

# SESSION WEEKLY

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TRANSPORTATION'S LONG ROAD  
SNUFFING OUT SMOKE  
MEDICINAL MARIJUANA

## SESSION WEEKLY

Session Weekly is a nonpartisan publication of Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services. During the 2007-2008 Legislative Session, each issue reports House action between Thursdays of each week, lists bill introductions and provides other information. No fee.

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On the cover: Jonathon Ross, *left*, watches as fellow Minneapolis North Community High School student Denzell Allen, *right*, tells the House E-12 Education Committee about his participation in the Summit Academy Quantum Opportunities Program. Louis J. King, II, president and CEO of the academy, *center* and Minneapolis North Community High School Principal Mike Favor, *right*, also testified before the committee.

— Photo by: Tom Olmscheid

# A declining problem

Number of bills look to help with funding concerns

BY STEPHEN HARDING

School districts across the state are struggling with declining enrollment and the loss of state funding. For administrators, that means stretching budgets further, resulting in staff cuts and building closures.

For every student lost, a school district relinquishes a minimum of \$4,974 from the education funding formula. When considering other revenue received from the government, such as for transportation, free and reduced lunches, and funds for teaching limited English learners, this averages out to \$6,704 per student.

From 1979 to 1985, there was a steady drop in enrollment across the state, but since then enrollment has been on a roller coaster ride. Nearly 80 percent of school districts in the state are losing students to charter schools, home

schools, private schools, students moving to other districts and a declining birth rate.

The problem is greatest in northeast Minnesota, where 90 percent of the districts are losing students. In the Twin Cities

metropolitan area, the number is around 60 percent, according to the nonpartisan House Fiscal Analysis Department.

Overall, the state is projected to lose 22,013 students during the next two years.

Regardless of a district's locale, administrators are faced with making undesirable choices — but ones that need to be made.

## Tightening the budget

The largest portion of the school budget is teacher compensation. So when budgets need to be tightened, the first to go are teachers. Due to contract terms, new teachers are cut first, but the problem is that they are not paid as much as their longer-serving counterparts.

According to [www.iseek.org/mncareers/index.html](http://www.iseek.org/mncareers/index.html), an average starting wage for an elementary teacher is \$31,030. For every six students lost to a district, one teacher may be cut.

When there is a rapid loss of students over a period of a few years, teachers lose their

**First Reading continued on page 4**



Photo courtesy of A. J. Olmscheid

Students at Mounds View High School in Arden Hills funnel through the hallways between classes. The Mounds View District faces a similar situation to many districts across the state — a declining enrollment.



jobs and schools can be closed or combined, making transportation more costly because of longer routes and increased class sizes. As a result, teaching effectiveness goes down.

## Metro woes

The Mounds View School District is a typical suburban school district in that it is losing students, but what is atypical is the rate at which it is losing students: 1,166 over the past five years. The 10 percent decline is the largest among the 50 suburban school districts.

"We have had to consolidate schools," said Superintendent Jan Witthuhn. "We had eight elementary schools two years ago, and we closed two of them."

Mounds View turned those buildings, which housed 650 students each, into administrative offices and community service facilities. The district has also instituted what Witthuhn calls a "controversial marketing effort" to retain and attract new students.

It's helped; however, there are just more students graduating than entering kindergarten, she said. Declining birth rates in the suburbs is to blame, and not children attending home or charter schools, she said.

## Greater Minnesota concerns

The McGregor School District is roughly 30 miles northeast of Mille Lacs Lake.

Its population ranges from isolated homesteads and cluster communities with 50 to 350 people, according to a fact sheet provided by its school board.

McGregor is one of the poorest districts in the state, with the average per capita income of \$21,000. The unemployment rate is almost twice the state average, and 63 percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunches.

The district educated 550 students in 1998-99. It now has approximately 425 students, and next year enrollment could drop to 360 due to the College of St. Scholastica opening a nearby charter school as well as other factors.

Adding it all up, McGregor could lose \$345,825 if all 45 students leave for the charter school. However, a bill has been introduced to deal with the problem.

Sponsored by [Rep. Loren Solberg](#) (DFL-Grand Rapids), [HF349](#) would appropriate \$400,000 in the next biennium to offset the loss of funds due to the loss of students. The House K-12 Finance Division laid the bill over for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill.

A companion bill, [SF419](#), Sponsored by Sen. Tom Saxhaug (DFL-Grand Rapids), has been laid over for possible inclusion in the Senate E-12 Education Budget Division.

Superintendent Rich Herman said his district still has to make cuts in the budget, "but this bill would help bridge the gap in funding."

## Other solutions

The state uses a formula to ease the burden of declining enrollment by taking the greater of either a district's current year adjusted pupil units, or the sum of 77 percent of its current year's adjusted pupil units plus 23 percent of the previous year's adjusted pupil units.

Sponsored by [Rep. Will Morgan](#) (DFL-Burnsville), [HF694](#) would take a four-year average of the districts adjusted pupil units to calculate the formula. The cost of this bill would be around \$90 million a year.

School districts that are losing students

would see a rise in funding levels from this bill. However, schools that see a rise in enrollment would receive no extra funding and some would be worse off because they have a big decline under current law, but may have remained relatively stable over a four-year average, according to the nonpartisan House Research Department.

McGregor would see a \$90,000 a year gain and Mounds View would see a nearly \$4 million gain if the bill would pass.


Its companion bill, [SF1344](#), sponsored by Sen.

Jim Carlson (DFL-Eagan) awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

The bill has been laid over by the House K-12 Finance Division for possible omnibus bill inclusion, as has [HF1411](#), sponsored by [Rep. Larry Howes](#) (R-Walker). Its companion bill, [SF1571](#), sponsored by Sen. Michelle Fischbach (R-Paynesville), awaits action in the Senate Finance Committee.

Howes' bill would give an advantage to small schools that are suffering from declining enrollment through a revenue increase that would equal 20 percent of the basic formula allowance times the two-year decline in enrollment limited to no more than 100 students, times a small school index. The index would be the current enrollment divided by 1,000. If enrollment is over 1,000 then the school index is 1.

The cost of the bill would be roughly \$22 million per year.

Because McGregor is projected to lose 35 students over the next two years, the formula would provide \$78,243. Mounds View, which stands to lose 949 students over the next two years, would receive \$99,949. 

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**Editor's note:** The following Highlights are coverage of select bills heard in House committees held March 15-22 and other House activity. To track the progress of a bill, go to [www.leg.mn](http://www.leg.mn) and click on Bill Search, Status and MyBills. Designations used in Highlight summaries: HF-House File; SF-Senate File; CH-Chapter; and \* bill the governor signed or vetoed.

## AGRICULTURE

### Farmer funding assistance

Planting season is right around the corner; but a program farmers, especially new farmers, look to for help funding their operations is out of money.

That situation could change with [HF274](#), sponsored by [Rep. Al Juhnke](#) (DFL-Willmar).

The [Rural Finance Authority](#) partners with local lenders to provide affordable credit to eligible farmers at a reduced interest rate. During the fiscal year 2006, more than \$14.7 million was loaned out through the program, effectively depleting its resources in July. As a result, the authority is unable to accept applications for five of its programs.

The bill, approved by the House Finance Committee March 19 awaits action on the House floor, and would appropriate \$30 million for the program.

Juhnke's initial request was for \$15 million, which was amended to \$50 million in the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division by [Rep. Tim Faust](#) (DFL-Mora). The \$30 million compromise was reached in the House Capital Investment Finance Division.

A companion bill, [SF227](#), sponsored by [Sen. Jim Vickerman](#) (DFL-Tracy), passed the Senate 64-0 on March 7 and was laid on the table.

— L. SCHUTZ

## BONDING

### Bonding in the off year

Minnesota's public colleges and universities could see funding for much-needed building repairs if a House bonding bill passes. A combined \$52 million would go to the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities for asset preservation and replacement.

Sponsored by [Rep. Alice Hausman](#) (DFL-St. Paul), the \$255 million bonding bill ([HF886](#)) was approved by the House Capital Investment

Finance Division, the House Finance Committee, and the House Ways and Means Committee during a three-day span beginning March 20. It is now headed to the House floor.

A companion bill, [SF844](#), sponsored by [Sen. Betsy Wergin](#) (R-Princeton), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

Of the total, \$135 million is bonded money and \$120 million is onetime money from the state's General Fund.

The Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center would receive \$30 million of its \$37.9 million request to build the first arena in the world with an environmental design certification. The arena would be used by the mens and womens hockey programs at [University of Minnesota-Duluth](#) and would be used for concerts and other city and regional events. It would include 7,000 seats for hockey games and more than 8,500 seats for concerts.

Other appropriations include:

- \$30 million for a capital loan to the Red Lake School District to design, construct, renovate, furnish and equip school facilities, and for health and safety capital improvements;
- \$30 million for the final design and construction of the Central Corridor transitway between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul;
- \$12.7 million from the trunk highway fund for exterior repair of the Department of Transportation Building in St. Paul;
- \$10 million to assist noncommercial television stations with the continued conversion to a digital broadcast signal as mandated by the federal government. It must also be used to interconnect Minnesota public television stations;
- \$8 million for the Reinvest in Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to acquire conservation easements from landowners on marginal lands to protect soil and water quality and to support fish and wildlife habitat. Of this, \$2.25 million is to implement the program;
- \$2.5 million for the Western Mesabi Mine Planning Board to construct siphons, a conveyance system and other improvements to accommodate water level and outflow control of the water level in the Canisteo mine pit in Itasca County; and
- \$2.1 million for the state share of land acquisition, engineering and design costs for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers East Division Flood Control Project, which will protect Roseau from recurring flooding. This would also go for flood mitigation projects in Browns Valley.

— S. HEGMAN

### No Session Weekly April 6

In observance of Passover and Easter, there will be no House floor sessions or committee hearings after 2 p.m. Monday, April 2 through Monday, April 9.

Because of this, there will be no Session Weekly published Friday, April 6. Session Weekly staff will resume coverage of the House with committees and a floor session scheduled for April 10. The magazine will then resume its regular Friday publication date.

### St. Cloud hockey could 'shine'

Another prominent hockey center could see improvements.

Sponsored by [Rep. Larry Haws](#) (DFL-St. Cloud), [HF348](#) would appropriate \$11 million to add and renovate space at the National Hockey Center in St. Cloud. The bill was held over March 15 by the House Capital Investment Finance Division for possible omnibus bill inclusion.

"This is a jewel and it's time to shine it up," Haws said.

The total project cost is \$13 million. The additional \$2 million would be raised by St. Cloud State University from private sources.

The project totals about 36,000 square feet, and 7,000 square feet of renovation. This will include a handicapped-accessible entrance and lobby, ticketing area, training space, expanded concourse, coaches' offices, additional spectator and reception space, and renovated space for additional locker rooms.

Predesign for the project is complete, so the design phase could begin immediately, said Steve Ludwig, vice president for administrative affairs at the university.

Since its opening in 1989, the building has been home to the university's mens and womens hockey programs, St. John's University intercollegiate hockey, academic and intramural sports programs, high school hockey, youth hockey practice and tournaments, recreation, national hockey festivals and development camps, and coaching and officiating clinics.

A companion bill, [SF292](#), sponsored by [Sen. Tarryl Clark](#) (DFL-St. Cloud), was laid over Feb. 22 by the Senate Finance Committee for possible omnibus bill inclusion.

— S. HEGMAN

## BUDGET

### Targets include new tax tier

House finance committees are meeting into the night to work out budget proposals, and get them out of committee by the upcoming

April 2 deadline.

The jumpstart to activity came after the House Ways and Means Committee approved a more than \$34.6 billion spending target for the 2008-09 biennium on March 16.

Sponsored by [Rep. Loren Solberg](#) (DFL-Grand Rapids), committee chairman, [HCR2](#) lays out funding proposals for the House DFL priorities, including: increasing the per-pupil school formula; movement toward all-day kindergarten; property tax relief; and health care coverage for all of the state's children. There is no Senate companion.

Early in the session, the House Ways and Means Committee held hearings across the state. The targets address the concerns of Minnesotans, Solberg said. "Those themes, no matter what part of the state we were in, rose to the top."

K-12 education is the greatest beneficiary with \$13.7 billion in biennial funding.

Transportation could become the most controversial spending target as the session moves along. There is significant difference in the proposals among the House, at approximately \$230 million, the governor's \$335.6 million proposal and the Senate's target of \$64 million. The House relies on a 5-cent a gallon tax increase in each of the next two fiscal years, which [Rep. Steve Sviggum](#) (R-Kenyon) said Republicans are being "coerced" into voting for.

"They're coerced because you are starving the transportation fund from the money that Gov. Pawlenty is putting into it," the former speaker said.

A new revenue generator could be controversial as well.

The House DFL Caucus is endorsing a fourth tax tier. Under the proposal, a married couple netting more than \$400,000 a year, and a single person netting \$226,000 or more, would be in a 9 percent tax bracket.

[House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher](#) (DFL-Mpls) said the money raised would be strictly for property tax relief across the state.

Other revenue could come from closing tax loopholes from Foreign Operating Corporations and greater enforcement of tax compliance.

The House spending targets are about \$126 million more than those proposed by the governor. The Senate's budget proposal is more in line with that of the governor.

— L. SCHUTZ

## BUSINESS

### Snuffing out smoking

The Freedom to Breathe Act, which would prohibit smoking in restaurants, bars and public transportation statewide, has overcome one more committee hurdle, with its March 15

## SILENT VIGIL



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

**A Capitol visitor reads a story about 1st Lt. Michael Fasnacht that was attached to a pair of boots during a March 19 peace vigil in the Rotunda. Fasnacht, of Mankato, died June 8, 2005, when the vehicle he was driving hit a roadside bomb while he was on patrol in Iraq. Forty-seven pairs of boots, one pair for each Minnesotan who has died in Iraq, were placed around the Star of the North.**

approval by the House Health Care and Human Services Finance Division.

It now awaits action by the House Finance Committee.

Sponsored by [Rep. Thomas Huntley](#) (DFL-Duluth), [HF305](#) was characterized as a public safety issue by proponents, who said the ban would provide protection for hospitality employees currently at the mercy of secondhand smoke on the job.

"The goal is to even the playing field across the state," said [Rep. Dan Severson](#) (R-Sauk Rapids). "Workers have a right to a healthy, hazard-free work area."

Opponents argued that while science has deemed secondhand smoke dangerous, it has not concluded whether ventilation systems installed at many restaurants and bars are ineffective safeguards.

"The debate is not over," said Sue Jeffers, owner of Stub and Herb's Bar and Restaurant in Minneapolis. She said that all 15 states with smoking bans have included certain exemptions for businesses or other entities.

The committee had earlier defeated an amendment to excuse restaurants and bars with ventilators from the ban.

Several Republican committee members said they opposed the bill because it would negate the right of choice for business owners.

"Minnesota should stay out of the private industry, and let the consumer drive the demand on this," [Rep. Sondra Erickson](#) (R-Princeton) said.

A companion bill, [SF238](#), sponsored by [Sen. Kathleen Sheran](#) (DFL-Mankato), is scheduled to be heard March 24 by the Senate Finance Committee.

— M. SIMPSON

## CONSUMERS

### Cold Belgian brews and more

Strong beers brewed in Minnesota, like Schell and Summit brands, could be available this year for beer drinkers at the Minnesota State Fair.

Sponsored by Rep. Joe Atkins (DFL-Inver Grove Heights), [HF1958](#), the omnibus liquor bill, would allow liquor licenses to be sold to establishments within a half-mile of the state fairgrounds and at the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus. Other provisions allow for larger bottles for brewing beer, on-sale licenses for farm wineries and increased maximum fees for off-sale licenses issued by cities. The bill was approved March 20 by the House Commerce and Labor Committee, and is headed for the House floor.

Under the bill, vendors would be permitted to sell more than 3.2 percent beer at the state fair and other fairground events, "provided that at least one Minnesota brewed malt liquor is made available for sale at each allowed location within the grounds."

Ken Thiemann, a brew master in Larsmont, along the North Shore, told a House committee



that under current law he would be unable to sell or serve his homemade Belgian beer in the traditional fashion because of current bottle size regulations. The bill would permit 750 milliliter bottles traditional to Belgian beers to be sold by small brewers and brew pubs.

It is currently illegal for liquor stores to donate bottles of wine to charities for events such as a silent auction. Under the bill, cities may issue to a nonprofit organization a temporary exclusive liquor store license once a year for charitable events. The funds from sales must be dedicated to the charitable purpose and the donation could not exceed five bottles for wine, 24 beer bottles and one liter for intoxicating liquors.

Not included in the bill is a provision allowing grocery stores to sell wine. The reason is because most of the provisions are noncontroversial. "Wine with dinner, no matter how you slice it, is highly controversial," Atkins said.

[Rep. Dean Simpson](#) (R-Perham), a grocery store owner, said he was disappointed the measure was left out. "It's a consumer's choice issue," and 33 other states allow it, he said. As a grocer, the problem of increased youth access is a fallacy because grocery stores are already responsible for selling wine coolers, cigarettes and lottery tickets, he said.

A companion bill, [SF1070](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action in the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

### Get a job, Sha na na ...

Would you be able to recognize original members of The Platters, The Drifters or The Coasters? Imposter bands performing as original members are out there and making money on performing the lie.

A Truth in Music Advertising Act, approved without opposition by the House Commerce and Labor Committee March 15, would make the act illegal. The bill now goes to the House floor. A companion bill, [SF1936](#), sponsored by [Sen. Dan Sparks](#) (DFL-Austin), awaits action by the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee.

Sponsored by [Rep. Joe Atkins](#) (DFL-Inver Grove Heights), [HF1314](#) would make any person who advertises or conducts a live musical performance or production by use of false, deceptive or misleading affiliation between a performing group and a recording group subject to misdemeanor charges.

The bill "gets after unethical concert promoters that take advantage of music fans," Atkins said. The attorney general or county attorney would be permitted to step in and stop a concert from happening.



PHOTO BY SARAH STACKE

**Jon "Bowzer" Bauman, an original member of the band "Sha Na Na," sings before the House Commerce and Labor Committee March 15 while testifying in support of the Truth in Music Advertising Act that would adopt regulations for advertising and conducting of live musical performances or productions.**

Jon "Bowzer" Bauman, an original member of the band Sha Na Na, and chairman of the Vocal Group Hall of Fame Foundation's Truth in Music Committee, said imposters are using a "sophisticated form of identity theft" and duping consumers. For the most part, it's the impersonating doo-wop groups that are taking advantage of fans. Because they didn't get a lot of television time, people don't recognize whether the bands actually have original members, he said.

— P. OSTBERG

## CRIME

### Computer theft punishment

A plan to toughen a penalty for computer theft has been booted up.

If a computer is stolen that contains any identity information about the user or any other person, the thief could face a felony charge, under [HF1053](#), sponsored by [Rep. Dave Olin](#) (DFL-Thief River Falls).

"As we're mostly aware, the computers nowadays probably inadvertently have Social Security numbers and all sorts of other things," Olin said. "This would make it a felony because that computer may be able to be used in identity theft efforts elsewhere by getting that information."

Approved March 19 by the House Labor and Consumer Protection Division and one day later by the House Commerce and Labor Committee, the bill now awaits action by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee.

"Computers oftentimes contain information that's much more damaging,

and much more useful to thieves, than just the laptop itself, which may only be worth a couple of hundred bucks in some cases," said Ben Wogsland, assistant director of communications with the attorney general's office. "It's difficult for prosecutors to get to the \$500 threshold for a felony in some cases. This just brings it to that threshold as we've done with some other property." According to statute, "other property" can include that taken "from an area of destruction caused by civil disaster, riot, bombing, or the proximity of the battle"; motor vehicles; and public funds belonging to the state or political subdivision.

Wogsland said it is his understanding that the bill would also address personal digital assistants, such as a BlackBerry or other handheld devices.

A companion bill, [SF727](#), sponsored by [Sen. Satveer Chaudhary](#) (DFL-Fridley), was held over March 7 by the Senate Public Safety Budget Division for omnibus bill consideration.

— M. COOK

### No required polygraphs

If a woman is sexually assaulted, she may be asked to take a polygraph exam to validate her story. In some cases, the exam may even play a part in whether to proceed with an investigation.

[Rep. Michael Paymar](#) (DFL-St. Paul) said this practice unfairly singles out sexual assault victims and treats them differently than other victims of crime.

Sponsored by Paymar, [HF1354](#) would prohibit law enforcement and prosecutors from requiring complainants of sexual assault

from having to take the exam. Initially, the bill said officials would not be allowed to ask about taking the exam. After hearing concerns from police officer representatives, Paymar successfully offered an amendment allowing them to do so.

The bill was approved March 20 by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee and was laid over for possible omnibus inclusion. There is no Senate companion.

Paymar also said when the Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized by Congress in 2005, there was an added provision that any state requiring victims to take a polygraph would not be eligible for certain federal funds. Without this bill, the state may no longer receive up to \$2 million in federal assistance.

Eighty-five percent of all sexual assaults throughout the country go unreported and the practice of asking for polygraphs does nothing to help, said Rochester Police Chief Roger Peterson. It's hard enough to get victims to admit that a crime has occurred, Peterson said. "We don't need more barriers in the process."

— C. GREEN

## EDUCATION

### Electronic bullying

Bullying in the 21st century is no longer confined to the cafeteria or the playground. It now happens over the Internet and through text messaging.

A bill introduced would help address this problem.

Sponsored by [Rep. Debra Hilstrom](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Center) and [Sen. Mee Moua](#) (DFL-St. Paul), [HF504/SF646](#)\* would require school boards to develop a policy to prohibit bullying in all forms, including by electronic means.

On March 20, the House E-12 Education Committee approved the bill and referred it to the House floor. The Senate passed the bill 61-2 on March 7.

Among the new ways of bullying is through Web sites that rank the least popular or ugliest student in school. Pictures and videos are also appearing on the Internet that are embarrassing or made to look like the victim is doing something illegal. "Things like these cause disruption in the school day," said Walter Roberts, professor of counselor education at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

[Rep. Marsha Swails](#) (DFL-Woodbury) supports the bill, but worries that this could micromanage student behavior.

She struggles with trying to legislate something that is oftentimes an off-school event or activity. "We need to raise the consciousness and awareness of our parents

and students that this is going on," she said.

Student athletes are disciplined for behavior outside of the school day, such as for drinking or drug use. "The kid doesn't have to be caught with a beer in their locker if they're found with a beer at a party," said [Rep. Jim Davnie](#) (DFL-Mpls). "That's an example of behavior outside of school that has consequences inside of school."

— S. HARDING

### Flexible learning calendar

Minnesota students get nearly 13 weeks of summer vacation, but a proposed bill could slice that almost in half.

Sponsored by [Rep. Sandra Peterson](#) (DFL-New Hope), [HF443](#) would give \$3 million to the Department of Education to provide \$50,000 grants to school districts and charter schools that voluntarily operate a flexible learning calendar. The estimated cost of changing the calendar would be \$200 per student due to transportation and keeping schools cool during the summer time.

It was heard March 16 by the House K-12 Finance Division, no action was taken.

Supporters say that fewer weeks off would help student retention, and students falling behind could receive an extra week of help.

Charlie Kyte, executive director of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, said that when Longfellow Elementary School in Rochester adopted

the calendar 10 years ago, a dramatic drop in discipline issues followed. In the first nine weeks of school, students tend not to misbehave, however, after that is when problems arise, he said.

Under the flexible scheduling plan, students would attend classes for nine weeks and then get three weeks of vacation. The number of days students attend school would stay the same. The school year would start in late-July and end the first week of June. Students would go to school for 45 days and then be off for 15 days.

A companion bill, [SF663](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes](#) (DFL-Winona), awaits action by the Senate E-12 Education Budget Division.

— S. HARDING

### Head Start help

Head Start helps families in need; now it could be receiving a helping hand from the state.

Sponsored by [Rep. Jim Davnie](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF894](#) would, in fiscal years 2008 and 2009, match the \$19.1 million the state already contributes to Head Start.

The House Early Childhood Learning Finance Division laid the bill over March 15 for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill.

The family-oriented program helps approximately 14,300 at-risk children with school readiness and social skills. The federal government contributed \$83 million

## CELTIC CELEBRATION



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

In celebration of St. Patrick's Day, members of the Rosemount band "Legacy" perform an Irish jig in the House Chamber March 15.



to the Minnesota Head Start program in 2006, according to the Minnesota Head Start Association Web site.

In addition to serving more children, the additional money would allow Head Start to expand hours, days of service and address the needs of special populations through different teaching models.

To be eligible for Head Start, a family of four must meet the federal guideline of having an income of no more than \$20,000 a year. Ninety percent of program enrollment is reserved for families below the poverty line, and 10 percent is reserved for children with disabilities.

A companion bill, [SF734](#), sponsored by [Sen. David Tomassoni](#) (DFL-Chisholm), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— S. HARDING

### Funding for youth programming

Men Against Destruction Defending Against Drugs and Social-Disorders, like many community organizations providing youth programming, lost its state funding in the 2003 budget cuts.

Sponsored by [Rep. A. "Willie" Dominguez](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF580](#) would provide \$5.51 million to the Education Department for competitive grants to public and nonprofit groups providing youth enrichment programming after school and during non-school hours.

The House Early Childhood Learning Finance Division laid the bill over March 15 for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill.

Testifying on behalf of the bill was V.J. Smith, executive director of MAD DADS. "You can't sit a gang member down and just give them a job. They're like animals. You have to empower them," he said. "You have to teach them how to act. You have to teach them how to speak. You have to teach them how to be a productive citizen."

MAD DADS was founded in Omaha, Neb., in 1989 by 18 black fathers, and has grown to 60 chapters in 16 states. Minnesota MAD DADS was founded in 1998 in Minneapolis, and seeks \$500,000 for costs and youth programming. Along with empowering youth and street patrols, they host block parties, rallies, night parades and provide chaperones at community events.

A companion bill, [SF602](#), sponsored by [Sen. Linda Scheid](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Park), awaits action by the Senate Education Committee.

— S. HARDING

### Open enrollment rule changes

The [Minnesota State High School League](#) Representative Assembly adopted a rule March 16 that open-enrolled students would be ineligible for varsity athletic competition

for one year without a corresponding change of address.

Sponsored by [Rep. Debra Hilstrom](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Center), [HF989](#) would overrule that change.

The House Disparities in Student Support and Service Subcommittee approved the bill March 19. The House K-12 Finance Division held the bill over two days later for possible omnibus bill inclusion. The bill will now go to the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee.

Hilstrom said concerns have been raised about coaches recruiting for "high-powered teams," but the league can't prove it. Because the league hasn't been able to punish coaches for the past five years, she said they are, instead, punishing students that open enroll.

Of the nearly 300,000 high school students in the state, more than 14,000 used open enrollment for the 2005-06 school year. Of those, 765 applied to participate in league-sponsored activities and would have been affected by the rule change, said Deputy Education Commissioner Chas Anderson.

League President Dave Stead said open enrollment is the not the issue. "The problem is students that move from one place to another, and displace students that have grown up in the community and are looking forward to representing their school."

Not all students that transfer to a new school would have to sit out for a year.

In addition to students whose family moves to a new district, students that transfer in the ninth grade would be immediately eligible, as would a child ordered to move by a court, Stead said.

According to Stead, there is a provision in the bylaws that if a student open enrolls for better academics, yet wants to continue to participate in varsity athletics, he or she can "retain full eligibility for varsity competition for one (1) calendar year at the school where the student was enrolled prior to the transfer after which time the student shall become fully eligible at the school to which the student has open enrolled."

A companion bill, [SF1106](#), sponsored by [Sen. Linda Scheid](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Park), was tabled March 7 by the Senate Education Committee.

— S. HARDING

### Quantum Opportunities Program

Some Minneapolis North Community High School students are at risk of failing a grade or dropping out of school.

Summit Academy Quantum Opportunities Program is providing a helping hand to these students.

Sponsored by [Rep. Carlos Mariani](#) (DFL-St.

Paul), [HF2085](#) would appropriate \$750,000 in each year of the upcoming biennium for the program. The House E-12 Education Committee approved the bill March 16. It will now go to the House K-12 Finance Division.

The program's goals are to help ninth- and 10th-graders improve academic achievement, pass the basic skills tests and put them on track to graduate.

There are 114 participants in the program. With extra funding, the program hopes to add 11 more students.

"When I first started the program I had a 1.2 GPA, and that was excessively low, in my opinion," said North High sophomore Denzell Allen. Now Allen has a 3.24 GPA and plans to attend Michigan State University to study biology. "It is not an hour to talk with your friends. I did some of that instead of my Algebra homework last year, and the instructors told me to leave," he said.

For upperclassmen, the program provides additional academic and social development experiences, assistance with post-secondary goals and information about possible scholarships.

A companion bill, [SF1746](#), sponsored by [Sen. Linda Higgins](#) (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— S. HARDING

### Recovering student transfers

Students who are in recovery-focused high schools will be allowed to participate in Minnesota State High School League-sponsored activities in their resident school district thanks to a new law sponsored by [Rep. Mary Liz Holberg](#) (R-Lakeville), and [Sen. Terri Bonoff](#) (DFL-Minnetonka).

The law, signed March 21 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, allows students who have successfully completed a licensed treatment program to immediately participate in league activities in their home district even though they may be attending a recovery-focused school in another district.

Local school districts will still enforce penalties on those students for violating a league or district rule.

This law keeps students active in their sport, and they can go to a special school to help with their problem, [Rep. Larry Howes](#) (R-Walker) said.

[HF1425/SF1499](#)\*/CH7

— S. HARDING

If you have Internet access, visit the Legislature's Web page at: [www.leg.mn](http://www.leg.mn)

## EMPLOYMENT

### Conservation Corps cash

A plan to help youth who are deaf and hard of hearing was heard loud and clear by a House division.

The Minnesota Conservation Corps Summer Youth Program brings together youth ages 15-18 from across the state to learn about each other while performing natural resources and conservation projects, such as habitat improvement, planting activities and trail construction.

The corps is seeking \$38,000 for the upcoming biennium to hire deaf interpreters to assist with the program.

Sponsored by [Rep. Tim Mahoney](#) (DFL-St. Paul), [HF2053](#) was held over March 20 by the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division for possible omnibus bill inclusion. A companion bill, [SF1803](#), sponsored by [Senate President James Metzen](#) (DFL-South St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

Executive Director Len Price said the program typically gets six to eight deaf students each year, but would like to accept more. "For some, it's the first time they've ever had a job and gotten a paycheck. By having them be part of our crews, we need to have a signer or interpreter available. The proposal would cover the cost of the interpreter, and the small stipend we give our students."

For many of the participants, it is their first time being with a deaf student.

The request comes from an organization that once received state funding. In 2003, the Minnesota Conservation Corps became a nonprofit after being part of the Department of Natural Resources since 1991. "During the years it was part of the department, there were dollars appropriated to provide this assistance to hire interpreters and to help deaf students become part of the program," Price said.

"This is a fantastic program. It's a shame it got cut from being a state program," said [Rep. Tom Rukavina](#) (DFL-Virginia), the division chairman. "It's a program that has really helped young people develop and expand their horizons."

— M. Cook

### Making more money

On the eve of St. Patrick's Day, a House division gave approval to a bill that could put more green in people's pockets.

[Rep. Tom Rukavina](#) (DFL-Virginia) is sponsoring [HF456](#), which would increase the state's minimum wage for large employers to \$6.75 on Aug. 1 this year and \$7.75 one year later. For smaller employers, the rates would

be \$5.75 and \$6.75. The current rate is \$6.15 per hour for large employers, and \$5.25 per hour for small ones.

By statute, a large employer is "an enterprise whose annual gross volume of sales made or business done is not less than \$625,000."

Future increases would be indexed to the Consumer Price Index, as is currently done in eight other states.

Approved by the House Labor and Consumer Protection Division March 16, and the House Commerce and Labor Committee March 20, the bill is headed to the House floor. A companion bill, [SF875](#), sponsored by [Sen. Ellen Anderson](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Business, Industry and Jobs Committee.

"We believe that a person who works full time, year-round should not be poor," said Brian Rusche, executive director of the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition.

However, opponents said the bill could hurt small businesses, especially in Greater Minnesota.

Peggy Rasmussen, owner of Countryside Café in Hamel, said many smaller restaurants operate on slim profit margins, meaning prices would increase or jobs decrease.

She said many area seniors stop by her business for ice cream or pie and a beverage. "There's a limit to how much people are going to pay for a cup of coffee."

Others said the federal government is expected to increase the minimum wage to \$7.25 this year, and the state should not get ahead of that amount.

The bill would also eliminate the training wage that allows employers to pay \$4.90 per hour to employees under age 20 for their first 90 consecutive days of employment.

It's important to have the rate because many youngsters have to learn so many things, such as customer service, said Buzz Anderson, president of the Minnesota Retailers Association.

— M. Cook

### Sick leave standards

According to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, 59 percent of Minnesotans have paid sick leave at their place of employment.

Sponsored by [Rep. John Lesch](#) (DFL-St. Paul), [HF1334](#) would require all employers to provide at least one hour of sick leave for every 40 hours worked by an employee. A business that employs less than 10 people would have to provide one hour for every 80 hours worked.

The House Labor and Consumer Protection Division approved the bill March 16 and sent it to the House Commerce and Labor Committee.

"Both large and small businesses say

that one of the greatest costs to them in the workplace is when employees show up sick and get other people sick and they lose productivity," Lesch said. "A modest plan ensuring a minimum paid sick days standard in Minnesota would save \$9.22 per worker per week. These savings would come from reduced turnover, lower productivity losses for sick workers on the job, avoiding relative short-term nursing home stays and a healthier work force."

A bus driver for First Student, Lyndie Ellenbaum does not get sick leave, nor does he have health insurance. He said an ailing employee can create a safety issue for the hundreds of youth he transports daily. "There are enough bad drivers out there, and I need to concentrate on avoiding them all day long and paying attention to the kids," he said.

Mike Hickey, state director for the National Federation of Independent Business, said the marketplace should be allowed flexibility, fearing the bill could affect small employers "in a tough way."

A companion bill, [SF1324](#), sponsored by [Sen. Ellen Anderson](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Business, Industry and Jobs Committee.

— M. Cook

## ENVIRONMENT

### No more 4x4 truck trails

[Rep. Frank Moe](#) (DFL-Bemidji) says the [Department of Natural Resources](#) is planning a 4x4 truck trail near Bemidji, and he intends to stop it — and all other new 4x4 trails as well.

Moe sponsors [HF1127](#), which would prohibit the development of 4x4 truck trails on any state-administered land without legislative approval. The House Environment and Natural Resources Committee approved the bill March 19. Now it goes to the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division.

Moe said the operation of 4x4 trucks causes soil erosion and other environmental damage. Noting that Minnesota already has certain areas specifically designed for these trucks, he argued that the state needs to "draw a line somewhere."

"We have a vested interest in preserving and protecting our public land, and I would argue that this is not what we want," he said.

Gene Larimore, a member of the Jack Pine Coalition, said 4x4 truck trails are "not compatible with the management of a sustainable forest."

Speaking in opposition to the bill, Garth Bergman, secretary of the Minnesota 4-Wheel Drive Association, said the bill would do

nothing to stop these trucks from illegally driving on state trails. Instead, he argued it would discourage lawful operation of the vehicles.

[Rep. Dennis Ozment](#) (R-Rosemount) noted that previous trails were established using fees that 4x4 drivers are still paying in the hopes that more trails will be established.

"If I was on their end of the stick, I'd be pretty upset," Ozment said.

A companion bill, [SF1094](#), sponsored by [Sen. Mary Olson](#) (DFL-Bemidji), awaits action by the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

— N. BUSSE

### Combating invasive species

A bill sponsored by [Rep. Bev Scalze](#) (DFL-Little Canada) would increase the surcharge added to watercraft license fees to help combat aquatic invasive species.

[HF2216](#) would create a variable surcharge depending on the type and size of watercraft. The House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division held an informational hearing March 20 on the bill, which currently awaits action by the House Game, Fish and Forestry Division.

Currently, watercraft license fees include a flat \$5 surcharge. Scalze's bill would increase it to \$25 for most boats, while the

surcharge for canoes and certain other types of watercraft would remain unchanged. Gov. Tim Pawlenty's [budget recommendations](#) propose a \$10 to \$15 surcharge, depending on the size of the boat.

Money raised by the surcharges would be used for prevention, control and treatment of aquatic invasive species such as Eurasian water milfoil, zebra mussels and spiny water flea.

Dick Osgood, secretary of Minnesota Waters, said that aquatic invasive species harm the state's lakes and rivers, and that state funding to deal with the problem has been inadequate.

"This increase is large — it certainly is. But we think it's small compared to the need," Osgood said.

Eric Lindberg, a volunteer for Minnesota Waters, said lake associations currently bear the brunt of the cost associated with dealing with invasive species, which also have a negative impact on property values.

Division chairwoman [Rep. Jean Wagenius](#) (DFL-Mpls) expressed concern that it was unfair to raise the surcharge on all watercraft operators when only a few "scofflaws" were actually spreading the invasive species. Osgood replied that the alternatives are also unfair, and the current strategies aren't working.

A companion bill, [SF1994](#), sponsored by [Sen. Satveer Chaudhary](#) (DFL-Fridley), awaits

action by the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

— N. BUSSE

### Mercury restrictions

When the Mercury Emissions Reduction Act of 2006 became law last year, it helped address Minnesota's mercury pollution problem. This year, [Rep. Melissa Hortman](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Park) aims for more changes in the law.

Hortman sponsors [HF1316](#), which would regulate or restrict the sale, use and disposal of certain products containing mercury. Approved March 15 by the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee, it now awaits action by the full House.

The bill would place a number of restrictions on products and devices containing mercury, including:

- banning the sale of certain medical devices, mercury switches and miscellaneous products containing mercury;
- requiring disposal of fluorescent lamps and light bulbs in a lamp recycling facility;
- banning the purchase, storage or use of elemental mercury and mercury-containing instruments in schools; and
- requiring products containing mercury to be clearly labeled as such.

Hortman said that fluorescent lamps and light bulbs alone are estimated to contribute as much as 173 pounds per year of environmental mercury pollution in the state.

Brad Buscher, chairman and CEO of Mercury Waste Solutions Inc., said not enough fluorescent lamps are disposed of properly through recycling.

"This bill will go a long way toward establishing the mechanisms which will allow for some accountability, which we currently don't have," Buscher said.

Buzz Anderson, president of the Minnesota Retailers Association, said he is concerned that the labeling requirements for fluorescent light bulbs could discourage people from buying them, which could be detrimental to energy conservation efforts in the state. (Fluorescent bulbs are generally more energy-efficient.)

"I want to make sure that what we do doesn't have the opposite effect of what we're trying to do, and that is to get people to buy these bulbs," Anderson said.

A companion, [SF1085](#), sponsored by [Sen. John Marty](#) (DFL-Roseville), was referred to the Senate Business, Industry and Jobs Committee March 22.

— N. BUSSE

### Protecting wild rice

The cultivation and harvesting of wild rice has played an indispensable role in American

## EXTRA JOLT



PHOTO BY TOM OLSCHIED

Dave Dombrowski, left, an electrician from Sartell, and other members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers filled the room for a March 20 meeting the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division. Speakers told the committee about the abundance of electrician training programs in Minnesota, and how it is leading to unemployment for many of them. They also urged members to support a bill that would provide extra benefits to electricians.



Indian history in Minnesota, and a bill sponsored by [Rep. Frank Moe](#) (DFL-Bemidji) aims to keep it that way.

Moe sponsors [HF1663](#), which would protect the state's native wild rice strains from genetic modification. The House Environment and Natural Resources Committee approved the bill March 15. It now goes to the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee. There is no Senate companion.

The bill would direct the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board to require an environmental impact statement before issuing a permit for any proposed release of genetically engineered wild rice. The board may also place conditions on the permit, as well as deny, modify, suspend or revoke it.

George Goggleye Jr., chairman of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Council, said wild rice is an essential part of his tribe's history — even part of their creation story.

"This is something that's very meaningful to us. To allow it to be genetically altered would be totally wrong. It would be disrespectful to the first people that inhabited this land," Goggleye said.

Tom Kelliher, representing the Biotechnology Industry Organization, said BIO has concerns that the bill would set a precedent that certain groups could prevent research into genetic engineering whenever they have a particular objection to it.

[Rep. Dave Olin](#) (DFL-Thief River Falls) refuted that notion. "This is a specific instance of a specific group of people that have a legitimate reason for wanting it to remain as it is. I don't think it sets any precedent whatsoever."

Moe amended the bill to include a study, to be prepared by the Department of Natural Resources, identifying threats to wild rice.

— N. BUSSE

## FAMILY

### Visitation rights for domestic partners

It will be up to the full House to decide if heterosexual or homosexual domestic partners can receive hospital visitation rights for their partners.

[Rep. Erin Murphy](#) (DFL-St. Paul) sponsor of [HF1589](#), said this would remove an ambiguity for hospital staff, who aren't currently required to permit domestic partners access to their loved ones during a health care crisis.

The bill was approved March 19 by the House Health and Human Services Committee.

"People in many communities are turned away because they are not blood related or married," said Ann DeGroot, executive director of OutFront Minnesota. "It's decided

## UP, UP AND AWAY



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

**Former Rep. Kris Hasskamp displays a model of a proposed sculpture depicting the high-altitude balloon "Man High II" to members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee March 20 during testimony on a bill that would establish the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area Citizens Advisory Council.**

hospital by hospital."

Several Republican committee members unsuccessfully offered amendments to stretch terminology used in the bill to include anyone — caregivers, friends and roommates who are emotionally attached and living with the patient.

"This shouldn't be limited to one set of people," said [Rep. Steve Gottwalt](#) (R-St. Cloud). "I think we need to define this more broadly for all people that face this situation."

[Rep. Tom Emmer](#) (R-Delano) unsuccessfully sought a change from "domestic partners" to "significant individuals," saying the new language would encompass more relationships. His amendment would have required those under the bill to prove they lived full time with the patient.

Murphy and other Democrats said the change might confuse the issue.

"I think we need to use language that is understood by others," said [Rep. Diane Loeffler](#) (DFL-Mpls), arguing that "domestic partners" is a generally recognized term.

Those who oppose the legislation's original form criticized the resistance.

"The one way to make this issue less divisive was rejected," [Rep. Laura Brod](#) (R-New Prague) said. "It seems to me that the bread-and-butter issues for the majority of Minnesotans are not reflected in this bill."

The bill's companion, [SF1398](#), sponsored by [Sen. John Marty](#) (DFL-Roseville), was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee March 21.

— M. SIMPSON

## GOVERNMENT

### Criminals need not apply

Those who have been convicted or had a civil judgment rendered against them for certain offenses would be ineligible to bid for state contracts, under a bill approved March 20 by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee. It now goes to the House Finance Committee.

Sponsored by [Rep. Tom Emmer](#) (R-Delano), [HF729](#) would prohibit commissioners and government agencies from entering into contracts with those convicted within the past five years of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements or receiving stolen property.

Any company or entity, including officers, directors, or beneficial owners to have paid a federal or state agency a settlement claim in excess of \$1 million for allegations from improper billing, collusion, failure to disclose requisite information or bid rigging would also be prohibited.

The Department of Human Services would be required to know which companies have engaged in questionable practices, and many times they wouldn't know their status in other states, said Kent Allin, materials management division director for the Department of Administration.

[Rep. Will Morgan](#) (DFL-Burnsville) said the bill will "force state government to be doing something they ought to have been doing

in the first place” by not contracting with companies of questionable backgrounds.

A companion bill, [SF1687](#), sponsored by Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville), awaits action in the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

### Compensating for the shutdown

Current state employees who used vacation time during the July 2005 partial government shutdown would be compensated in full under a bill, approved March 21 by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee.

Sponsored by [Rep. Leon Lillie](#) (DFL-North St. Paul), [HF333](#) would fully compensate current employees for any vacation time used during the shutdown period. Only current employees, and not those who have retired or left their positions, would be eligible, Lillie said. “There’s going to be some casualties,” but people still working should be treated fairly, he said.

There were no employees testifying in support of the bill because of a contract agreement following the shutdown that compensated employees for half of the time they used. Part of that agreement was that employees couldn’t come forward for more compensation, Lillie said.

The Department of Employee Relations opposes the bill because the contract was voluntarily signed by all the unions that represent state employees, said Paul Larson, deputy commissioner for labor relations and compensation for the department. It states that a complete and total understanding was reached, and no effort should be made to diminish or enhance terms of the agreement before any quasi-judicial, legislative or quasi-legislative body, he said. “If you look at the first two weeks of July, that’s prime vacation time they were going to be off anyway.”

“We’re often told as legislators not to meddle in the negotiations process,” and if we pass this, we make the assumption the unions did not represent their people, said [Rep. Laura Brod](#) (R-New Prague).

“It was us, here in this body and the leaders of the state, that really caused the situation,” Lillie said, adding that the 8,300 state workers deserve to be treated fairly, and the shutdown wasn’t their fault.

The bill now goes to the House Finance Committee.

A companion bill, [SF329](#), sponsored by [Sen. D. Scott Dibble](#) (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

### Hire from layoff list first

State agencies would be required to exhaust their senior employee layoff lists before they could contract for professional services, under a bill approved March 20 by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee.

Under the bill ([HF548](#)), sponsored by [Rep. Steve Simon](#) (DFL-St. Louis Park), agencies could not contract out jobs eliminated in the previous four years, without first considering former employees on seniority unit layoff lists. Nor could they contract for services in excess of \$5,000 without first considering laid off employees on the list.

The concern came from information technology agency employees, said Richard Kolodziejski, legislative affairs director for the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees. He cited the governor’s [Web site](#), which says the state will encourage competition through pricing and outsourcing while increasing the use of technology in government services. Employees are concerned about the governor’s upcoming trade visit to India, and if that could lead to outsourcing of state jobs, he said.

An unsuccessful amendment offered by [Rep. Laura Brod](#) (R-New Prague) would have required the agency to make contract decisions based on best value.

In opposition, [Rep. Phyllis Kahn](#) (DFL-Mpls) asked how best value can be placed on people. “I mean how would you decide the best value between me and Rep. Brod?”

As the committee erupted in laughter, Rep. Brod responded, “Mr. Chair, I can answer that question if you wish.”

The bill now goes to the House floor.

A companion bill, [SF471](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action in the Senate Finance Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

## HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

### Toxic herbicide

Atrazine is a herbicide commonly used by farmers to prevent weed growth. Almost 80 million pounds of the compound are sprayed on fields across the United States annually, some believe to the demise of generations to come.

“My professional opinion is that you should get rid of it,” said Tyrone Hayes, a professor in the Department of Integrative Biology of the University of California, Berkeley, who has studied the effects of atrazine on frogs and other beings.

He was speaking on behalf of [HF1986](#), sponsored by [Rep. Ken Tschumper](#) (DFL-La Cresent), which would direct the [Department](#)

[of Health](#) to establish and enforce public drinking water standards for atrazine levels at least as low nationwide levels, or 3 parts per billion.

The House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division laid it over March 21 for possible omnibus bill inclusion. The companion, [SF2056](#), is sponsored by Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville) and has been referred to the Senate Health, Housing and Family Security Committee.

Hayes found that frogs, both in laboratory and field testing, that were exposed to atrazine suffered hormonal imbalances in utero, changing them to hermaphrodites; immunosuppression, making them more susceptible to disease; retarded development, both cognitively and physically; and inhibited metamorphosis from tadpole to frog.

This is significant, he said, because processes and chemicals across species are pretty much identical: they all possess the testosterone and estrogen that drive reproduction, for example, and are similarly affected by the thyroid and steroids.

“(Frog) hormones are the same chemically as human beings,” he said.

He cited additional studies, some by atrazine’s manufacturer, Syngenta, which show increased prostate and breast cancer rates in people most vulnerable to the compound, either due to geography or workplace.

“It’s not about you or me — we’ve already been exposed,” he said. “It’s not about our children or our grandchildren — (they’ve) already been exposed. It’s about our future ... and what they’ll say about us.”

Timothy Pastoor, head of human safety for Syngenta, said Hayes misrepresents studies about atrazine, specifically those about heightened cancer rates in humans, and said the herbicide has undergone 12 years of intense evaluation by the [Environmental Pollution Agency](#). He contends it remains very useful for its users.

“It works, it’s cheap and it helps farmers,” he said. “It can also prevent 90 percent of erosion that may occur (in fields).”

— M. SIMPSON

### Care for sexual assault victims

It took several tries for parties concerned with [HF1442](#) — dubbed the Compassionate Care for Sexual Assault Victims Act — to find a compromise over a provision requiring distribution of the emergency contraceptive known as Plan B to victims of sexual assault.

Sponsored by [Rep. Nora Slawik](#) (DFL-Maplewood), the bill proposes a standard of care for sexual assault victims in hospitals statewide. It necessitates providing “unbiased”

information about emergency contraceptives and prophylactic antibiotics — which help prevent infection of sexually transmitted diseases — and mandates that such drugs be provided should they be safe for, and requested by, the patient.

The House Health and Human Services Committee approved the bill March 20. It now awaits action by the full House.

Proponents argued that providing safeguards at hospitals would prevent additional hardship to women who might otherwise struggle to locate Plan B before the drug's 72-hour window of efficacy closes.

"There's no crime where people must provide for their own medical care," said Beth Olson, program coordinator for the Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault.

Members labored over language to assuage Catholic hospitals and pro-life advocates, who worry that emergency contraceptives might terminate a pregnancy. They ultimately agreed upon an amendment that exempts providers from supplying Plan B should a woman be found pregnant.

A Senate companion bill, [SF1266](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Health, Housing and Family Security Committee.

— M. SIMPSON

### Executive director needed

After three deaths and several complaints about care at the 400-bed Minneapolis Veterans Home, Gov. Tim Pawlenty, in February, called for a consultant to manage day-to-day operations at the facility.

This is one of five veterans homes in the state, and the [Minnesota Veterans Homes Board](#), which oversees the operations, has been unable to fill the executive director position since it became vacant last August.

There are high praises from the board for Hastings Veterans Home Administrator Chip Cox, who is acting as interim executive director of the board. But he is unable to apply for the position because he is not a veteran. And that qualification could be a reason why the pool of acceptable applicants is so limited, said Mike Pugliese, deputy commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

[Rep. Larry Haws](#) (DFL-St. Cloud) sponsors [HF1891](#), which would eliminate the veteran qualification.

But opposition by one group during the House Veterans Affairs Division meeting March 16 prompted Haws to promise to find a solution before the bill moved to the next committee.

"It is hard for me to believe that you can't find a qualified person in the medical field who is a veteran," said Al Loehr, legislative

director for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

All veterans' organizations in the state, except for the VFW, have leant support to the qualification change, according to Pugliese.

"Yes, these are veterans homes, but these are long-term care facilities," Pugliese said. The veteran qualification does not necessarily equate to better care. The goal is to find the best candidate, he said.

Haws said that unless a compromise could be reached on the requirement, "the bill would be dead."

The House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Committee approved the amended bill March 21 and sent it to the House Finance Committee.

The Senate companion, [SF2059](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes](#) (DFL-Winona), was referred to the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Committee.

As amended, the bill provides that veteran status for the executive director position would be preferred, but not required.

Qualifications for board members are also addressed. The board chair would need to be a veteran, which is not currently a requirement. It also strengthens language stating that at least five of the nine members be health care professionals.

— L. SCHUTZ

### Medicinal marijuana

Minnesota could become the 12th state to legalize the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes — but it won't be easy.

At a meeting of the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 19, [Rep. Thomas Huntley](#) (DFL-Duluth) presented [HF655](#), which would provide regulations for marijuana use and production.

Calling it a compassionate way to support those who are suffering, [Rep. Steve Sviggum](#) (R-Kenyon) said the bill would provide a way for doctors to help their patients alleviate pain.

Support was also provided by witnesses suffering with liver disease, Tourette's syndrome and cerebral palsy, all calling for the legalization of a drug that has helped them when other medications could not.

Opposition came from representatives of law enforcement, county attorneys and the Minnesota Family Council. Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom said the bill "is not in the interest of Minnesota's citizens." The bill is trying to do work that should be done by the Federal Drug Administration, and it would give the perception that "pot is harmless," he said.

When an amendment was proposed to provide stricter regulations and criminal penalties, law enforcement officials said that even with the changes, the bill was a "dud." It

gives the message to our youth that pot is cool, said William Gillespie, executive director of the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association.

Neal Levine, director of Minnesotans for Compassionate Care, stressed that many studies have been done to support marijuana as a legitimate drug for pain management, and the bill would provide the necessary oversight for production and distribution.

Approved by the committee on a roll call vote, 11-8, the bill's next stop is the House Finance Committee.

The companion, [SF345](#), sponsored by [Sen. Steve Murphy](#) (DFL-Red Wing), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— C. GREEN

### Mental health services coverage

Medical Assistance could cover more mental health care expenses, under a bill sponsored by [Rep. Mary Ellen Otremba](#) (DFL-Long Prairie).

If passed, [HF794](#) would force the system to reimburse psychologists for consultations with physicians, and increase overall reimbursement rates for mental health professionals by 23.7 percent.

The House Mental Health Division approved the bill March 16 and sent it to the House Health and Human Services Committee.

Steve Vincent, director of Behavioral Health Services at St. Cloud Hospital, said the legislation would accomplish two goals important to practitioners: "to improve access to mental health services and to integrate mental health care into the rest of health care."

He and Willie Garrett, chief professional officer for the Minnesota Psychological Association, characterized the issue as one of quality care, arguing that effective patient treatment includes attention to both body and mind.

"All medical problems have a mental health component to them," Garrett said.

Otremba said the consultations and care described in the bill already take place, many on a pro bono basis. This, she said, makes it especially difficult for rural areas to recruit mental health professionals, because of how little their income would be compared to colleagues working in metropolitan areas.

Members were surprised that similar policies weren't currently in place.

"It seems like we should have had this in place two decades ago," [Rep. Bruce Anderson](#) (R-Buffalo Township) said.

"Exactly," Otremba said. "We tried before, and we're hoping this year, we'll be successful."

Sponsored by [Senate President James Metzen](#) (DFL-South St. Paul), [SF855](#), the



companion bill, awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— M. SIMPSON

## HOUSING

### Battling foreclosures

Since the burst of the housing bubble, foreclosure rates have surged across Minnesota.

From 2005 to 2006, rates climbed by 167 percent statewide, and housing advocates say they expect continued increases in coming years at two or three times today's levels.

"If we don't act quickly to provide the counseling and foreclosure assistance (these people) need, we will lose millions in public and private investments in our communities," [Rep. Jim Davnie](#) (DFL-Mpls) told members of the House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division March 19. The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in the division's omnibus bill.

He sponsors [HF1744](#), which would provide \$2 million more in fiscal years 2008-09 to the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency for HECAT, the homeownership education, counseling and training program. The program offers money to nonprofit organizations and groups that, in turn, provide short-term, no-interest loans, counseling and other services to families at risk of foreclosure.

Darryl Dahlheimer, program manager for Lutheran Social Service Financial Counseling, said the boost would go a long way in protecting families from two of the most dire consequences of foreclosure: bankruptcy and homelessness.

"It's a myth that we can help everyone facing foreclosure, but it's not a myth that we can prevent them from going homeless," he said. "There are options for people that they don't know about."

For instance, he said, those who've fallen victim to predatory lending can sell their home and collect any equity, instead of leaving it to lenders, with the help of guidance counseling. Dahlheimer said HECAT funding in 2006 allowed his agency to assist nearly 1,500 families with administrative services or loans.

A companion bill, [SF1588](#), sponsored by [Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul), has been referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

— M. SIMPSON

## HUMANITIES

### Money for history

Historical societies across the state could get grant help with preserving their pasts.

Sponsored by [Rep. Dean Urdahl](#) (R-Grove City), [HF1862](#) would appropriate money from the General Fund to the Minnesota Historical Society in fiscal year 2008 for a grant-in-aid program for county and local historical societies. The bill was held over for possible omnibus bill inclusion March 19 by the House Minnesota Heritage Finance Division. There is no Senate companion.

Each dollar of state funds would have to be matched dollar-for-dollar with non-state funds by the grant recipients. The money would be one-time and available until June 30, 2009.

Urdahl said local and county historical societies are often strapped for funding and this grant program could go a long way.

[Rep. Bob Gunther](#) (R-Fairmont) said the funding probably isn't enough, but it's a good start. The bill had no fiscal note.

— S. HEGMAN

## INSURANCE

### Domestic partner benefits

Bread and butter were circulated by several Republican members of the House Health and Human Services Committee March 21 as a message about [HF1618](#), which would grant health insurance to domestic partners of eligible state employees.

The reason was symbolic, as a return to the "bread-and-butter issues" most important to Minnesotans.

"As Republicans, we were criticized for straying from the bread-and-butter issues of Minnesota," said [Rep. Laura Brod](#) (R-New Prague) said. "But here we are, hearing this bill."

Sponsored by [Rep. Phyllis Kahn](#) (DFL-Mpls), the bill would entitle same-sex domestic partners to the same benefits available to spouses of state employees. It would force a return to a policy implemented through the collective bargaining process in 2002 that was later nullified by Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

"That was one of the most demoralizing days of my work life, not to mention a big inconvenience for us," said Lori Lippert, a state employee for almost 12 years. "It made me feel like my work was less important than the person sitting next to me."

The bill was approved and sent to the House Finance Committee.

C. Scott Cooper, representing OutFront Minnesota, said the policy was important for three reasons: "It's fair, it's good business and it's easy to do."

Analysts expect \$1.8 million in additional costs to the state should the bill pass. The

figure would increase due to a successful oral amendment offered by [Rep. Kim Norton](#) (DFL-Rochester) that opened the legislation to all domestic partners, regardless of sex.

[Sen. Sandy Pappas](#) (DFL-St. Paul) sponsored the companion, [SF1369](#), which has been laid over for possible inclusion in the Senate Government Budget Division's omnibus bill.

— M. SIMPSON

## LAW

### Harsher no contact penalties

Under the Domestic Abuse Act, there are two orders a court can provide for a victim's protection.

A court may provide an order for protection, which requires the petitioner to apply for the order at a hearing before a judge. Once the order is granted, the respondent — the person the order is against — may not physically harm or contact the petitioner, or visit the petitioner's residence or place of employment.

If there are three violations within a 10-year period, the respondent is guilty of a felony with a possible five-year prison sentence.

A court may also provide a no contact order, which can be issued once charges have been filed against an abuser. This order does not require a request from the victim, and does not carry the same penalties as the order for protection.

[HF506](#) proposes to close the gap in the law.

Under the bill, a second violation of a no contact order would be a gross misdemeanor; the third would be a felony with the same sanctions as an order for protection, which would include a minimum of 30 days' incarceration and counseling.

Assistant Attorney General David Voigt said that the most volatile period in domestic abuse situations is directly after an abuser is charged and released. That's when the no contact orders can provide protection, and that's why this provision must be fixed, Voigt said.

Sponsored by [Rep. Dave Olin](#) (DFL-Thief River Falls), the bill was approved by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 20 and has been sent to the House Finance Committee.

A companion bill, [SF890](#), sponsored by [Sen. Mary Olson](#) (DFL-Bemidji), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— C. GREEN

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Duluth retiree benefits

A bill attempting to curb the impending \$300 million health care liability for retired Duluth city employees is in the hands of a conference committee.

Sponsored by [Rep. Thomas Huntley](#) (DFL-Duluth) and [Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon](#) (DFL-Duluth), [HF163/SF60\\*](#) would allow the Public Employees Retirement Association to establish an irrevocable fund for the city to help pay for post-employment benefits promised to retirees. The [State Board of Investment](#) would invest money for the fund with earnings credited to the city.

Huntley amended the bill by inserting the House language into the Senate file, which was then passed 127-5 by the House March 16. The Senate did not concur with the change, and a conference committee was appointed to work out the differences.

Under the bill, the board could also invest money from the city's community investment fund to help with debt service payments for the city's street improvement program.

In 1983, the state auditor told Duluth city officials to be more thorough in their accounting practices after learning employees were retiring with large amounts of sick leave time. Negotiations with unions resulted in free health care for retirees in exchange for giving up the sick leave.

"Unfortunately the city never set aside any money to pay for that," Huntley said. The change would reduce the liability to about \$150 million.

"I believe there could be a much more cost effective way to address the matter," said [Rep. Mark Olson](#) (R-Big Lake).

The bill comes on the heels of a Jan. 22 report issued by the Office of the Legislative Auditor that expressed serious concerns with post-employment benefits by local jurisdictions that are not adequately funded.

— P. OSTBERG

### New name for county association

Signed  
by  
the  
governor

To better represent the nature of its organization, the Metropolitan Intercounty Association has changed its name to the Minnesota Intercounty Association, under a new law signed March 19 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

Keith Carlson, executive director of the association, said that it would also reflect the fact that eight of the 13 members of the association are from Greater Minnesota.

Sponsored by [Rep. Bev Scalze](#) (DFL-

Little Canada) and [Sen. Ann Lynch](#) (DFL-Rochester), the law was effective upon enactment.

[HF935/SF736\\*](#)/CH6

— C. GREEN

## MILITARY

### An invitation to WWII vets

Dedication of the new [World War II Veterans Memorial](#) on the State Capitol grounds is scheduled for June 9, and [Rep. Tim Faust](#) (DFL-Mora) would like every veteran from that era to have a chance to attend.

If [HF1901](#) becomes law, it might just be possible.

Earlier in the session, as Faust viewed the construction progress of the new monument, he began to think about how he could get all the state World War II veterans to attend the event. "This is our last chance to honor them; to show our appreciation for what they have done," he told the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division March 20. Members approved the bill and sent it to the House Finance Committee.

The bill would appropriate money for transportation, meals and lodging for WWII veterans who would like to attend the event.

Plans for the event are being developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the allocation of \$500,000 would help pay for activities related to the dedication.

A companion bill, [SF1789](#), sponsored by [Sen. Jim Vickerman](#) (DFL-Tracy), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— L. SCHUTZ

## TAXES

### Restoring the equalizer

In an effort to provide property tax relief to all areas of the state, a plan has been proposed to restore aid money that was cut in 2003.

Sponsored by [Rep. Robin Brown](#) (DFL-Austin), [HF1518](#) would provide a \$325 million package to restore Local Government Aid, county program aid and school levy equalization in fiscal year 2009. The bill was held over March 16 by the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division for possible inclusion in its division report.

Significant cuts were made to local government and county program aid in 2003.

Designed to provide property tax relief, the bill would restore \$125 million in LGA for aid payable in 2008, bringing levels back to pre-2003 appropriations, without inflation. County program aid would also be restored with \$25 million.

The other half of the bill would provide \$175 million in school tax levy equalization. Inflationary increases for all areas addressed in the bill would begin in fiscal year 2010.

Greater Minnesota cities receive 66 percent of the state's LGA. Alexandria Mayor H. Dan Ness said without LGA, the city of Virginia would need a tax rate nearly three times higher than the his city to produce the same revenue per person. On the flip side, Alexandria would need a tax rate three times higher than Wayzata to produce an equal amount of revenue per person.

The bill is split so that 49 percent of the money would go to the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area and 51 percent to Greater Minnesota.

A companion bill, [SF1227](#), sponsored by [Rep. Dan Skogen](#) (DFL-Hewitt), was laid over March 12 for possible inclusion in a Senate Taxes Committee omnibus bill.

— S. HEGMAN

### The citizens' bill

Thomas Hanson was sitting at his kitchen table in Brooklyn Park when he thought of an idea to help out property taxpayers.

He called that idea into the Minnesota Property Tax Comment Line, and now it's included in the Citizens Omnibus Property Tax Bill.

"He literally brought his idea from the kitchen table to the committee table," said [Rep. Paul Marquart](#) (DFL-Dilworth), who sponsors [HF2142](#). "This is a great example of grassroots legislation."

The bill was introduced March 20 to the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division and could be included in the division's report. It has no Senate companion.

Marquart, chairman of the division, opened a comment line Jan. 29, which over a two-month period generated 650 citizen comments via phone and e-mail. Out of those comments, six ideas were picked for the bill.

Hanson's provision would reestablish "this old house," exempting up to \$75,000 of value-added improvements from a home's taxable value for 10 years on houses 50 years or older. The program was in place from 1993 to 2003.

Roger Urban of Eagan contacted the property tax line because he didn't know he was eligible for the state's property tax refund, and found the language confusing in the tax code.

"I thought, 'Am I really that stupid?' or are a lot of people in the same boat?" he said.

He found that 350,000 eligible property taxpayers don't file for their refunds every year. Also, the state's property tax booklet doesn't mention the refund, he said.

Urban didn't know about it until a couple of years ago, but was told he could claim only

money from the previous year. His provision in the bill would extend the claim timeframe to three years.

The bill would also:

- increase the market value that qualifies for a reduced class rate for the homestead of a blind or disabled person from \$32,000 to \$50,000;
- establish a new classification for rural lands to differentiate them from agricultural property and seasonal recreational property, with the same class rate as agricultural non-homestead property;
- authorize counties to establish procedures to allow homeowners to pay their property taxes in eight monthly installments from May through December of each year; and
- establish a property tax deferral program for owners of seasonal-recreational property, which would defer 50 percent of the property tax amount in excess of the tax amount in the year of application for the program, payable upon transfer of the property or the death of the owner.

— S. HEGMAN

## TRANSPORTATION

### Cell phone penalties

People who choose to drive while talking on a cell phone could pay more than just roaming charges.

Sponsored by [Rep. Frank Hornstein](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF311](#) would double the fine for moving violations if the driver is using a cell phone at the time of the infraction.

Approved March 15 by the House Transportation Finance Division, the bill was laid over March 22 by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee for possible omnibus bill inclusion.

This is not a ban on cell phones, Hornstein said. Rather it sends a message to people about the dangers of driving while distracted, especially as cell phones become more elaborate.

The bill would allow exceptions for cell phone use in certain emergency situations.

“There are many distractions that occur in cars, but cell phone use is the most dangerous because it requires a person to think, answer and respond, which is much more complicated than changing a radio station or drinking a cup of coffee,” said Donny Harder, a freshman at Minneapolis Southwest High School, who brought the bill to Hornstein’s attention. “According to a 2005 State Farm Insurance survey, more than 40 percent of respondents said they had close calls or near misses with a driver who was using a cell phone.”

[Rep. Mike Nelson](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Park) questioned how an officer would know if a

driver with an earbud was using their phone. “That would double your ticket because the assumption then would be that you were talking on the cell phone because you have the earbud in your ear.”

Supporters note that cell phone records can be tracked and later used to remove that portion of the violation.

A companion bill, [SF247](#), sponsored by [Sen. D. Scott Dibble](#) (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— M. COOK

### Online driver’s education

Most teenagers cannot wait until they are eligible to get their instruction permit and then a driver’s license.

But how they receive the necessary education could change.

[Rep. Steve Simon](#) (DFL-St. Louis Park) is sponsoring [HF1062](#), which would allow the classroom portion of driver’s education to be Internet based. Behind-the-wheel training would still be done in the traditional way.

“This simply states that this is an option,” he told the House Transportation and Transit Policy Subcommittee March 20. “We have to have kids learn in ways that work for them.”

The bill, which has no fiscal impact to the state, was held over for possible inclusion in the omnibus transportation policy bill. A companion measure, [SF885](#), sponsored by [Sen. D. Scott Dibble](#) (DFL-Mpls), failed March 20 in the Senate Transportation Budget and Policy Division.

Under current law, parents who home school can teach the classroom portion of driver’s education, provided [certain requirements](#) are met.

Gary Tsifrin, DriversEd.com founder, said his company, which is regulated in seven states, offers on-demand interactive learning for students with busy lives, increased motivation, increased safety and fairness.

“Online courses allow for families in rural areas to have equal access to driver’s education,” he said.

Tsifrin said his company’s program offers 2-D and 3-D interactive scenarios to teach defensive driving skills, and it asks questions every so often to ensure that a student is paying attention.

Among concerns addressed by opponents were that online training does not provide for different scenarios. The bulk of our class is teaching “What if” scenarios, said James Thienes, owner of Safeway Driving School.

“Driver’s education is not just a list of rules and regulations that teens need to learn in order to pass their permit test. Driver’s education is an opportunity to teach teens good decision making skills one more time before they go

out on our roads,” he said. “The classroom offers discussions, practical demonstrations, guest speakers, local stories, interaction with other students and accountability for each and every student.”

— M. COOK

### Permitting ‘PhotoCop’

In addition to putting themselves physically in danger, running a red light could cost a motor vehicle operator financially, even without an officer around.

In 250 cities across 22 states, drivers running red lights are photographed and the vehicle owner is mailed a ticket.

Sponsored by [Rep. Paul Thissen](#) (DFL-Mpls), [HF1058](#) would permit the same in Minnesota. Approved March 15 by the House Transportation Finance Division, the bill was sent to the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee. A companion bill, [SF1071](#), sponsored by [Sen. D. Scott Dibble](#) (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

“This is aimed at increasing traffic safety, and the thing about it is we know it works at doing that,” Thissen said. “This would avoid property damage and ultimately lower insurance rates.”

Minneapolis began a Stop on Red program in the summer of 2005, but stopped it in March 2006 because of a legal challenge that the city had no authority to enact the program. That challenge now awaits action by the state Supreme Court.

With cameras at 12 intersections, the city issued almost 25,000 citations in the first eight months of operation, and saw a 31 percent decrease in crashes, said Minneapolis City Councilman Paul Ostrow.

Assistant Minneapolis Police Chief Sharon Lubinski said sensors in the road indicate when a vehicle is going through a red light. “That starts a camera that takes three still photos and almost 12 seconds of video, which has a documentation of that violation,” she said. People can access the video online when they receive a citation.

Some division members questioned the fairness of sending the vehicle owner a ticket, when that person may not have been the driver.

We’re trying to increase awareness of who a vehicle is loaned to, said Mary Ellen Heng, assistant Minneapolis city attorney.

Howard Bass, a member of the ACLU of Minnesota Board of Directors, expressed concern about individual privacy.

“This is one small step for traffic enforcement, but one giant leap towards a 1984 Orwellian society where Big Brother monitors our every movement,” he said.

— M. COOK



# Route to smooth roads a bit bumpy

Omnibus transportation finance bill includes tax increases, more transit funds

By MIKE COOK

A funding package to improve state roads and transit needs is headed for the House floor; however, it could be traveling toward a dead end.

The House omnibus transportation finance bill contains a number of proposed tax increases that supporters say are needed to get the state's transportation systems closer to today's standards, while also looking to the future. It allocates almost \$4.36 billion between the [Department of Transportation](#), [Department of Public Safety](#) and Metropolitan Council. Approximately \$3.9 billion is in transportation appropriations.

Sponsored by [Rep. Bernie Lieder](#) (DFL-Crookston), [HF946](#) was approved March 16-22 by the House Transportation Finance Division, the House Finance Committee, the House Taxes Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee. It is expected to be on the House floor March 24.

The Senate transportation plan, [SF1986](#), sponsored by [Sen. Steve Murphy](#) (DFL-Red Wing), was approved March 22 by the Senate Taxes Committee and awaits action on the Senate floor.

Opponents said the bill is in trouble because [Gov. Tim Pawlenty](#) has threatened to veto any gas tax increase.

"You need more talking with the governor as we move this thing forward," said [Rep. Steve Sviggum](#) (R-Kenyon).

"The governor does change his mind once in a while, and maybe there's a time period where he's waiting for public reaction, and that could happen too," Lieder said. "We definitely are not sending this bill to be veto bait, and we told him that."

## Highway user taxes

The bill includes a 5-cent increase in the state gas tax in each of the next two fiscal years, and the tax on alternative motor fuels would be raised proportionately.

"Assuming a family drives 10,000 miles a year and got 20 miles per gallon, that'd be 500 gallons at 10 cents, it'd be \$50 a year for one car," Lieder told the House Finance Committee. "I presume most cars, at least the newer models, are getting better than 20 miles per gallon."

After meeting with the governor, Lieder said Pawlenty may be interested in indexing the gas tax for inflation, something done in a

number of other states.

"It could be a way to put the two concepts together," said [Rep. Phyllis Kahn](#) (DFL-Mpls).

The state's 20-cent gas tax has not been increased since 1988, and supporters said if the tax had been adjusted for inflation since then, the current tax would be 34 cents per gallon.

"We've seen our gas prices go way up and none of those increases are being spent on our roads in Minnesota," said [Rep. Melissa Hortman](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Park). "Wisconsin suspended their indexing after Hurricane Katrina, and they stand at 32 cents a gallon. It's an embarrassment to me that Wisconsin's roads are in better shape than ours. That's

because they made a commitment to ongoing support through indexing their gas tax."

Vehicle registration taxes would be affected because there would no longer be caps on the amount one could pay. Approved during the Ventura administration, state law now puts a \$189 cap for the vehicle's first year and a \$99 cap thereafter.

The bill also increases the vehicle depreciation schedule so there is a greater reduction per year in the base value used to calculate the tax, and it limits the tax so previously registered vehicles are not affected by the change.

## Motor vehicle sales tax revenue

State voters passed a constitutional



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Proceeds from a proposed 0.5 percent transportation sales and use tax could be used for construction or reconstruction of roads or trunk highways of regional significance. The House is expected to vote on the bill March 24.





PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

**The omnibus transportation finance bill calls for 60 percent of motor vehicle sales tax revenues to ultimately go to highways, 36.5 percent to Twin Cities metropolitan area transit and 3.5 percent to Greater Minnesota transit.**

amendment in November 2006 to dedicate all motor vehicle sales tax revenues to transportation improvements.

Under the bill, the revenue would be allocated so that once it is fully phased in on July 1, 2011, 60 percent of funds would go to highways, 36.5 percent to Twin Cities metropolitan area transit and 3.5 percent to Greater Minnesota transit.

[Rep. Connie Ruth](#) (R-Owatonna), one of three “no” votes in the House Transportation Finance Division, along with [Rep. Mary Liz Holberg](#) (R-Lakeville) and [Rep. Doug Magnus](#) (R-Slayton), said there was much talk about a 35-5 transit percentage split. “We really are in trouble. Five percent really needs to be the minimum for the rural area,” she said. “In the rural area, we know that the population is aging and as we’re trying to get people even to get groceries or get to the doctor, the rural transit is really important. We don’t have the opportunities in the rural area that we do in the city.”

The lack of funding hurts disabled Minnesotans even more because this is their way to get around, said [Rep. Shelley Madore](#) (DFL-Apple Valley), who expressed fear that they could end up seeking financial assistance because they can’t get to a job.

“I think 36.5-3.5 is certainly better than most of our rural colleagues may have expected at the start of session,” said [Rep.](#)

[Frank Hornstein](#) (DFL-Mpls). “It’s certainly a compromise for most of us in the metro with the amount of transit needs we have.”

### Local option taxes

Counties would be permitted, under the bill, to raise their wheelage tax from \$5 to \$20 on each motor vehicle, except for motorcycles and trucks with a gross weight of at least 26,000 pounds, kept in the county and subject to annual registration.

Under current law, counties in the Twin Cities metropolitan area can impose the tax. The

bill provides for all counties and it eliminates the requirement of an offset in property taxes.

Five counties in the Twin Cities metropolitan area — Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington — would be permitted to impose a 0.5 percent

transportation sales and use tax as well as a \$20 excise tax on motor vehicles sold at retail. Carver and Scott counties would

also be permitted to join the quintet.

Proceeds from the tax would be allocated by a joint powers board to the state and political subdivisions for construction or reconstruction of roads or trunk highways of regional significance and transitway construction, capital improvements and operating assistance.

“We didn’t have much choice,” Lieder said.

***“It’s an embarrassment to me that Wisconsin’s roads are in better shape than ours.”***

— Rep. Melissa Hortman

***“To have us go to the taxpayers and the folks in Minnesota looking at a billion-dollar increase is pretty staggering when we’re seeing the economy, I think, a little bit on shaky ground.”***

— Rep. Doug Magnus

## Other aspects

The bill would also provide:

- \$518.6 million in fiscal year 2008 and \$738.6 million in fiscal year 2009 for trunk highway construction work;
- more than \$245 million in fiscal year 2008 and \$277.8 million in fiscal year 2009 for infrastructure operations and maintenance;
- \$146.9 million in the biennium to the Metropolitan Council, with bus transit receiving all but \$10.6 million, which is allocated for operation of the Hiawatha light rail line;
- \$296.8 million for the Public Safety Department, of which \$139.1 million would be for the state patrol, including an additional \$8.4 million for 40 additional troopers and other enhancements;
- a fee increase on most license plates and stickers, and a fee would be established for collector plates and an International Fuel Tax Agreement sticker;
- a 75-cent increase for driver’s licenses, permits and identification cards. Fees for filing a certificate of title would increase by the same amount, as would various permit fees for motorized bicycles; and
- a license reinstatement fee of \$20 for a person whose license was suspended for gasoline theft.

“The problem we have is that the entire bill isn’t so much the highway portion, it was the transit portion, because transit doesn’t have a dedicated fund.”

Counties in Greater Minnesota, acting alone or with a joint powers agreement, would also be permitted to impose the 0.5 percent transportation sales and use tax and \$20 excise tax. However, unlike the Twin

**Transportation continued on page 23**



## Monday, March 19

### **HF2165-Ruud (DFL)** **Commerce & Labor**

Automatic renewal clauses limited in business leases or contracts.

### **HF2166-Benson (DFL)** **Finance**

Minnesota Historical Society grant provided for professional development for teachers.

### **HF2167-Davnie (DFL)** **Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Minnesota Financial Crimes Oversight Council and Task Force reorganized, oversight of the council transferred to the attorney general, jurisdiction expanded to include organized retail crime and driver's license surcharge imposed.

### **HF2168-Kahn (DFL)** **Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs**

Hemp industry development and regulation provided, possession and cultivation of industrial hemp defense provided and definition of marijuana modified.

### **HF2169-Peterson, A. (DFL)** **Finance**

Sparsity revenue calculation modified and levy reestablished for school districts in statutory operating debt.

### **HF2170-Kahn (DFL)** **Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system individual retirement account plan and supplemental plan unclaimed account procedures established.

### **HF2171-Mullery (DFL)** **Taxes**

Tax increment financing; plan election provided for first year to receive increment.

### **HF2172-Brod (R)** **E-12 Education**

Charter school students authorized to participate in extracurricular activities in their resident school district.

### **HF2173-Eastlund (R)** **Finance**

Independent School District No. 15, St. Francis, compensatory pilot grants increased for two years.

### **HF2174-Kalin (DFL)** **Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission memorialized by resolution to take account of energy efficiency.

### **HF2175-Kalin (DFL)** **Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Public building report card required reporting energy use in public buildings on a publicly accessible database.

### **HF2176-Kalin (DFL)** **Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Tax increment financing and JOBZ and business subsidies searchable database required.

### **HF2177-Bunn (DFL)** **Health & Human Services**

Health Risk Advisory Council established.

### **HF2178-Thissen (DFL)** **Health & Human Services**

Long-term care programs funding restored, services expanded, new grant programs established, statewide priority created to enhance the mobility of older adults, studies required and tax credit established.

### **HF2179-Berns (R)** **Health & Human Services**

United States Medical Licensing Examination extensions authorized for applicants with medical illnesses.

### **HF2180-Anderson, B. (R)** **Health & Human Services**

Board of Oversight of Human Services Appeals established.

### **HF2181-Abeler (R)** **Health & Human Services**

Care coordination for children with high-cost mental health conditions provided through the U Special Kids Program.

### **HF2182-Loeffler (DFL)** **Health & Human Services**

Human services advisory committee established to simplify program administration and studies and reports required.

### **HF2183-Thao (DFL)** **Health & Human Services**

High deductible health plan regulation provided.

### **HF2184-Liebling (DFL)** **Health & Human Services**

Medical education and research cost distribution formula modified.

### **HF2185-Lanning (R)** **E-12 Education**

Healthy child development within communities grant program established.

### **HF2186-Hornstein (DFL)** **Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Child support six-month review requirements modified, and income information and enforcement remedies provided.

### **HF2187-Erickson (R)** **Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Volunteer firefighter relief association investment policies and reporting required, and certain reporting requirements repealed.

### **HF2188-Brynaert (DFL)** **Finance**

Driver's license road examination required upon every third renewal.

### **HF2189-Paymar (DFL)** **Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Statewide moratorium established on new billboards, and existing billboards declared nonconforming uses.

### **HF2190-Atkins (DFL)** **Commerce & Labor**

Biodiesel fuel sales regulated.

### **HF2191-Madore (DFL)** **Transportation Finance Division**

Secretary of state address designated address use authorized for data protection purposes.

### **HF2192-Hilstrom (DFL)** **Taxes**

Brooklyn Center tax increment financing district authorized uses expanded.

### **HF2193-Hilstrom (DFL)** **Taxes**

Brooklyn Center tax increment financing district authorized uses expanded.

### **HF2194-Kahn (DFL)** **Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Teacher retirement fund associations in cities of the first class provisions modified, state and local public retirement program actuarial services procurement modified.

### **HF2195-Demmer (R)** **Finance**

Rochester; Trunk Highway 52 and 65th Street N.W. interchange construction permits issued.

### **HF2196-Sailer (DFL)** **Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs**

Waste pesticide collection program provisions modified, and minimum annual program expenditure amount increased.

### **HF2197-Zellers (R)** **Transportation Finance Division**

Interstate 94 designated as the Purple Heart Trail.

### **HF2198-Dill (DFL)** **Taxes**

Cook County Hospital District levy authority modified.

### **HF2199-Hansen (DFL)** **Finance**

South St. Paul span arch bridge funding provided.

### **HF2200-Magnus (R)** **Finance**

Hydrogen use as energy resource promoted to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

### **HF2201-Olin (DFL)** **Environment & Natural Resources**

Lifetime deer hunting licenses granted to residents who have been a volunteer firearms safety instructor for at least 25 years.

### **HF2202-Paymar (DFL)** **Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Billboards nonconforming use provisions modified.

### **HF2203-Paymar (DFL)** **Finance**

Outdoor advertising permits surcharge imposed, funding provided for removal of dilapidated billboards.

### **HF2204-Rukavina (DFL)** **Finance**

Board of Invention funding provided.

### **HF2205-Bigham (DFL)** **Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Sexual offenses; applicability provided for certain old sex offender provisions for crimes committed before enactment of new sex offender law.

### **HF2206-Kalin (DFL)** **Finance**

Impound lot operators recovery costs provided and abandoned vehicle account established.

### **HF2207-Westrom (R)** **Transportation Finance Division**

Recreational vehicle combination definition modified to include any type of towed middle vehicle.



**HF2208-Slocum (DFL)****Taxes**

Richfield City Hall and maintenance facility construction materials sales tax exemption provided.

**HF2209-Madore (DFL)****Commerce & Labor**

Motor vehicle sale damage disclosure requirement modified.

**HF2210-Clark (DFL)****Finance**

Restorative justice services grants provided.

**HF2211-Olin (DFL)****Finance**

Badger indoor ice arena funding provided.

**HF2212-Loeffler (DFL)****Finance**

State Capitol restoration and renovation funding provided.

**HF2213-Morrow (DFL)****Finance**

Tow permit for oversized and overweight vehicles required.

**HF2214-Juhnke (DFL)****Taxes**

Agricultural homestead property minimum acreage requirements decreased in certain cases.

**HF2215-Knuth (DFL)****Environment & Natural Resources**

Minnesota travel green program required through Explore Minnesota Tourism.

**HF2216-Scalze (DFL)****Environment & Natural Resources**

Watercraft surcharge and water recreation account modified, and nonresident fishing surcharge imposed.

**HF2217-Dominguez (DFL)****Finance**

Alternative dispute resolution study and assessment provided.

**HF2218-Slocum (DFL)****Energy Finance & Policy Division**

Utility proceedings interveners compensation conditions and procedures specified.

**HF2219-Koenen (DFL)****Finance**

Gasoline and special fuel tax rates increased, and phase-in of motor vehicle sales tax revenues to transportation provided.

**HF2220-Anderson, B. (R)****Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Nonconforming lots use local government requirements limited.

**HF2221-Peterson, S. (DFL)****Finance**

Board of Teaching funding increased.

**HF2222-Otremba (DFL)****Finance**

Central Lakes Regional Sanitary District sewer system funding provided.

**HF2223-Abeler (R)****Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Home rule charter cities authorized to provide by charter the procedures for appointment of housing and redevelopment authority commissioners.

**HF2224-Walker (DFL)****Finance**

African-American juvenile crime prevention grants provided.

**HF2225-Demmer (R)****Environment & Natural Resources**

Artificial light use in locating animals restrictions modified.

**HF2226-Lanning (R)****Commerce & Labor**

Postsecondary institutions authorized to conduct raffles under certain circumstances.

**HF2227-Juhnke (DFL)****Finance**

Agricultural, veterans and military affairs funding provided, programs established, and accounts and fees modified.

**HF2228-Anzelc (DFL)****Taxes**

Agricultural sales tax exemption extended to logging tires.

**HF2229-Mullery (DFL)****Public Safety & Civil Justice**

DWI offenders ignition interlock device pilot project established, and temporary exception to mandatory sentencing law provided for offenders required to use these devices.

**HF2230-Loeffler (DFL)****Taxes**

Future residential relative homesteads eliminated and non-homestead residential property class rate modified.

**HF2231-Brown (DFL)****Taxes**

Local government aid to towns provided.

**HF2232-Smith (R)****Taxes**

Open space property tax law requirements modified.

**HF2233-Kalin (DFL)****Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Local government development credit banks transfer authorized.

**HF2234-Otremba (DFL)****Transportation Finance Division**

Dallas Sams Memorial Highway designated for Trunk Highway 210.

**HF2235-Juhnke (DFL)****Taxes**

Farm and small business properties estate tax exclusion provided.

**HF2236-Liebling (DFL)****Finance**

Southeastern Minnesota Regional Public Safety Training Center funding provided, bonds issued, and money appropriated.

**HF2237-Nelson (DFL)****Taxes**

Bloomington tax increment financing district improvements construction materials sales tax exemption provided, and district duration extended and boundaries modified.

**HF2238-Brynaert (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

School employee statewide health insurance program established.

**HF2239-Thissen (DFL)****Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Minneapolis Board of Estimate and Taxation duties and powers transferred to the Minneapolis City Council.

**HF2240-Rukavina (DFL)****Finance**

Laurentian Energy Authority renewable biomass energy production funding provided.

**HF2241-Clark (DFL)****Finance**

Health and Human Services grants and programs and Housing Finance Agency funding provided.

**HF2242-Marquart (DFL)****Taxes**

Seasonal restaurant property tax class rate reduced.

**HF2243-Tschumper (DFL)****Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Lanesboro local sales tax authorized.

**HF2244-Morgan (DFL)****Taxes**

Burnsville surface water treatment plant construction materials sales tax exemption provided.

**HF2246-Westrom (R)****Finance**

Renewable energy production incentive allocations modified, home biomass use rebates established and other renewable energy requirements provided.

**HF2247-Dean (R)****Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Attorney general private attorney contracts procedures and restrictions established.

**HF2248-Nelson (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

Workers' Compensation Advisory Council recommendations adopted.

**HF2249-Clark (DFL)****Housing Policy & Finance & Public Health Finance Division**

City property transfers to nonprofit organizations for housing projects regulated.

**HF2250-Bly (DFL)****Finance**

Dakota language teacher training immersion program established at the University of Minnesota.

**HF2251-Lenczewski (DFL)****Taxes**

Bloomington north-south airport runway siting reimbursement mechanism provided.

**HF2252-Davnie (DFL)****Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Sustainable growth working group established.

**HF2253-Peterson, A. (DFL)****Finance**

Community-based energy development projects provisions modified, renewable energy projects regulated, Public Utilities Commission policies required, wind energy permits authorized and renewable energy option program sunset repealed.

**HF2254-Ruth (R)****Health & Human Services**

Waseca County nursing facility payment rates modified for services to ventilator-dependent persons.

**HF2255-Zellers (R)****Taxes**

Seasonal-recreational property value frozen for two years relating to property taxation.

**HF2256-Eken (DFL)****Environment & Natural Resources**

Fish house and dark house three-year license provided.

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**Tuesday, March 20**
**HF2245-Greiling (DFL)****Ways & Means**

General education aid modified.

**HF2257-Beard (R)****Taxes**

Local construction and maintenance of roads, bridges and airports construction materials sales tax exemption provided.

**HF2258-Clark (DFL)****Finance**

Arsenic health risk level standard required.

**HF2259-Lenczewski (DFL)****Taxes**

Nonresident compensation taxation modified.

**HF2260-Lenczewski (DFL)****Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

State Budget Trends Study Commission established.

**HF2261-Hansen (DFL)****Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Mendota local food and beverage tax authorized.

**HF2262-Ruud (DFL)****Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Department of Energy established and duties transferred from Department of Commerce.

**HF2263-Tillberry (DFL)****Finance**

Education transition revenue modified.

**HF2264-Svigum (R)****Finance**

Trunk highway projects funding provided.

**HF2265-Mullery (DFL)****Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Violent offenders required to consent to on-demand searches as a condition of being released on probation, supervised release or parole.

**HF2266-Murphy, M. (DFL)****Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs**

Port of Duluth export grain inspection provided.

**HF2267-Murphy, M. (DFL)****Finance**

Arrowhead Regional Corrections Agency productive day pilot project funding provided.

**HF2268-Lenczewski (DFL)****Taxes**

Public improvements and services financing and issuance of obligations terms and conditions provided.

**Wednesday, March 21****HF2269-Ruud (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

Hospital reporting of charity care, bad debt and community benefit required.

**HF2270-Huntley (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

Farm co-op health plan pilot project authorized.

**HF2271-Huntley (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

Health care services provisions, data management and Medicaid reimbursement provisions modified; lead risk assessment services provided; and general assistance medical care, Medical Assistance and long-term care partnerships modified.

**HF2272-Huntley (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

MinnesotaCare eligibility increased for single adults and households without children.

**HF2273-Huntley (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

Dependent health care coverage definition expanded to any unmarried child under age 25.

**HF2274-Huntley (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

MinnesotaCare children's eligibility insurance barriers removed.

**HF2275-Norton (DFL)****Finance**

Dental providers critical access reimbursement modified, and additional staff required to administer critical access dental program.

**HF2276-Demmer (R)****Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs**

Silver Star Families of America Day designated on May 1.

**HF2277-Pelowski (DFL)****Finance**

Winona State University Memorial Hall improvements funding provided.

**HF2278-Welti (DFL)****Finance**

Propane pre-purchase program established and consumer protections provided to delivered-fuel customers.

**HF2279-Doty (DFL)****Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Minnesota Correctional Facility - St. Cloud current and past retirement coverage clarified.

**HF2280-Huntley (DFL)****Finance**

Nuclear-powered electric generating plant certificate of need prohibition removed, Legislative Electric Energy Task Force sunset extended and study required.

**HF2281-McNamara (R)****Finance**

Non-resident tuition rebate provided.

**HF2282-Demmer (R)****Finance**

Mantorville; Stage Coach Trail and welcome center design grant provided.

**HF2283-Demmer (R)****E-12 Education**

Nonpublic school student health services provided.

**HF2284-Demmer (R)****Finance**

Mantorville; Stage Coach Trail and welcome center design grant provided.

**HF2285-Sertich (DFL)****Environment & Natural Resources**

Natural resource and cultural heritage dedicated funding provided through increased sales tax revenue, funds established, Natural Heritage Enhancement Council created and constitutional amendment proposed.

**HF2286-Rukavina (DFL)****Finance**

Taconite proceeds distribution to school districts modified.

**HF2287-Dill (DFL)****Finance**

Municipal airport authorities and property tax levies authorized.

**HF2288-Brynaert (DFL)****Finance**

Mankato Civic Center Arena and Women's Hockey Development Center funding provided.

**HF2289-Huntley (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

Patient Safety and Drug Review Transparency Act adopted requiring disclosure of clinical trials for prescription drugs.

**HF2290-Sailer (DFL)****Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Worker's compensation; improper access to medical records penalties provided.

**HF2291-Greiling (DFL)****Finance**

Telecommunications/Internet access equity aid full funding provided.

**Thursday, March 22****HF2292-Morrow (DFL)****Finance**

State natural disaster assistance grant program established.

**HF2293-Ozment (R)****Finance**

Claims against the state settlement provided relating to corrections.

**HF2294-Dill (DFL)****Taxes**

Cook-Orr Hospital District levy authority modified.

**HF2295-Madore (DFL)****Health & Human Services**

Board of Medical Practice required to bring adverse actions to district court, governor authorized to remove a board member and board member duties specified.

**HF2296-Peppin (R)****Finance**

Interstate 94 noise barrier funding provided to mitigate the effects of 2006 Rogers tornado.

**HF2297-Kohls (R)****Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs**

Metropolitan agricultural preserve expiration authorized under certain conditions.

**HF2298-Zellers (R)****Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Jury service postponement procedures specified, small businesses protected, grounds for excuse established; and maximum length of service, contempt of court for failure to appear and supplemental compensation for lengthy trials provided.

**HF2299-Demmer (R)****Finance**

Lake Zumbro restoration funding provided.

**HF2300-Kahn (DFL)****Commerce & Labor**

University of Minnesota event on-sale liquor licenses authorized.

**HF2301-Fritz (DFL)****Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Correctional employees early retirement incentive provided.

**HF2302-Welti (DFL)****Finance**

Great River Ridge Trail funding provided.

**HF2303-Sertich (DFL)****Environment & Natural Resources**

Side Lake in St. Louis County water level established.

**HF2304-Masin (DFL)**  
**Public Safety & Civil Justice**  
 Child support payment agreements full compliance requirement provided.

**HF2305-Hilty (DFL)**  
**Finance**  
 Energy activities funding provided, mortgage companies and licensees provisions modified, credit services organizations registration fee increased, residential mortgage fraud prohibited and penalties imposed.

**HF2306-Hilty (DFL)**  
**Energy Finance & Policy Division**  
 Public Utilities Commission required to initiate proceedings regarding interconnection of distributed generation facilities.

**HF2307-Hilty (DFL)**  
**Energy Finance & Policy Division**  
 Global Warming Preparedness Act of 2007 adopted; rulemaking and

reporting relating to statewide greenhouse gas emissions required; and carbon dioxide pipeline rights-of-way and phase-out of coal-fired power plants provided.

**HF2308-Marquart (DFL)**  
**Finance**  
 Independent School District No. 801, Browns Valley, declining pupil aid funding provided.

**HF2309-Atkins (DFL)**  
**E-12 Education**  
 Career and technical student organizations benefits in the postsecondary institution classroom study provided.

**HF2310-Davnie (DFL)**  
**Higher Education & Work Force Development Policy & Finance Division**  
 Social Security unemployment offset provisions modified.

**HF2311-Davnie (DFL)**  
**Taxes**  
 Tobacco tax and tobacco health impact fee computation modified for "moist snuff."

**HF2312-Ward (DFL)**  
**Health & Human Services**  
 Long-term care insurance policies protected from extreme premium increases.

**HF2313-Bunn (DFL)**  
**Ways & Means**  
 General fund forecasts additional revenues priorities modified.

**HF2314-Erickson (R)**  
**Finance**  
 Special education funding task force established.

**HF2315-Anzelc (DFL)**  
**Finance**  
 Isolated schools declining enrollment revenue funding increased.

**HF2316-Koenen (DFL)**  
**Energy Finance & Policy Division**  
 Renewable energy agency authorized with the powers of a municipal power agency, and claims handling status specified.

**HF2317-Loeffler (DFL)**  
**Finance**  
 Hennepin County new chance program for young parents funding provided.

**HF2318-Bigham (DFL)**  
**Public Safety & Civil Justice**  
 Repeat sex offender sentences modified.

## Transportation continued from page 19

Cities metropolitan area, the tax enactment would only be permitted if approved by a majority of voters, and the tax must be for a specific transportation project with a termination upon project completion.

If all counties enacted the sales tax increase, it is estimated to net \$680 million in the upcoming biennium and \$764 million in fiscal years 2010-11.

"I would assume we aren't going to see too many rural counties jumping into the sales tax the first year or anytime," Lieder said.

"There are over \$800 million in taxes and fees increasing in this bill, so far," Magnus said. "To have us go to the taxpayers and the folks in Minnesota looking at a billion-dollar increase is pretty staggering when we're seeing the economy, I think, a little bit on shaky ground."

## Leased vehicle taxes

The greatest disappointment expressed by members of the House Transportation Finance Division was with a plan to reallocate the sales

tax from leased vehicles for transportation purposes. The money was to be divided the same way as the motor vehicle sales tax revenue, with 60 percent to highways and 40 percent to transit. That money now goes to the General Fund.

"When transportation comes up against public safety, education and health care it just never seems to win the fight, no matter who's mounting the fight," Holberg said.

[Rep. Ron Erhardt](#) (R-Edina) predicts that without additional funding Metro Transit may shut down some routes and lay off staff.

Pawlenty supports the plan, but Lieder said the House Taxes Committee has kept the money for its use.

"So we will not receive any of the leased vehicle sales tax revenue for transportation purposes," Holberg said. "The targets of the DFL Caucus will not provide for that transfer to transportation, but that money will continue to be spent for General Fund purposes."


"It's basically in the tax committee," Lieder said. "We're going to try through the process, I hope somewhere we can get additional money.

This money was really kind of critical to our transportation division because it would provide some additional monies for transit, which we don't have."

"From an outstate viewpoint, she's not just speaking for the minority party," said [Rep. Al Doty](#) (DFL-Royalton). "That's not a viewpoint that's simply outstate Minnesota. I'm not happy either," Hortman added.

## Bonding

The bill calls for \$1 billion in transportation bonding for construction on the trunk highway system. The total would be bonded at \$100 million per year for the next 10 fiscal years. Pawlenty is seeking \$1.7 billion.

"In his bill this year, he was using the highway revenue from the motor vehicle excise tax, which, if you used it all, would equate to the billion-seven," Lieder said. "We had to use some of that money because of our targets. We put in a billion and used the rest of it within the general bill." 

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## MINNESOTA INDEX

### Baby goes goo-goo ga-ga

Number of Minnesota births in 2005.....	70,920
Last year the number was that high .....	1964
Births in 2000 .....	67,451
Fertility rate, or average number of lifetime births per woman in 2005 .....	2.02
In 2000 .....	1.97
In 1980 .....	1.87
Average number of births per day in Minnesota in 2005 .....	194
Number of those that were firstborn children.....	76
Births to women age 35 and older .....	30
Births to women under age 20.....	13
Percent of Minnesota babies born in 2005 that were to unwed mothers .....	30
Percent in 2000.....	26
National average in 2005, as percent.....	36
Percent of babies born in Minnesota to mothers who were born outside the United States.....	17.4
Percent in 2000.....	13.4
Percent in 1990.....	5.4
Births in 2005, as percent, where the mother and father were not of the same race or ethnicity .....	8.9
Percent in 2000.....	7
Percent in 1992.....	4.2
Increase in plural births in the state from 2000 to 2005, as percent .....	6
Increase from 1995 to 2000, as percent .....	29
Percent of plural births in 2005 that were twins .....	95
Abortions performed in Minnesota in 2005.....	13,362
Top three boys names for babies born in Minnesota in 2005 (Ethan, Jacob and Samuel).....	490, 474, 435
Girls named Ava, Grace and Emma.....	457, 423, 417
Top three boys names for babies born in Minnesota in 1995 (Jacob, Tyler and Matthew).....	747, 703, 672
Girls named Samantha, Emily and Ashley .....	561, 552, 438
Top three boys names for babies born in Minnesota in 1975 (Jason, Michael and Matthew).....	1,241, 1,182, 914
Girls named Jennifer, Amy and Angela .....	1,322, 893, 645

Sources: Minnesota State Demographic Center, [Department of Health](#), including [2005 Minnesota Health Statistics Annual Summary](#) and [Induced Abortions in Minnesota January-December 2005: Report to the Legislature](#); [Social Security Administration](#).

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