Percentage of increase in number of teachers per 1,000 students, 1989 to 1999	8
Teachers per 1,000 students, 1999	70
In 1998	67
Average total district expenditure per student, 1999	\$6,758
Number of districts in Minnesota, 1999	350
In 1989	435

Source: *School District Finances*, Office of the Legislative Auditor, February 2000.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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