

SESSION WEEKLY

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FALLING SHORT ON DOLLARS

EMERGENCY CENTERS — PREPARING FOR THE WORST

GOING FISHING? TWO LINES A POSSIBILITY

SCREENING NEWBORNS

HF3886 - HF4060



SESSION WEEKLY

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On the cover: Senate Assistant Majority Leader Tarryl Clark, *left*, and House Majority Leader Tony Sertich face the media outside the governor's office minutes after Gov. Tim Pawlenty outlined his budget-balancing plan, March 7. Spending cuts, using surplus balance funds, tapping into state budget reserves and lowering the state sales tax are part of the governor's plan to reduce a \$938 million biennial deficit.

— Photo by: Tom Olmscheid



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

During a March 7 news conference, Gov. Tim Pawlenty holds up a sheet showing the percentage of cuts that each state agency should expect as part of his deficit-reduction plan. Finance Commissioner Tom Hanson, right, was also on hand to answer questions.

By MIKE COOK

Spending cuts, using surplus balance funds, tapping into state budget reserves and lowering the state sales tax are the cornerstones of Gov. Tim Pawlenty's \$938 million deficit-reduction plan.

But the proposal isn't going over well with everyone.

"This plan balances our budget without adding to the burden facing Minnesotans," Pawlenty said at a March 7 news conference. "We'll tackle this deficit by holding government accountable, tightening our belts and using available resources, not by raising taxes."

His plan includes reducing state spending by \$341 million, using \$250 million of the state's \$653 million budget reserve and taking \$250 million from the surplus in the Health Care Access Fund.

Pawlenty said the reductions would decrease the biennial budget increase from 10.6 percent to 9.2 percent, still more than double the rate of inflation.

The plan includes funding for a few new initiatives, such as \$12 million for Strategic

Entrepreneurial Economic Development, which is designed to help stimulate the economy in rural Minnesota; \$6 million for military and veteran's packages; and \$5 million in K-12 reforms, including summer academies for teachers, particularly for math and science, and online curricula access to better incorporate technology into the education system.

Highlights of the governor's plan to curb the shortfall include: no reduction in K-12 education or local government aid; a 4 percent reduction for most state agencies; and a 1/8th percent sales tax decrease.

State Budget Director Jim Schowalter noted that about 40 percent of the state budget is directed to K-12, and 9 percent is in local

aids and credits. "That means that either you're going to take much more significant reductions in other areas or take some other kind of action, such as onetime reserves."

Since the governor's release, the plan has been met with resistance and skepticism from many DFLers.

"My concern is how much of this solution is sound bites and how much is substance," Rep. Gene Pelowski Jr. (DFL-Winona) said during the House Finance Committee's March 10 gathering. "It appears we're getting a great deal of sound bite and the substance we're going to put off into the next biennium."

The plan reduces the projected 2010-11 biennial deficit from almost \$1.09 billion to \$693 million, which Pawlenty said can be covered by unused reserves and rainy-day funds. When the state had a \$4.5 billion deficit in 2003, the original out-year deficit was \$1.7 billion.

Finance Commissioner Tom Hanson noted that it is a constitutional requirement to solve the current biennial deficit. To fix the projected 2010-11 deficit, he said taxes would have to be raised or spending would need to be significantly reduced. "Either solution you pick at this point

First Reading continued on page 4

might very well hurt the (economic) recovery that we want over the next year.”

Hanson said a series of bills would be drafted to address the deficit. Fiscal targets are expected to be given to House finance divisions early next week.

Agriculture

Although the governor proposes a comparatively small cut (\$102,000) to the Agriculture Department, the chairman of the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division cautioned department staff not to get too comfortable.

The proposed biennial cut would reduce the department’s funding for administrative services and information technology.

With a budget of \$24 million from the General Fund and more than \$31 million in other funds, Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar), chairman of the division, questioned why the proposed cut is far less than the 3 percent to 4 percent being advocated for agencies by House and Senate leadership.

“What you see is what the governor chose to go forward with,” Quinn Cheney, the department’s director of policy development, told the division March 11.

Juhnke countered that, once each division has its budget targets, more cuts could be proposed for the department.

Environment

The largest proposed reductions in the area of environment and natural resources spending could fall on the Department of Natural Resources, which has been asked to reduce its current biennial funding by 4 percent, or \$2.94 million.

The reductions are spread over a wide range of DNR programs, with the Fish and Wildlife, Ecological Services and Parks and Recreation divisions taking the biggest hits. Some of the impacts on individual services and programs include:

- smaller-than-expected funding increases for aquatic invasive species control and enforcement;
- reduced biological monitoring to support total maximum daily load Clean Water Legacy programs;
- reduced supply and expense budgets for state parks;
- reduced maintenance and restoration of state trails; and
- elimination of grants for the “Let’s Go Fishing” program for senior citizens.

Meanwhile, the Pollution Control Agency faces a more modest reduction of \$473,000

per fiscal year of General Fund spending. PCA Operational Support Division Director Myrna Halbach said the reductions could be achieved through largely administrative measures, such as modifying replacement schedules for computer equipment and cutting publications costs by using more Web-based publishing.

State agencies

The plan calls for a 4 percent reduction for most state agencies.

Pawlenty does not believe the cuts will result in layoffs, in part because of the large number of people eligible to retire in the near future, so attrition may make up the shortfall. “Leaving those positions unfilled, or in some cases migrating the services to technology is going to be a big part of that,” Pawlenty said. “Moving to e-government will allow us to shrink state government. That’s what we’re planning to do anyhow.”

Included in the governor’s recommendations are cuts of \$6.86 million for the Legislature, \$1.78 million for constitutional offices and \$1.17 million for the Department of Administration.

State Auditor Rebecca Otto told members of the State Government Finance Division March 12 that cuts to her office could result in a loss of five staff positions, and could significantly hamper the ability of the office to conduct investigations.

Health and human services

Taking \$250 million from the Health Care Access Fund, which Pawlenty says has a “substantial surplus,” still leaves a balance for the current and next biennium.

Even with the money removed, there is enough to maintain eligibility and nobody will have their benefits reduced, Pawlenty said. “Those are very expensive programs, and their costs are rising dramatically, but rather than cut those programs now — it may come to that point in the future if the economy continues to deteriorate — we think it’s important to maintain those programs.”

Savings are also generated by canceling planned expansions to MinnesotaCare to single people without children and by slowing the growth of provider payments by making certain rate reductions.

“Health plan programs had about a 17 percent biennial growth,” Hanson said. “Now it’s down to about 15 percent.”

Nonetheless, Rep. Nora Slawik (DFL-Maplewood) took direct aim at the governor’s plan.

“You are taking 54 percent of the cuts of the deficit just through HHS cuts and transfers,” she said. “That’s just outrageous that you are

again going to balance it on the backs of those who can least afford it.”

Health and human services is nearly 30 percent of the state budget, so any reduction is going to be big, especially with K-12 education off the table, Schowalter said. “In talking about proportionality, if everything was reduced 4 percent this would be less than that 4 percent.”

Slawik, who chairs the House Early Childhood Learning Finance Division, said the governor’s recommendation to refinance TANF funds (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) threatens the state’s Child Care Assistance Program.

“I hope people understand what this does. It is money that could be helping needy families and kids with child care and it’s displacing it, in essence,” she said.

Higher education

A \$27.2 million reduction to the University of Minnesota and \$26 million to the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system is proposed. The amounts are about 0.9 percent of the university’s \$3 billion operating budget, and 1.3 percent of the MnSCU all-funds operating budget.

The university received a nearly 17 percent funding increase last year; MnSCU nearly 13 percent.

The governor’s plan does include \$2.1 million for the university to study the high incidence of mesothelioma among Iron Range taconite workers.

“Raising tuition will be the last place we will look for a solution to solve whatever comes our way,” University President Robert Bruininks told the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division March 12. “I can tell you, quite honestly, if the cut’s this deep, I frankly think it would be a dereliction of responsibility on my part if tuition wasn’t a part of the solution.”

Others, including MnSCU officials and university student leaders, said the cut would go against some of the positives made the last several years.

“There’s no way for us to remove this much money from the budget without a serious impact on students, on faculty and on our strategic initiatives, that include providing the educated workforce that Minnesota needs,” said Laura King, MnSCU vice-chancellor for finance.

K-12 education

Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville) criticized the governor’s plan, in part, because

Editor's note: The following Highlights are coverage of select bills heard in House committees and other House activities held March 6-13. Designations used in Highlight summaries: HF-House File; SF-Senate File; Ch-Chapter; and *-the bill, version considered by the House, or the bill language signed by the governor.

AGRICULTURE

Animal treatment referrals

The issue of whether an animal should need a referral from a veterinarian to receive chiropractic care was characterized in a committee hearing as two groups muscling each other, trying to get a piece of the business.

The debate surfaced in the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Committee March 10 during discussion of HF3584, sponsored Rep. Lyle Koenen (DFL-Clara City), which would give definition to the practice of animal chiropractic and its licensing requirements.

This is the first of several bills expected to come from recommendations by the animal husbandry working group convened by the 2007 Legislature to work through issues over who can perform certain animal care.

The Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association objects to Koenen's bill because it would allow those licensed in animal chiropractic care to perform manipulations without first having a referral from a veterinarian.

"I feel that it is extremely important that with my four years of veterinary school ... that I can make a diagnosis and refer them to the appropriate part," said Kate An Hunter, a veterinarian at the Carver Lake Veterinary Center.

However, Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) questioned why animals need a referral when humans seeking chiropractic care don't. "It doesn't seem right that for an animal it is different."

Rep. Steve Drazkowski (R-Wabasha) questioned if the consumer is served by having to pay for a referral. "Obviously what we have here is two groups putting their elbows out and saying I want to get in on this."

The bill was amended to require that a chiropractor, after dispensing treatment, contact the animal's veterinarian. Following committee approval, the bill awaits action by the House.

Sponsored by Sen. Gary Kubly (DFL-

Granite Falls), the companion, SF3165, awaits action by the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Committee.

— L. SCHUTZ

CRIME

No hogging concert tickets online

When tickets went on sale last year for the Miley Cyrus/Hannah Montana "Best of Both Worlds" tour, parents who went online to get tickets shortly after the on-sale began found that the concerts were already sold out.

Tickets were subsequently resold on various Web sites for as much as 10 times the original price. This was all thanks to software that allows brokers to cut in front of everyone else in line and buy up seats.

Sponsored by Rep. Joe Atkins (DFL-Inver Grove Heights), HF2911 goes after the software and anyone using it. Approved by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 11, it now goes to the House floor.

The bill would make it a gross misdemeanor to sell, distribute or use software to get around security and move to the front of an Internet ticket buyer line.

The bill does not affect last year's law that repealed Minnesota ticket scalping statutes.

"It's no different then if there are people camped out waiting for tickets and some big bully went by and elbowed everyone out of line, and bought up all the tickets," Atkins said.

Rep. Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover), sponsor of last year's ticket reselling legislation, asked Atkins if the bill would put additional responsibilities on law enforcement, already inundated with cybercrimes like identity theft. Atkins said that it was his understanding that this is still a rare occurrence and should not come up often.

A companion bill, SF3139, sponsored by Sen. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— C. GREEN

To have a jury trial or not

Minnesota law allows a defendant in a criminal case to decide whether he or she will have a jury trial. With only 23 words, HF1218, would change that.

Sponsored by Rep. John Lesch (DFL-St. Paul), the bill was approved by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 7, and sent to the House Public Safety Finance Division.

The bill would allow a defendant to waive a

jury trial "with the approval of the court and the consent of the prosecutor."

Lesch, a St. Paul prosecutor, said that while some may argue the criminal court system exists to protect the rights of criminal defendants, that's not the case. "The criminal court system exists to ensure that fairness and truth comes out in disputes when someone is accused," he said. "This bill aims to insure that there is fairness in the courtroom."

Calling fairness "a two-way street," Dakota County Attorney Jim Backstrom said the bill is not an attack on the judiciary, but is about assuring public confidence in our criminal justice system. "Bottom line, we want to make sure that due process and fairness apply to both [parties]."

Paul Young, assistant Anoka County attorney, said that if a defendant now decides that there will be no jury trial, it's over. The prosecution should have an opportunity to be heard on the decision, he said.

John Stuart, state public defender, said that the constitution stresses rights for the individual, not for the government. Stuart also said that while other states allow for this provision, Minnesota has its own set of priorities and an excellent set of judges leading its judiciary.

A companion bill, SF3521, sponsored by Sen. Linda Scheid (DFL-Brooklyn Park), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— C. GREEN

EDUCATION

Recommendations on hold

Gov. Tim Pawlenty recommends cutting the appropriation to the Department of Education by 4 percent, just as he is recommending for other government agencies.

The House K-12 Finance Division March 12 held over HF3951, a bill on the governor's recommendations to the Department of Education.

Sponsored by Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville), the bill would establish a new review process for teachers; establish a virtual education program; and establish an alternative to post-secondary licensure. The bill would also direct the commissioner of education to establish a reciprocity agreement with adjoining states.

Mark Klein, a member of the board of directors for the Minnesota High-Tech Association and former Microsoft employee, said careers, today, rarely progress in a linear way with wage-earners, on average, doing 14

different jobs by the time they are middle-aged. He said the virtual education program would provide an alternate way into the teaching profession, especially for people from technology-based industries.

Rep. Tom Anzelc (DFL-Balsam Township) criticized ties to corporations in these programs. “The priorities are misguided here and I hope we give this all some very serious thought, this is sending us in the wrong direction.”

Rep. Pat Garofalo (R-Farmington), a network engineer, said the shortage of engineers is stifling the economy. Private sector companies would pay to put their equipment in schools and give people high-paying jobs out of high school.

The companion bill, SF3631, sponsored by Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Plummer), awaits action by the Senate Education Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

Background check flexibility

A bill sponsored by Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-St. Louis Park) would allow a school to contract with a third party to conduct criminal background checks, which are required by statute.

HF2955 was approved March 11 by the House E-12 Education Committee and referred to the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee.

Annie Doughty, executive director of human resource services for Wayzata Public Schools, said the district must now use the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension for background checks, though it does do an additional check through a third-party vendor. The district does between 500 and 600 background checks a year for new substitutes, new employees and coaches.

“Our main objective is to keep kids safe,” she said.

Doughty said the BCA does a check based on name and birth date, while the private vendor they use also performs checks based on addresses generated by the person’s Social Security number. They then go to those counties to get information. She said the BCA has made it clear that it does not have the resources to do this type of investigation.

A school hiring authority wanting to perform a more in-depth check would need to receive permission from a state compact officer; provide the officer with the contract; and ask the officer if the contractor has any security violations. The contract must specify the reasons why the background check information may be made available. The subject of a criminal history background check by a third-party contractor would have the right to obtain a copy of the background check.

A companion bill, SF2754, sponsored by Sen. Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley) awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

E-12 omnibus bill sent to floor

The House E-12 Education Committee approved its omnibus bill March 13, and sent it to the House floor.

HF3316, sponsored by Rep. Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul), would:

- add state academic growth-based measures to the Minnesota school report card;
- require school administrators to give a Tennessee warning, a warning that states the purpose and intended use for data, only when that information may lead to a student’s expulsion;
- require criminal background checks for all school employees, including coaches and those directing extracurricular activities;
- require the school district, when it conducts a Bureau of Criminal Apprehension background check on a teacher or prospective teacher, to also check with the Board of Teaching to see if that person has been disciplined for sexual conduct issues;
- ensure that people enrolled in a teacher preparation program receive instruction in historical and cultural competencies related to American Indians;
- allow a school to appeal its adequate yearly progress or status determination in writing to the education commissioner within 30 days of a decision. The special advisory committee must submit a written deci-

sion to grant or deny the appeal within 30 days;

- require schools to place scores they receive on standardized tests on transcripts;
- increase from \$20 to \$40, the amount that the commissioner may charge individuals to take the GED test; and
- close a loophole that allows parents of children declared truant to avoid an investigation from Child Infant Protective Services by withdrawing their child from school.

A companion bill, SF3001, sponsored by Sen. Chuck Wiger (DFL-Maplewood), awaits action by the Senate Education Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

Changing the revenue formula

The House K-12 Finance Division laid over for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill a plan to change the formula for integration revenue for certain Minnesota school districts.

HF3423, sponsored by Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center), would create a new class for integration revenue.

According to statute, “the revenue must be used to create or enhance learning opportunities which are designed to provide opportunities for students to have increased interracial contacts through classroom experiences, staff initiatives, and other educationally related programs.”

Under current law, school districts with over 15 percent of students of color receive the lesser of the cost of plan implementation minus aid received or \$129 times the adjusted pupil units for the school year. This bill

YOUNG DADS



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Lee Cody Wilson, left, holds his 6-year-old son, Jontae, while participating in a “Young Dads Program” March 10 in the Capitol Rotunda.

would allow districts with more than 50 percent students of color to receive the lesser of implementation costs or \$445 times the adjusted pupil count.

The bill would also allow school districts with a negative unreserved general fund balance greater than 2.5 percent as of June 20, 2007, to levy under the section to eliminate a deficit. This levy can only be used for cash flow requirements and cannot be used to supplement district revenue or income.

Brooklyn Center Schools Superintendent Keith Lester said the district's levy authority is one of the lowest in the metro and there is a renewal due in 2011. With declining revenue and increased inflation, the district is living off grants. "I'm not sure you can ever get out (of operating debt)," he said.

Bryan Bass, principal of Brooklyn Center High School, said the district works to try to provide a rigorous curriculum for the student population.

"We are surviving with hope and with a very committed staff on soft money," he said.

Rep. Tim Faust (DFL-Mora) said it seems totally unfair that Brooklyn Center has a similar number of students of color, but Minneapolis gets three to four times the money.

Rep. Pat Garofalo (R-Farmington) said part of the reason is that there are three districts, including Minneapolis, that statutorily receive money. The others are Duluth and St. Paul.

A companion bill, SF3204, sponsored by Sen. Linda Scheid (DFL-Brooklyn Park), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

Dept. of Education rule enforcement

A bill that would fundamentally change the way the Department of Education interacts with school districts received committee approval.

HF3596, sponsored by Rep. Tim Faust (DFL-Mora), would prohibit the education commissioner from enforcing unadopted rules.

Approved March 6 by the House E-12 Education Committee, the bill goes to the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee.

Under this bill, department pronouncements would be treated as rules, and would be unenforceable. The commissioner would need to notify districts when issuing these pronouncements that they are not enforceable.

Faust said the bill would deal with rules that add confusion and cost, especially in the special education arena.

Daryl Miller, president of Minnesota Administrators for Special Education, said in the Robbinsdale Area School District, a parent

filed a complaint on behalf of a child who was going to be attending a transitional program for students ages 18-21.

"We did not understand how we could be out of compliance, because our program was modeled after some of the exemplary programs in the state," he said. After that, the district had two requests for due process hearings which led to between \$50,000 and \$60,000 in additional costs.

Elisabeth Lodge Rogers, director of student services for the St. Cloud Area School District, said the district was served with a complaint regarding extracurricular activity paraprofessional support. A child's mother stated if the student had a paraprofessional during the school day, they should have one during an extracurricular activity.

She said if the district were required to do this, it would amount to \$580,000 additional every year.

"I do feel like it's a machine gun trying to kill a mouse," said Education Commissioner Alice Seagren. She has had some concerns because of special education requirements that are set on the federal level.

"We need to have, I think, some kind of agreement as to how we're going to move forward with this," she said.

A companion bill, SF3317, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury), awaits action by the Senate Education Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

Getting ready for kindergarten

Fewer than half of incoming kindergarteners in the state are fully prepared for school, Todd Otis, president of Ready 4 K told the House Early Childhood Learning Finance Division March 6.

HF3290, sponsored by Rep. Sandra Peterson (DFL-New Hope) would establish grants for school districts to assess and close the achievement gap of children who are not ready for kindergarten. The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in the division's omnibus bill.

Currently school districts screen incoming kindergarteners for health, academic and social skills. The grants would help school districts administer research-based assessments and coordinate with community and school-based early childhood programs. Participating school districts would be required to submit an annual report on the assessment process and results.

"These investments go a long way between providing a vital link between the early childhood and the K-12 years," Peterson said. "When we know more about how our children are doing, we can do more to help our children do better."

Karen Effrem, a board member for the group EdWatch, which opposes kindergarten screening, said the best way for children to close achievement gap is to grow up in an "intact family with religious affiliation."

She said the percentage of children who are truly unprepared for kindergarten is much lower than the popular conception, and that the school-run assessments are subjective.

"It is very hard to accurately assess a child, especially a young child, because they do grow and change so rapidly," she said.

Rep. Ryan Winkler (DFL-Golden Valley), said he and his wife met recently with their 4-year-old son's preschool teacher, who gave them a page and a half of information based on observations of their son.

"It was a whole bunch of subjective things, but it was extremely valuable for us as parents just to see the difference between how he behaved and interacted at school, versus how he behaved and interacted with us at home," he said.

Sen. Terri Bonoff (DFL-Minnetonka) sponsors the companion bill, SF3044, which awaits action by the Senate Education Committee.

— C. BLANCHARD

Special education study extension

The House E-12 Education Committee sent a bill to the floor that would allow completion of a study on state special education.

HF3621, sponsored by Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center), would permit the Special Education Task Force to complete its work by extending its term to Feb. 15, 2009.

The task force was created during the 2007 legislative session to recommend to the Legislature how Minnesota's special education provisions, that exceed minimum federal requirements, might be amended to conform to federal requirements or made more effective.

Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Plummer) said the task force held seven full-day meetings, instead of the planned four, reviewing approximately 119 separate statutes.

The task force has so far reviewed 73 rules, partly because of time constraints, and partly because the Department of Education was reviewing the rules at that time, Stumpf said.

Rep. Marsha Swails (DFL-Woodbury) said she was struck by a comparison to Wisconsin, which has 26 statutes. "If Wisconsin can do it, certainly Minnesota can do it," she said.

John Guffman, a parent serving on the task force, disagrees that the state system is overregulated. "I would oppose holding ourselves out like Wisconsin, which has seven times more litigation than Minnesota," he said.

A companion bill, SF3465, sponsored by Sen. Linda Scheid (DFL-Brooklyn Park), awaits action by the Senate Education Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

ELECTIONS

Election changes proposed

A bill incorporating several elections provisions was approved by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee on March 11 and sent to the House floor.

Provisions from various elections bills were inserted into HF3172, sponsored by Rep. Gene Pelowski Jr. (DFL-Winona). The strategy of bundling elections bills was implemented with hopes that a bundle has a better chance of being signed into law by the governor than the omnibus bills that have failed in the past.

Incorporated from the original text of Pelowski's bill are provisions that would:

- require the governor to call for a special election within five days after a legislative vacancy occurs, with a special election to be held no more than 35 days thereafter;
- provide that a candidate must file no later than 14 days before a special primary; and
- provide that standard recount laws will apply to a special primary or election.

Provisions from HF965/SF753*, sponsored by Rep. Carol McFarlane (R-White Bear Lake) and Sen. Sandy Rummel (DFL-White Bear Lake), would:

- change election judge requirements to require that at least two election judges in each precinct must be affiliated with different major political parties, and allowing that other individuals not affiliated with a major political party can be appointed as judges at any time; and
- exempt townships from party balance requirements in elections that are not held along with a statewide election due to township elections being nonpartisan. Also included is a similar exemption for school district elections.

Integrated from HF768, sponsored by Rep. Jeremy Kalin (DFL-North Branch), are provisions that would:

- permit county auditors to deliver absentee ballots to designated agents;
- permit voters to designate agents if they would have difficulty getting to the polls because of health reasons, disability or residence at an assisted living facility; and
- change from four to seven the number of days preceding an election when an agent can be designated.

Provisions from HF646/SF380,* sponsored by Rep. Denise Dittrich (DFL-Champlin) and Sen. Chuck Wiger (DFL-Maplewood), include:

- permit counties, municipalities or school districts to conduct special elections via mail;
- permit school boards to decide whether to hold a primary election;
- modify the deadline for candidates to file for school board elections; and
- permit school district elections to be conducted via an approved electronic voting system.

A provision from HF2866, sponsored by Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-St. Louis Park), would permit existing "old" voter registration applications to be used, without alteration, until they are gone.

A companion bill SF2574, sponsored by Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope), awaits action by the full Senate.

— B. HOGENSON

Easier voting from overseas

A bill that would modify certain procedures and requirements for absentee voting by military and other overseas voters was approved by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee March 12 and sent to the House floor.

Sponsored by Rep. Jeremy Kalin (DFL-North Branch) and Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes (DFL-Winona), HF1259/SF1218* would permit the transmission of absentee ballots electronically, in certain circumstances, and would permit the secretary of state to adopt rules to facilitate absentee voting in emergency situations.

The bill is designed to rectify the problem of Minnesota military members and other overseas voters not always having their ballots counted.

"This bill removes significant barriers of bureaucracy and red tape from American citizens overseas being able to exercise their democratic rights," Kalin said.

In addition to military members, electronic transmission of absentee ballots would be available for civilians who are living outside the country, but are authorized by federal law to vote. Others who have never resided in the United States would be eligible, if they have parents who maintain residence in Minnesota for at least 20 days before their departure from the United States.

"The commander-in-chief has asked our service members to serve as defenders of democracy overseas, and our citizens overseas, in whatever capacity they work or live overseas, are ambassadors of democracy,"

Kalin said. "And the core foundation of democracy is the right to vote."

An amendment, unsuccessfully proposed by Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague), would have modified the bill to deal specifically with military voting. She said the governor would not sign the bill in its current form because provisions in the bill were mentioned in the governor's veto message of a similar bill last year.

"We can't blame anybody but ourselves if we don't get the military portions done," Brod said.

The bill was passed 63-1 by the Senate on April 23, 2007.

— B. HOGENSON

Keeping voter information current

A bill intended to keep the voter registration rolls updated and allow more efficient elections was passed by the House 115-16 March 10.

HF1546, sponsored by Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-St. Louis Park), would modify procedures for processing voter registration notices that are returned as undeliverable due to a lack of valid address. Simon said this has become problematic, leading to the same voter being registered at more than one location.

In order to avoid that pitfall, the bill establishes a procedure for the secretary of state to collect information from the U.S. Postal Service and electronically distribute it to county auditors in order to update the statewide voter registration system and avoid voters being registered at multiple locations.

"This will speed up the process on Election Day," Simon said.

The bill awaits action by the Senate, where it is sponsored by Sen. Dan Larson (DFL-Bloomington).

— B. HOGENSON

ENERGY

Reconnecting heat service

Utility customers who enter into a payment agreement with their heating utility company after having their service disconnected could get their heat turned back on faster, under a bill passed 132-0 by the House March 10.

HF3368, sponsored by Rep. Linda Slocum (DFL-Richfield), would require utility companies to make "reasonable efforts" to restore heat service within 24 hours of an agreement during the state's cold weather rule period (Oct. 15 to April 15). The bill now goes to the Senate, where Sen. John Doll (DFL-Burnsville) is the sponsor.

Calling heating service a "basic right" for Minnesotans, Slocum noted that the Public

Utilities Commission and representatives from utility companies have agreed to the bill's language.

The bill would also provide that:

- a utility customer has a right to a payment agreement that takes into account the financial circumstances of their household, even if it exceeds 50 percent of the state's median income;
- utilities may not charge additional service deposits for customers who are "reasonably on time" in fulfilling their accepted payment agreements; and
- utilities must submit their monthly reports on disconnections, past due accounts and other customer data to the PUC within 45 days after the last day of the month to which the data refers.

Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano) tried unsuccessfully to amend the bill by making the rule apply only to those utility customers who do not have outstanding warrants or civil judgments to resolve. Slocum said Emmer's amendment would have slowed the bill's progress.

— N. BUSSE

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Justice Act proposed

According to Rep. Joe Mullery (DFL-Mpls), minority communities are disproportionately affected by industrial pollution and other environmental health risks. A bill he sponsors is intended to help put an end to it.

HF205, also known as the Environmental Justice Act, would help ensure that people of all races, cultures and incomes are treated fairly in the development and implementation of environmental laws and policies in Minnesota. The House Environment and Natural Resources Committee approved the bill March 11.

The bill would establish a multi-agency Environmental Justice Task Force to make recommendations to state agencies on environmental justice issues. Local governments would be able to petition the task force to develop action plans to remediate environment-related health concerns in their communities.

Additionally, the bill would direct the Environmental Quality Board to create a 15-member Environmental Justice Advisory Council to advise the board on similar issues.

Cecilia Martinez, a leadership fellow with the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy at the University of Delaware, praised the bill and cited research showing that pollution tends to affect "those who have

low incomes and those who do not have the capacity to participate in the public policy process."

Rep. Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji) said he supports the concept of environmental justice, adding that a federal Superfund site in his district has been neglected for years in large part because most of the residents are minorities; however, Moe said he is dubious as to whether the bill would really solve the problem.

"I hate to be cynical, but how is another commission, how is another group going to help us?" Moe said.

Martinez replied that it was a "legitimate question," and added that Mullery's bill is only a first step toward environmental justice.

The bill now goes to the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee. It has no Senate companion.

— N. BUSSE

Lake Vermilion park hits a snag

A bill sponsored by Rep. David Dill (DFL-Crane Lake) would establish the Lake Vermilion State Park — but with some strings attached.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty has been a vocal proponent of the plan to establish a new state park on a 3,000-acre block of undeveloped land on Lake Vermilion in northeastern Minnesota. Dill said he supports the plan too, but with one caveat: if St. Louis County is going to sell the land for the park to the state, Dill wants the state to give some of its land to the county too.

His bill, HF3433, would authorize the Department of Natural Resources to acquire the land for the park — but only if the state then ceded an equal amount of school trust land to the county. The Lake Vermilion State Park would then be designated as a school trust land, with park revenue going toward the state's school trust fund.

"We need to have an offset, so that as this land is taken off the tax rolls, and becomes public for a state park, that we have other lands that are owned by the state that will then be put on the tax rolls," Dill said.

Assistant Commissioner Bob Meier said the department had "drastic concerns" about the plan, noting that the DNR just finished exchanging all of the school trust lands out of the park system.

Other opponents included Judy Erickson, government relations director of the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota, who said it would set a bad precedent for the state to pay for a new state park and then have the parks revenues go somewhere else.

Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee didn't like

the plan either. A motion to approve the bill March 11 and send it to the House Finance Committee failed on a division vote of 6-6.

A companion bill, SF3076, sponsored by Sen. Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— N. BUSSE

Getting tough on toxic chemicals

In December 2006, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency changed the rules that require companies to publicly disclose information on toxic chemical emissions from their facilities, essentially easing the requirements so that fewer companies had to report the data. Rep. Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji) sponsors a bill that would put Minnesota back on the old rules.

HF3685 would roll back the federal rule change, which allows polluters who work with 10 times the amount of toxic substances previously allowed to emit toxins into the environment without having to disclose the amounts they emit or where the emissions go. The bill is headed for the House floor, after being approved March 11 by the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

"This is an example of a bill that was brought to me by the Pollution Control Agency because they're trying to do the right thing," Moe said, adding that the EPA's ruling essentially made it easier for companies to pollute.

Before December 2006, companies that managed quantities of chemicals listed on the EPA's Toxic Release Inventory were required to report details on any toxic emissions if they managed more than 500 pounds of toxic chemicals. Since the rule change was implemented, only companies managing more than 5,000 pounds of the chemicals are required to report those details.

The previous reporting requirements had been in place since 1990. Minnesota has joined 11 other states in filing a lawsuit against the EPA to restore the previous requirements.

If enacted, the bill would be retroactive from Jan. 1, 2007, to ensure that no data gaps exist from previous TRI reporting.

A companion, SF3580, sponsored by Sen. Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley), awaits action by the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

— N. BUSSE

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

911 mental health line

It's an echo the House Mental Health Division has been hearing repeatedly from mental health advocates: Minnesota needs

improvements in services to those with mental illness.

Rep. Patti Fritz (DFL-Faribault) sponsors HF3147 that would instruct the human services commissioner to convene a working group to determine the feasibility of creating a statewide toll-free telephone number for mental health crisis calls. The working group would consist of members from crisis providers, the Minnesota Ambulance Association, law enforcement, 911 call centers, consumers, families and mental health advocates.

Fritz said some counties have mental health crisis numbers, but many times the only option is to call the police or for an ambulance. She said neither can always handle the mental health episode with the most appropriate services.

The bill was approved March 7 and now goes to the House Health and Human Services Committee. A companion bill, SF3030, sponsored by Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville), awaits action by the Senate Health, Housing and Family Security Committee.

Dan Parnell, whose 19-year-old son was diagnosed with mental illness four years ago, told the division about a recent episode in which he knew calling the police would agitate his son even more. He had no crisis service to call that could deal with the situation most effectively, he said.

Grand Rapids has a crisis call system that has resulted in a decrease of hospitalizations of those experiencing mental episodes, as well as ambulance transports of patients to mental health facilities, said Sue Abderholden, executive director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Minnesota. A crisis line could direct callers to a mental health service that could deal with a crisis most effectively, she said.

— P. OSTBERG

Calculating cancer risks

The cancer risk to human from carcinogens in the air, water or soil would be assessed under a bill approved by the House Health and Human Services Committee March 10.

Sponsored by Rep. Erin Murphy (DFL-St. Paul), HF3333 would require the health commissioner to identify the risk of known and probable carcinogens. This would be established by a formula whereby no more than one person in one million people exposed to a substance or chemical over a lifetime would be estimated to develop cancer from exposure.

Substances categorized as known and probable carcinogens would be defined by at least one of the following agencies: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Health and Human Services National Toxicology Program or the World



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Cancer survivor Susan Nordbye testifies before the House Health and Human Services Committee March 10 in support of a bill that would establish a standard of protection for the risk of cancer and require modification of rules.

Health Organization International Agency for Research and Cancer.

The bill now goes to the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee. A Senate companion, SF2944, sponsored by Sen. Sandy Rummel (DFL-White Bear Lake), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

Samuel Yamin, a public health scientist with the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, said seven states apply “the more protective end of the United States Environmental Protection Agency range.” There are hundreds of substances listed as carcinogens that have been studied and are known to cause cancer, he said.

Rep. Steve Gottwalt (R-St. Cloud) said he respects the effort, but the bill would cause sweeping changes that could be costly to state businesses. The “cost impact is untold” and would be an important factor in whether businesses choose Minnesota as their home, he said.

Yamin said people should consider the health costs, averaging about \$20,000 annually, to community and hospitals when a person is diagnosed with cancer. When ranked with other states, Minnesota has higher rates of breast and prostate cancer, he said.

— P. OSTBERG

Auto purchase and repair grants

The House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division heard a proposal March 10 that would give community action agencies money to help individuals with auto repairs and purchases. It was laid over for possible inclusion in a division omnibus bill.

Sponsored by Rep. Morrie Lanning (R-Moorhead), HF3208 would appropriate \$3 million for the current biennium to a fund that the human services commissioner would distribute to agencies. Each agency would provide a 10 percent match using either nonstate funds or in-kind services. Loans and grants could be given to families and individuals whose income makes them eligible for benefits under the Minnesota Family Investment Program.

The bill is “to help families who are on welfare be able to work their way off welfare and be able to retain employment,” said Lanning. A similar proposal was in last year’s health and human services bill, but the funding process was questioned by the department, and therefore vetoed by the governor, he said.

“Community action agencies are the masters of match funding,” said Joe Pederson, executive director for Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership. “We know how to make the best use of the dollar.”

Over the past six years we’ve made loans and grants to more than 70 families, and most are single moms, said Steve Nagle, executive director for West Central Minnesota Communities Actions Inc. In rural Minnesota “there’s virtually no public transportation that will work for people” to get to needed places such as daycare, he said.

There was no opposition to the bill.

A Senate companion, SF3113, sponsored by Sen. Julie Rosen (R-Fairmont), awaits action in the Senate Finance Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

Standards for surrogate mothers

Because of medical advances over the last few decades, families can use surrogate mothers to help with the birth of a child.

HF3448, sponsored by Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover), would provide the requirements for a “gestational carrier agreement” — an agreement between the surrogate mother and the intended mother and father.

Approved by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 12, it now goes to the House floor. A companion, SF2965, sponsored by Sen. Linda Higgins (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Tingelstad said that while surrogate

arrangements have been happening in Minnesota for some time, the bill would provide standards and safeguards.

The bill proposes that any agreement include specifics about compensation, reimbursement for medical and legal services, and that the woman carrying the baby abstain from certain activities, including smoking, drinking and using nonprescription drugs. It also defines the parent-child relationship, and requires that any compensation be placed in an escrow account.

Tom Pritchard, president of the Minnesota Family Council, said the bill would unwisely break new ground, opening the way for “designer babies.”

Curtis Herbert, a private attorney, said that the issue is whether the state wants to “commoditize” baby making. “I give you the money, you give me the baby.” Herbert also said that although other states and countries may permit such agreements, none of them embrace compensation.

Taking exception to Herbert’s analogy, Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center) said that because the arrangements are happening, and will continue to happen, the Legislature has to decide “whether it will set up standards, or we can have none.”

— C. GREEN

Children’s mental health services

A bill that would lay out guidelines to mental health providers on restraint procedures on children in day treatment facilities was approved by the House Mental Health Division March 7.

Sponsored by Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Mpls), HF3377 would require each agency to have a plan for when restrictive procedures and seclusion might be used on children, and under what conditions procedures would be used, including the use of mechanical restraints.

The bill also specifies the need for oversight by a treatment center mental health professional when restraining measures are used. Parental consent would be requested at the time of program enrollment for the use of restrictive measures, and immediate notification of a parent would be required if a procedure is used.

Unlike day treatment programs that are not covered by certain rules, the use of restraint in both inpatient hospital programs and residential treatment facilities is strictly regulated, said Glenace Edwall, director of the Department of Human Services’ Children’s Mental Health Division.

Rep. Larry Hosch (DFL-St. Joseph) asked whether the changes would apply to school systems. Schools are governed by special

education rules, and their standards are much lower, said Sue Abderholden, executive director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Minnesota.

A consistent community-wide standard would be the goal, she said. It would be especially important for children that, in the course of a day, could switch from a school’s treatment program to a community day treatment program where use of restrictive procedures can vary widely.

“You can actually learn other techniques to deal with these behaviors that work very, very effectively and we don’t have to resort to them if we get the right training,” Abderholden said.

The bill now goes to the House Finance Committee.

A companion bill, SF3049, sponsored by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the full Senate.

— P. OSTBERG

Parents’ newborn screening rights

When a child is born in Minnesota, they are screened for 53 rare and serious medical conditions. This process, however, conflicts with state law governing genetic information collection.

Sponsored by Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Mpls), HF3438 would rectify that. It was approved by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 7, and awaits action by the House Health and Human Services Committee.

Thissen said the day after the birth of his third child, his family was told about an unknown health condition. “Had we not found out, he would have gotten very sick. Because of the screening, we caught it and he’s doing great.”

Under current statute, written consent must be given for genetic material collection, and this would include all newborn screenings. One can ‘opt-in’ to the program only with written consent. Under the bill, newborn screening would be done unless the procedure was declined, meaning the parents could ‘opt-out.’

This distinction is problematic, said Twila Brase, president of the Citizens’ Council on Health Care.

Brase said that parents should not only be given an opportunity to ‘opt-in,’ but that they should be told the samples taken are not for newborn tests, but genetic testing. According to Brase, there are now more than 1.4 million profiles of newborns in a state database, with more than 700,000 genetic samples on file. These samples are now considered government property, and were taken without the parents’ knowledge or consent, she said.

Joanne Bartkus, director of the Public Health Laboratory Division at the Department

of Health, said 73,000 children are annually screened for medical conditions, and that it’s important to continue the program. The bill would help strengthen how information is given to parents.

The bill would also allow parents to decline to have test results used for research, and would require the department to present a report to the Legislature on the newborn screening process.

A companion bill, SF3138, sponsored by Sen. Ann Lynch (DFL-Rochester), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— C. GREEN

Ombudsman for mental health

The state’s Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities would be permitted to retain paper copies of records, under a bill approved March 12 by the House Health and Human Services Committee.

HF3576, sponsored by Rep. Shelley Madore (DFL-Apple Valley), would allow the office’s information gathering to include paper, as well as electronic forms. Also under the bill, clients would further be defined as “a now deceased person who had been served by an agency, facility, or program.”

The bill now goes to the House floor.

For 20 years, the office has monitored state government health systems and investigated complaints by the public, said Roberta Opheim, state ombudsman for mental health and mental retardation. Concerns were recently raised by the Human Services Department that office staff could possibly lose private patient’s records when driving to and from various locations across the state. Opheim said when reviewing and investigating complaints, many times health records are not available in electronic format and paper copies are needed.

The department would like the office to have files sent electronically from locations, so information isn’t moving from facilities into an individual’s car, Anne Barry, chief compliance officer with the department, said in a previous committee. “We know that if there are going to be breaches of information it’s generally because somebody made a copy.”

Opheim said the office has never had an incident of losing or misplacing personal files and needs the copies to examine details in files. Both offices have been working together to come up with an electronic solution, but have yet to reach consensus, she said.

A companion bill, SF3225, sponsored by Sen. Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

Small-employer health insurance

A bill approved by the House Health and Human Services Committee March 10 would require the state's health insurers to provide flexible benefit plans to businesses with no more than 50 employees.

Sponsored by Rep. Denise Dittich (DFL-Champlin), HF3721 would require health carriers to provide information to small-employers on the availability of various plans that the 2005 Legislature passed.

The 2005 health care reform packages were designed to give small businesses product flexibility and cost reductions, Dittich said. The problem is insurance companies are not offering or marketing those plans.

Information on the plans would be displayed with other product information on the health carrier's public Web site and delivered to each employer currently insured by the carrier at the time of the employer's renewal.

Her original proposal would have mandated the state's top three insurance companies offer the plans, but an amendment successfully offered by Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Mpls) removed references to specific health carriers. The bill would now apply to "each health

carrier in the small employer market."

Dannette Coleman, Medica vice president of public policy and government relations, said other low-cost products are already mandated; therefore, the legislation wouldn't provide any added health benefits.

Rep. Steve Gottwalt (R-St. Cloud) said the bill attempts to regulate the health care market with the potential of small employers not even purchasing the plans. It would also add costs to health carriers because each health benefit plan offered to consumers is required to be approved by the commerce commissioner, he said.

The bill now goes to the House Commerce and Labor Committee.

A Senate companion, SF3446, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury), awaits action by the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

HIGHER EDUCATION

Securing a tuition price for students

Planning for college costs can mean lots of uncertainty for students and their parents.

Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Jordan) sponsors HF43, which would guarantee up to four years of stable tuition at any school in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system or the University of Minnesota.

"This is probably the second biggest investment Americans make, yet all we can do is give them a variable rate mortgage on their education," he said. "This is an attempt to put in another option when it comes to financing a college education."

Heard March 10 by the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division, it was laid over for possible inclusion in the division's omnibus bill.

A companion bill, SF232, sponsored by Sen. Chris Gerlach (R-Apple Valley), awaits action by the Senate Higher Education Committee.

"Right now we give broad latitude to both the MnSCU system and the University of Minnesota to set its tuition rates. This bill does not change that one iota," Buesgens said. "This just adds a second component."

The bill would require that, beginning this fall, tuition charged to an undergraduate enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program at a state college or university for each semester during a four-year period could not exceed the tuition that the student was charged during the first semester of enrollment. For students seeking a two-year associate's degree the limit would be two years.

A student who continues to be enrolled after

the specified period would see their tuition increase to the rate paid by new enrollees at the school.

Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia), the division chairman, commended Buesgens for the idea, but expressed concern that somebody would have to make up the difference of potential lost revenue.

"Is it the following freshman class or is it the students themselves, because the tuition gets jacked up in recognition? This is a capitalistic commodity."

— M. COOK

HOUSING

Keeping the heat on

A bill that would make it easier for tenants to take over utility payments from their landlords was approved by the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee March 10 and sent to the House floor.

Sponsored by Rep. Bob Gunther (R-Fairmont) and Sen. Rick Olseen (DFL-Harris), HF3428/SF2909* would allow a tenant to restore utility service by paying outstanding utility charges that would otherwise be the responsibility of the landlord.

Gunther said the problem of landlords leaving their tenants freezing and in the dark has been predominantly limited to the Twin Cities metropolitan area. After hearing stories about it from Rep. Joe Mullery (DFL-Mpls), action was taken to draft the bill.

"What this bill does is simply allow the tenant to call the landlord and tell him they're taking over so they can have power and heat; then call the utilities and say, 'We will pay the heat from now on, please turn it back on,'" Gunther said. "They will then take the amount that they pay off their rent."

If a residential building has less than five units, the bill allows tenants to become the customer of record and the responsible bill payer for the utility account. If the residential building is single metered, other tenants in the building may contribute payments to the utility company or municipality on the landlord's account or the account of a tenant who is the customer of record.

The bill was passed 63-0 by the Senate March 6.

— B. HOGENSON

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

County appointive positions

Two bills allowing certain offices in Nicollet and Yellow Medicine counties to be appointive were passed by the House on March 10.

Sponsored by Rep. Terry Morrow (DFL-St.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Mike Haas, a member of IBEW Local Union 110 in St. Paul, listens March 11 as union leaders discuss concerns about the number of unemployed electricians and the additional electricians being trained by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities during a joint hearing of the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division and the Senate Higher Education Budget and Policy Division.

Peter), HF2816 would allow Nicollet County to make the office of auditor-treasurer appointive, if approved by a voter referendum. It passed 90-42.

HF2907, sponsored by Rep. Aaron Peterson (DFL-Appleton), would allow Yellow Medicine County to make the offices of recorder, auditor and treasurer appointive, subject to an 80 percent vote of the county board. The bill provides for a reverse referendum. It passed 89-43.

Rep. Torrey Westrom (R-Elbow Lake) said that the House, by voting to make local offices appointive, was taking away the local ability of voters to make changes when they see fit.

"Don't vote to strip away local voters' right to decide," Westrom said.

Both now await action on the Senate floor. Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato) and Sen. Gary Kubly (DFL-Granite Falls) are the respective sponsors.

— B. HOGENSON

Going after delinquent taxes

A bill giving the Big Stone County Board additional options for collecting delinquent taxes was passed 132-0 by the House March 6.

Sponsored by Rep. Aaron Peterson (DFL-Appleton), HF3157 would allow the county board, by resolution, to assign to the county treasurer all duties that relate to delinquent real property taxes, including forfeiture of real property for nonpayment of taxes. Concurrence of the county treasurer and auditor is also required.

"In 2006, the state auditor granted this Big Stone County request for a waiver," Peterson said. "The recommendation is to make that permanent and allow tax-forfeited properties to return to the county tax base in a timelier manner. It was found the same county staff person performs these duties, but is supervised by two different county officials."

Received March 10 by the Senate, the bill awaits action by the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee where Sen. Gary Kubly (DFL-Granite Falls) is the sponsor.

— B. HOGENSON

Funding a holiday observance

A bill that would increase the amount of money counties are authorized to spend for Memorial Day observances was passed 131-0 by the House March 6.

Sponsored by Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague), HF2599 would increase the amount a county board is authorized to spend on the observance to \$3,500. The new amount would be effective July 1, 2008, and mark the first increase since the amount was increased from

DEFICIT-REDUCTION CONCERNS



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Students listened as University of Minnesota President Robert Bruininks tells the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division March 12 that raising tuition would be a last resort to deal with the \$27.2 million budget cut to the university that Gov. Tim Pawlenty has recommended in his deficit-reduction plan.

\$1,500 to \$2,000 in 1984.

Prior to the statutes being passed in 1911 and 1921, counties were not authorized to appropriate any money for Memorial Day exercises.

In addition, the bill would increase from \$100 to \$300 the amount a county board may appropriate to each post of a recognized military service persons' organization or society to help pay for Memorial Day exercises. This amount was last increased in 1979.

Received March 10 by the Senate, the bill awaits action by the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee. Sen. Jim Vickerman (DFL-Tracy) is the Senate sponsor.

— B. HOGENSON

Money for parks, recognitions

A bill allowing towns to spend money for recognition of volunteers, service efforts, retiring town officers, or to host or support a community celebration was passed 132-0 by the House March 6.

Sponsored by Rep. Tom Anzelc (DFL-Balsam Township), HF2636 clarifies a provision relating to parks and authorizes expenditures for the purpose of recognizing volunteers, service efforts, retiring officials and hosting community celebrations.

It also strikes a provision that would require a separate election for a ballot question to direct the town board to raise funds for parks. By allowing the electors to authorize the town board to spend money for the purpose of

recognitions and community celebrations, towns would have the same authority already granted to cities under Minnesota statutes.

The bill awaits action by the full Senate. Sen. Tom Saxhaug (DFL-Grand Rapids) is the Senate sponsor.

— B. HOGENSON

MILITARY

Helping employers of those deployed

When military reservists or National Guard members are deployed, it's not only an adjustment for their families, but also the businesses where they work.

Two bills approved by the House Veterans Affairs Division March 7 would help ease the situation.

Rep. Bob Dettmer (R-Forest Lake) sponsors HF3427, which would create a revolving loan fund for qualifying businesses to receive a onetime \$20,000 loan, if they have suffered economic losses because of an essential employee being deployed, even if that employee is the sole proprietor.

The bill would also expand the displaced workers program to include veterans who are honorably discharged and are earning less than they should be paid, based on their qualifications and skills they developed while serving in the military. The bill now awaits action in the House Finance Committee.

"When we look at returning veterans we really need to look at three areas: the veteran,

their family and their employer. These initiatives are designed to reduce barriers for the returning veterans and help them be successful and the employers," said Col. Eric Ahlness, Minnesota National Guard director of government relations.

Rep. Kathy Tangelstad (R-Andover) sponsors HF3686 that would give a reservist-owned business some measure of protection from civil court proceedings for a minimum of 60 days, while the person is deployed.

Donald Kerr, principal planner for the Department of Military Affairs, said previous legislation protects rights of individual deployed soldiers and their families from civil action, "however we failed to protect wholly-owned businesses of those services members." He cited an example of a person who had to back out of some contracts because of being deployed to Iraq, and found his business was not protected.

The bill was referred to the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee.

Sen. Amy Koch (R-Buffalo) sponsors SF3055, the Senate companion to Dettmer's bill, which awaits action by the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee. The Senate companion to Tangelstad's bill is SF3743, sponsored by Sen. Leo Foley (R-New Ulm). It awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee

— L. SCHUTZ

SAFETY

The return of 'photo cop'

Cameras taking photos of motorists going through red lights in Minneapolis may be turned back on.

HF3863, sponsored by Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Mpls), would authorize local units of government to operate traffic light cameras. Drivers caught would be mailed a ticket, but the ticket could not serve as grounds for a license suspension, and would not appear on the driver's record.

Approved by the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 7, the bill's next stop is the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee. The Senate companion, SF3656, is sponsored by Sen. Linda Higgins (DFL-Mpls). It awaits action in the Senate Transportation Committee.

The bill would provide that half of the fine proceeds be used for law enforcement, with a portion targeted for emergency medical services recruitment efforts.

Thissen said that when the cameras were previously operating in the summer of 2005 there was at least a 30 percent drop in crashes at intersections with the cameras, leading to saved lives and reduced insurance rates. They were turned off after a March 2006 court

case challenging the constitutionality of the devices.

John Cummings, founder of Minnesotans for Safe Driving, spoke of two incidents where drivers were killed when other motorists didn't stop for a red light. "People should have the ability to protect themselves, and this is one of the things that will do it. This changes behavior."

William Gillespie, executive director of the Minnesota Police & Peace Officers Association, said that the bill would usurp authority from local peace officers.

Rep. Tony Cornish (R-Good Thunder) said the bill takes away from community policing and does not guarantee increased safety.

A similar bill, HF1058, also sponsored by Thissen, failed to get committee approval last year.

— C. GREEN

Quit texting, focus on driving

There are many distractions behind the wheel, but Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls) calls text messaging the most extreme.

He is sponsoring HF3726, which would ban the practice while driving.

It would prohibit a driver from "using a wireless communications device to compose, read, or send, an electronic message, when the vehicle is in motion or a part of traffic."

By definition, a wireless communications device includes a cell phone or portable electronic device capable of receiving and transmitting data, such as text messages and e-mails.

"According to one media report, 25 percent of teens are engaged at one time or another in text messaging while driving," Hornstein said. "I think it's very clear why this would be a hazard. One would have to take their eyes off the road, at least temporarily."

Approved March 6 by the House Transportation Finance Division, the bill now heads to the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee. A companion bill, SF3562, sponsored by Sen. Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing), awaits action by the Senate Transportation Committee.

"We're a strong supporter of this," said Jeff Nachbar, public policy director for the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota.

The bill provides exceptions for using a wireless communications device, including: if it is in a voice-activated or other hands-free mode; for obtaining emergency assistance; if the person believes life or safety is in immediate danger; and in an authorized emergency vehicle while performing official duties.

If enacted, Minnesota would become the third state to ratify such a law, following Washington and New Jersey. "I always like it

when Minnesota is the first to do something, but I think it'd be great if we were at least in the first three in the country," said Hornstein, who laughed while admitting to the division that he doesn't know how to text.

— M. COOK

TAXES

Conforming bill becomes law

**Signed
by
the
governor**

The third time's a charm for an omnibus tax bill.

On March 7, Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed it into law — the third omnibus tax bill presented to the governor this biennium. He vetoed the first two bills presented in 2007.

Sponsored by Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington) and Sen. Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook), the new law will affect primarily tax preparers and Minnesotans who qualify for new updates to the state tax code. The law conforms to most of the changes Congress made over the year, including several new benefits for members of the military and civil servants.

The new law:

- allows members of the military to put nontaxable combat pay toward IRA contributions;
- allows a direct transfer of money from IRAs to charities;
- limits some charitable contributions, like used household items and clothes, and requires appraisals for items valued more than \$500;
- permanently increases contribution limits to several retirement plans;
- allows public safety retirees to exclude \$3,000 from government pensions to pay for qualified health insurance premiums;
- creates an itemized deduction for mortgage insurance premiums;
- allows a one-time rollover to health savings accounts;
- excludes from gross income the indebtedness on a house; and
- excludes up to \$360 of income paid to volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians.

Most provisions in the new law took effect March 8.

Because many of the changes apply to the current tax season, Minnesotans who have already filed must send an amended tax return in order to receive any new deductions that may apply. To amend a 2007 return, filers can use the M1X form, available with instructions on the Department of Revenue Web site (www.taxes.state.mn.us).

HF3201*/SF2935/CH154

— C. BLANCHARD

Tax relief after a tornado

When a 2006 tornado wiped out several homes in her area, Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague) said the last thing homeowners needed after the rebuilding process was a property tax hike.

But when a home built in the 1910s is completely destroyed by a natural disaster, the market value of a new home can dramatically increase, even if it's the same size as the old one.

"What we're trying to do is not to have those homeowners feel the shock of those increased taxes right away," Brod said.

Brod proposed HF2412 to the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division March 7. The bill would allow homeowners to pay taxes on the value of their old home, with the tax increase on the new home phased-in over a three-year period.

Limiting a home's market value can be frustrating for assessors, Brod said, but she'd be willing to work on the bill.

The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in the division's omnibus bill.

"I really like this bill," said Division Chairman Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth), who added he is normally opposed to limited-market value.

"I do think that you're at least keeping this person from getting a double-whammy," he said. "They've suffered the damage of their home and now they fix it up and it's really not necessarily an improvement, it's just a newer home ... and now they're going to get hit with higher property taxes after this disaster."

Currently homeowners in disaster areas declared by the president are subject to some protections, but homeowners hit by local disasters, like tornadoes or floods, are not eligible for any property tax relief. The bill would apply to homes where a local emergency has been declared.

To be eligible, homes would have to sustain more than \$5,000 in damage and have an increased market value after reconstruction.

There is no Senate companion.

— C. BLANCHARD

TECHNOLOGY

Bill would boost nanotech

A House committee approved a bill that would help lay the financial groundwork for a joint public-private nanotechnology venture in Minnesota.

HF3911, sponsored by Rep. Mike Beard (R-Shakopee), would appropriate \$250,000 to the Department of Employment and Economic Development for a project that seeks to boost the state's nanotechnology

sector and make it an economic catalyst for related industries. The House Biosciences and Emerging Technology Committee approved the bill March 11 and referred it to the House Finance Committee.

The money would go toward finishing the design work for a Minnesota Center for Nanotechnology — a proposed nonprofit corporation that would coordinate nanotech initiatives around the state, with the goal of promoting industrial and academic research and stimulating economic growth.

Darrel Gubrud, president of MNNano, which is spearheading the effort, said that Beard's bill is part of a larger, long-term program that would involve up to \$10 million per year in state funding for a variety of nanotechnology research and development initiatives.

Beard called nanotechnology "the next big thing," and said that while the economic benefits of investing in such technologies would not be immediately tangible, the long-term impact of creating new high-tech jobs would be significant.

"We're looking at things that are down the road that are going to play out very handsomely for our kids and grandkids," he said.

Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Mpls) asked Beard why the state should choose to invest its limited resources in nanotechnology over other high-tech fields like genomics. Beard said that nanotechnology "deals with a host of disciplines" and would help spawn commercially viable technologies in other sectors like bioscience and medicine.

A companion bill, SF3632, sponsored by Sen. Julie Rosen (R-Fairmont), awaits action by the Senate Business, Industry and Jobs Committee.

— N. BUSSE

TRANSPORTATION

Seeking OK to study a line

Since 2002, it has been illegal for three government entities to consider a specific commuter rail line.

Sponsored by Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield), HF3003 would allow the Metropolitan Council, Department of Transportation and county regional rail authorities to study or plan for a potential Dan Patch Line from downtown Minneapolis to Northfield.

The bill was held over March 11 by the House Transportation Finance Division for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill.

A companion bill, SF2990, sponsored by Sen. Kevin Dahle (DFL-Northfield), awaits action by the Senate Transportation Committee.

"There has been great conversation about trying to renew talk about the Dan Patch Line. People didn't know there was a law that prohibited the conversation," Bly said.

The Metropolitan Council is in the process of looking at its transportation policy plan, a 30-year document designed to help decide where transit and transitway investments should take place in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

"We are studying 29 corridors throughout the region. We're not suggesting we should move forward and fund all of these. We're just trying to see which ones basically have the muster in order to be viewed as a viable transitway," said Judd Schetnan, the council's government affairs director. "I don't know if the Dan Patch Line would pass that test, but we think we should at least have the opportunity to look at it as a possible transitway."

An amendment successfully offered by Rep. Mary Liz Holberg (R-Lakeville) ensures that no money can be used for preliminary engineering, final design or construction of the line, which was previously identified as a potential corridor that would have stops in downtown Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Edina, Bloomington, Savage, Burnsville, Lakeville and Northfield. The council could later return to the Legislature for funding.

A study in the late-90s showed this line would be "extremely expensive," Holberg said. "I'm certain the result will be the same or similar in that it's just so expensive."

— M. COOK

Milk transportation weight

A bill to permanently exempt milk haulers from certain truck weight restrictions, limits and prohibitions received House approval.

Passed 132-0 March 6, it would remove a July 1, 2007, sunset in current law. It now awaits action by the full Senate.

Federal law requires dairy haulers to completely empty a milk tank on a farm before they can remove the hose to the truck, said Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar), who sponsors HF1219 with Sen. Betsy Wergin (R-Princeton).

"Because of federal food law, we are seeing larger and larger bulk tanks out there, and larger and larger herds, and consequently under spring road restrictions, because of the way they have to do this, they are overweight," Juhnke said. "They have two options at this point: ignore federal food laws, unhook and go out with the right weight and risk losing their federal license or, more likely, what they're doing today or would do if we didn't do this bill, would be to run illegally."

"Not being able to unhook means you either blow that day's profit or put it on the truck,"

AND COUNTING ...



PHOTO BY SARAH STACKE

Members meet for the 89th day of session on March 11. Legislative days are limited to 120, and May 19 is the last day the House can meet in regular session in 2008.

said Rep. Al Doty (DFL-Royalton).

Juhnke sponsored a bill a few years ago that allowed milk haulers to fill up at the point of production, and if they were overweight, they would be required to take the most direct route to a 10-ton route.

The bill does not permit a vehicle to exceed a weight restriction of 5 tons per axle by more than 2 tons per axle.

"This is not an overweight bill, it's about spring road restrictions, and when they lower the weight for a few weeks," said Bruce Kleven, representing the Minnesota Association of Cooperatives. "The rest of the year, there's no issue and the guys are running legally." He said North Dakota and Wisconsin haulers can run heavier truck weights all year.

— M. Cook

Leave 'em room

Terry Schmitt has worked for 27 years as a Department of Transportation maintenance person in Goodhue County.

In that time, he has seen a number of near misses between motorists and a stopped maintenance vehicle; and a couple of hits, including one that severely injured two coworkers.

He spoke to the House Transportation Finance Division March 7 in support of a bill that would require motorists to move to the far left of a roadway when approaching road maintenance or construction vehicles if it is safe to change lanes. The bill would also include the Freeway Incident Response Safety Team vehicles in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, formerly known as Highway Helpers.

Sponsored by Rep. Steve Drazkowski (R-Wabasha), HF2970 was approved by the division and referred to the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee.

"We find ourselves in a position of being the first ones on the scene that a state patrol officer would find themselves in. It could be a stranded motorist or somebody that has a flat tire. We have cases when we're plowing snow where we've come across accidents or other stranded motorists that might be partially on a road or around a curve or

in some other position that could endanger them. We'll stop with our lights flashing, call the state patrol, and wait until they get there," Schmitt said. "We're trying to protect our own workers. ... We'd like a little more bite to get the traffic to move over and give us a little more room to work."

Joe Huneke, a transportation maintenance worker for 19 years, thinks the law passed for the state patrol is a great idea. "I just thought it was missing in one aspect of having maintenance workers also."

A ticket can be issued if an officer has probable cause to believe the driver has violated the law. The citation can be issued within four hours if the incident.

A companion bill, SF2810, sponsored by Sen. Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing), awaits action by the Senate Transportation Committee.

— M. Cook

Moving a registrar office

In most cases, a bank moving to a new location four blocks away would not be a big deal.

But it could be problematic in New Prague.

"The State Bank of New Prague has been providing the deputy registrar services for our area for many, many years. They have decided to build a new building not far away, but it happens to be across the county line," said Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague). "State law does not allow a deputy registrar office to move across county line without a revision."

Brod sponsors HF3128, which would provide a variance from the Public Safety Department that would allow the bank to move its deputy registrar office from Scott County to Le Sueur County. The office move must take place by the end of the year.

Approved March 6 by the House Transportation Finance Division, the bill awaits action on the House floor.

"It is not a license bureau itself, so we want to make sure that we are only changing the law for the purposes that are provided in that building," Brod said.

A companion bill, SF2755, sponsored by Sen. Kevin Dahle (DFL-Northfield), awaits action by the Senate Transportation Committee.

— M. Cook

Ensuring safe trailers

The safety of trailers and commercial vehicles is the focus of a bill aimed at protecting other motorists.

Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) sponsors HF2967, which would modify brake requirements on trailers and semi-trailers; reduce the minimum gross vehicle weight of vehicles that may have to stop for vehicle weighing; and toughen penalties for duplicating, altering or forging a commercial vehicle inspection decal.

Approved March 6 by the House Transportation Finance Division, the bill was sent to the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee.

The bill would require a trailer or semi-trailer weighing more than 3,000 pounds to have a braking capability, if it becomes detached from the towing vehicle. Current law is more than 6,000 pounds.

"In recent years we've seen a number of trailers come uncoupled from power units, and without breakaway braking they've gone down the highway and then subsequently impacted other vehicles and have been involved in fatal crashes," said Capt. Ken Urquhart, commander of the state patrol's commercial vehicle section.

The weight change would also make the state consistent with federal safety regulations.

The decal provision comes from an incident last June where authorities found that a

Highlights continued on page 22

Preparing for the worst

Emergency responders push for new training centers

By CRAIG GREEN

Disasters happen. There are fires, floods, tornadoes. Trucks can overturn and burst into flames in the middle of rush hour.

When the Interstate 35W bridge went down last August, Minnesota public safety officers were put to the test. They had to respond quickly and efficiently. They had to communicate effectively, transport 121 victims from the site to medical facilities, and move large chunks of the bridge that had fallen.

“Without proper training, prior planning, multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary response, we would not have been successful,” said Tim Leslie, assistant commissioner of the Department of Public Safety.

Leslie spoke before the House Public Safety Finance Division Feb. 14 in support of funding construction of an emergency and training center at Camp Ripley, where emergency services officials could meet and train. Funding for the center is included in the House capital investment finance bill, passed by the House March 6.

Plans for the future

In 1998, there were at least eight bills introduced seeking funding for public safety training facilities. That same year, the Legislature instructed the commissioner of public safety to provide a statewide master plan for fire and law enforcement training facilities in Minnesota.

The 1999 report, and a 2000 supplemental report, provided several recommendations on location, design, operations, funding and capacity. They stressed the use of existing facilities, the use of technology for realistic training, identifying regional funding resources, and the need for cooperation between federal, state and local governments.

Based on these reports, two sites rose to the top of numerous requests this year: Camp

Ripley and a southeastern Minnesota public safety training facility near Rochester.

This session, 16 bills have been introduced for funding various state and regional public safety facilities.

“Why are there so many proposals this year? Because there is a need,” said Olmsted County Sheriff Steven Borchardt.

State emergency training site

Camp Ripley is a 53,000-acre, state-owned military training site about 100 miles north of the Twin Cities, between Brainerd and Little Falls. It has two runways, a control tower, an administrative and operations building, helicopter pads, an aircraft hanger, and two crash fire rescue bays.

The House capital investment finance bill would provide \$4 million for construction of a new homeland security and emergency management training and exercise center at Camp Ripley. This phase would include construction of an auditorium, a simulated emergency operations center, collapsed structures and a fire hydrant system for a simulated city.

An additional phase would include construction of a dormitory, cafeteria, a burn tower and emergency vehicle driving course, at an estimated cost of \$10.91 million.

Funding for this project will be requested during the 2010 session.

Rocco Forte, director of emergency preparedness for Minneapolis, said that the emergency services would not have been as successful as they were following the bridge collapse without the training they had received at a facility in Virginia. In the future, it would be even better if there was a Minnesota facility like Camp Ripley where other officials could receive training, he said.

“An emergency is the wrong time to exchange business cards,” Leslie said, quoting his boss. Camp Ripley would provide a location for state emergency professionals to meet and train together, he said.

New regional training site

The proposal for southeastern Minnesota calls for a regional training facility, smaller in scope than Camp Ripley. The 40-acre facility would include a burn tower, driving range and weapons training facility. Included in the capital investment bill is \$3.65 million, with matching funds coming from Olmsted County and the City of Rochester.

Speaking before the House Capital Investment Finance Division, Borchardt stressed that the site is important because there is nothing like it nearby. Accessibility, he said, is a key for the many volunteer public safety officers who need training.


Borchardt said that it's important for public safety officers to have opportunities to train regularly, especially when working with

complicated equipment.

But this is hard to do when there are no local training facilities. “We’re asking people to be near perfect with physical responses during the most harrowing times

in their lives,” Borchardt said. “And it takes accessibility; that’s the only way it’s going to work.”

Each facility is also included in Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s bonding recommendations.

The Senate capital investment bill, SF3295, sponsored by Sen. Keith Langseth (DFL-Glyndon), includes requested funding for both projects, as well. 

“An emergency is the wrong time to exchange business cards.”

— Tim Leslie
Assistant Commissioner of the
Department of Public Safety

Hunting and fishing galore

Omnibus game and fish bill is chock full of policy changes

By Nick Busse

Hunters, anglers and Department of Natural Resources employees take note: the 2008 omnibus game and fish bill has arrived.

HF3547, sponsored by Rep. David Dill (DFL-Crane Lake), represents the work of the House Game, Fish and Forestry Division, which Dill chairs. The bill is loaded with dozens of proposed changes to the state's hunting and fishing laws, most of which were adopted from smaller policy bills heard by the division. It has no Senate companion.

During a March 6 meeting of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee, Dill wasted no words in summarizing the bill.

"There's a lot of provisions in there," he said.

One of the more controversial measures would allow residents as young as 10 years old to hunt big game without a firearms safety certificate if accompanied by a parent or guardian who remains within arm's reach. Rep. Jean Wagenius (DFL-Mpls) said she is uncomfortable with the idea of not requiring children that young to complete some kind of firearms safety training before they go hunting.

Dill responded that the idea is to help reinvigorate the state's dwindling numbers of hunting participants by getting more young people out in the deer stand.

Rep. Denny McNamara (R-Hastings) agreed, arguing that competency with firearms wasn't the point.

"It's a very good experience and it'll introduce youngsters to the big game experience. And they may not even actually pull the trigger. I don't think that's the important thing," McNamara said.

What follows is a selected summary of the bill's provisions, broken down by category. The bill now awaits action by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREW VONBANK

Several provisions in this year's omnibus game and fish bill are designed to encourage more hunting by young people.

Fishing

- creating a "conservation angling license" that would cost two-thirds the price of a regular license, allow license-holders to take up to one-half of the normal fish possession limits, and be valid for 14 consecutive days;
- allowing anglers to fish with two lines simultaneously;
- expanding the open season for spear fishing through the ice by leaving open the season's opening date; and
- numerous provisions clarifying that statutes applying to ice houses also apply to various kinds of portable shelters used for ice fishing.

Hunting

- provisions eliminating the minimum age requirements for hunting moose, elk and prairie chicken;
- requiring residents under age 16 to obtain a license to hunt big or small game, but waving the fee;
- allowing residents ages 10 and 11 to hunt big game provided that they are within immediate reach of a parent or guardian;
- loosening firearm safety requirements for residents under age 16;

- creating a \$52 all-firearm season deer hunting license allowing hunters to take two deer, only one of which may be a buck;
- establishing a \$165 master bear hunting outfitter license that allows one person under the license to serve as the outfitter and another to guide and bait bear;
- allowing youth who will turn 12 years old within the calendar year to obtain a license to hunt big game;
- allowing the use of crossbows to hunt bear and turkey during their respective firearms seasons;
- allowing bow hunters to possess a firearm while hunting big game other than deer;
- allowing bear hunting permit applicants to apply for more than one permit area at a time by ranking their choices;
- limiting the time period in which raccoons may be hunted to between one half-hour after sunset to one half-hour before sunrise;
- requiring the DNR to submit a report to the Legislature by Jan. 1, 2009, evaluating the effectiveness and necessity of the state's uncased firearms laws; and
- increasing the cock pheasant bag limit to three per day after the 16th day of the pheasant season (a similar measure was included in last year's game and fish bill but was removed in a conference committee).

Aquaculture and miscellaneous

- requiring the DNR to file biannual reports to the Legislature on proposed fee changes that would make the department's aquaculture licensing program self-sustaining;
- asking the DNR to encourage fish farming in man-made ponds rather than natural public waters;
- prohibiting the DNR from issuing or renewing a license to raise minnows in waters subject to protective easements funded by state or federal waterfowl stamp proceeds;
- allowing those authorized to sell various DNR-issued licenses to charge a fee of up to \$3.50 for electronic licensing transactions; and
- removing a requirement for those riding horses on horse trails to visibly display their trail passes.



Monday, March 10

HF3886-Paymar (DFL) **Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Pre-confinement data access on inmates granted to the Department of Corrections.

HF3887-Heidgerken (R) **Finance**

Teacher training and experience revenue reinstated.

HF3888-Atkins (DFL) **Commerce & Labor**

Real estate transactions regulated, terms defined and closing agents regulated.

HF3889-Holberg (R) **Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Subdivision development contracts regulated.

HF3890-Finstad (R)
Environment & Natural Resources
Watonswan County Soil and Water Conservation District Board procedures provided for filling vacant supervisor positions.

HF3891-Loeffler (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Minnesota Milestones goals and indicators in budget preparation incorporated, Legislative Commission on Planning and Fiscal Policy and a working group established and Sesquicentennial Commission additional duties provided.

HF3892-Brown (DFL)
Taxes
Nonprofit outdoor recreation organization property tax exemption provided.

HF3893-Nelson (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Employment provisions modified, Fair Labor Standards Act provisions added and penalties provided.

HF3894-Bigham (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Fire sprinkler stringent local regulation allowed and clarifying changes made.

HF3895-Murphy, M. (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Statewide lump-sum voluntary retirement plan established for volunteer firefighters, conforming changes made to existing volunteer firefighter laws.

HF3896-Hornstein (DFL)
Transportation Finance Division
Walkways required by certain railroad tracks.

HF3897-Dill (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
St. Louis County; conveyance and compensation required for Crane Lake public access land.

HF3898-Dill (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Timber sales provisions modified and refund provided.

HF3899-Atkins (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Life insurance individual contracts regulated on a variable basis and annuity fee disclosure required.

HF3900-Mullery (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Misdemeanor penalty increase provided.

HF3901-Fritz (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Steele County; nursing home bed moratorium exception provided.

HF3902-Juhnke (DFL)
Finance
Agriculture appropriation changed.

HF3903-Brynaert (DFL)
Finance
Extended employment services funding provided and money appropriated.

HF3904-Tillberry (DFL)
Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs
Charter commission discharge provided, compensation provided, amendments authorized by ordinance and water and sewer charges provided.

HF3905-Bly (DFL)
E-12 Education
School board decision appeal allowed by potential school site.

HF3906-Bly (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Public service corporation exemptions repealed.

HF3907-Lillie (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Franchise agreements regulated between outdoor sport equipment dealers, manufacturers and distributors.

HF3908-Haws (DFL)
E-12 Education
School board requirements clarified regarding the hiring and dismissal of teachers.

HF3909-Beard (R)
Transportation Finance Division
Drivers' license ineligibility provided by dishonored check payment for vehicle taxes and fees.

HF3910-Morrow (DFL)
Finance
Office of Pupil Transportation Safety created, staffing and duties prescribed, report required and money appropriated.

HF3911-Beard (R)
Biosciences & Emerging Technology
Enabling design project funding provided and money appropriated.

HF3912-Koenen (DFL)
Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs
Commemorative medallion distribution required recognizing service in the United States armed forces during World War II.

HF3913-Gunther (R)
Commerce & Labor
Minnesota Boxing Commission name changed, penalties provided, jurisdiction extended and rulemaking authorized.

HF3914-Erhardt (R)
Transportation Finance Division
Motor vehicles required one license plate.

HF3915-Murphy, M. (DFL)
Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs
St. Louis County civil service pilot project provided.

HF3916-Dominguez (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Utility company employee assault penalties increased.

HF3917-Ozment (R)
Environment & Natural Resources
Campfire provisions modified.

HF3918-Olin (DFL)
Finance
Vehicle permit authorized for gross vehicle weight up to 105,000 pounds, permit fee allocation prescribed and money appropriated.

HF3919-Paulsen (R)
Taxes
Corporate franchise tax rate reduced, research credit increased and credit transfer allowed among unitary group, apportioning method modified, and capital equipment sales tax exemption allowed at time of purchase.

HF3920-Sailer (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
State auditor report data protection provided.

HF3921-Olson (IR)
Environment & Natural Resources
Turkey license landowner and tenant separate selection eligibility modified.

HF3922-Olson (IR)
Higher Education & Work Force Development Policy & Finance Division
Free Speech for Faculty and Students Bill of Rights enacted.

HF3923-Olson (IR)
Finance
Big Lake ice arena funding provided.

HF3924-Thao (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Optometrists allowed to dispense legend drugs at retail under certain conditions.

HF3925-Thissen (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
St. Paul Teachers Retirement Fund Association Rule of 90 benefit tier extended to post-1989 hires.

HF3926-Thissen (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Teachers Retirement Association Rule of 90 benefit tier extended to post-1989 hires.

HF3927-Thissen (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Duluth Teachers Retirement Fund Association Rule of 90 benefit tier extended to post-1989 hires.

HF3928-Olin (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Revisor's bill correcting erroneous, ambiguous and omitted text and obsolete references; eliminating redundant, conflicting and superseded provisions; and making miscellaneous corrections.

HF3929-Hilty (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Limited towns exempted from voting system requirement in certain situations.

HF3930-Hornstein (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Pollution Control Agency notification required on status of underground tanks.

HF3931-Kalin (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Mortgage redemption sales moved to end of current redemption period and mortgagee redemption rights eliminated.

HF3932-Atkins (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Reinstatement right and other provisions modified relating to mortgage foreclosure.

HF3933-Loeffler (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Executive branch employee duties and rights specified.

HF3934-Kalin (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Uniform Disclaimer of Property Interests Act adopted.

HF3935-Moe (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Outdoor heritage fund and Lessard Heritage Enhancement Council established.

HF3936-Holberg (R)
Commerce & Labor
Bomb squad employee disability payments provided.

HF3937-Ruud (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Lasers, intense pulsed light devices and radio frequency devices use regulated relating to medical treatment.

HF3938-Murphy, M. (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
Volunteer firefighter relief associations misconduct reporting required by public accountants, holding of relief assets authorized, investment limitations clarified and definitions and benefits clarified.

HF3939-Kalin (DFL)
Taxes
Special research and development corporate tax credit authorized.

HF3940-Shimanski (R)
Health & Human Services
Finger imaging system established to identify applicants for and recipients of public assistance programs; penalties imposed.

HF3941-Shimanski (R)
Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs
Somatic cell count limit increased for goat milk.

HF3942-Lesch (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Family law terminology, procedures and requirements modified.

HF3943-Koenen (DFL)
Taxes
Green acres property tax program requirements modified.

HF3944-Clark (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Fragrance-free schools education campaign established.

HF3945-Drazkowski (R)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Illegal immigration; attorney general directed to prepare a report on illegal immigration costs to the state and federal government, and monitor and record federal authorities' responses to state law enforcement officer inquiries.

HF3946-Otremba (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Abortion; saline amniocentesis prohibited and civil and criminal penalties provided.

HF3947-Otremba (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Abortion; saline amniocentesis prohibited and civil and criminal penalties provided.

HF3948-Bunn (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Physical activity costs allowed to be covered under home and community-based waivers.

HF3949-Thissen (DFL)
Finance
Shelter needy individuals support provided.

HF3950-Clark (DFL)
E-12 Education
American Indian Youth summer programming funding provided.

HF3951-Greiling (DFL)
Finance
Pre-kindergarten through grade 12 education funding provided including general education, education excellence and state agencies.

HF3952-Olson (IR)
Transportation Finance Division
Defensive driving instruction and technique required for classroom training and included in the driver's manual.

HF3953-Kalin (DFL)
Finance
Veteran-to-veteran statewide peer counseling pilot program established.

HF3954-Hosch (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Health care cooperative arrangement procedures established.

Tuesday, March 11

HF3955-Thissen (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Community-based care promoted for older adults through the establishment of a community consortium demonstration project, account established in the General Fund to distribute pooled resources and project evaluation required.

HF3956-Moe (DFL)
Finance
American Indian education liaison position established within Department of Education.

HF3957-Welti (DFL)
E-12 Education
School districts required to make data available to the public.

HF3958-Swails (DFL)
E-12 Education
Teacher licensure via portfolio established.

HF3959-Ward (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections
October designated as domestic violence awareness month in Minnesota.

HF3960-Morrow (DFL)
Transportation Finance Division
Driver education instruction relating to interaction with commercial motor vehicles required and modification of driver's manual required.

HF3961-Atkins (DFL)
Transportation Finance Division
Consultation required regarding new design for drivers' license for persons under 21 years of age.

HF3962-Morrow (DFL)
Transportation Finance Division
Spotter trucks regulated.

HF3963-Morrow (DFL)
Transportation Finance Division
Anhydrous ammonia driver hours of service provision modified.

HF3964-Magnus (R)
Finance
Transportation appropriations reduced, surcharge deleted and technical change made relating to driver examination requirements.

HF3965-Slocum (DFL)
Finance
Unused veterans' license plate disposal authorized.

HF3966-Sailer (DFL)
Finance
Upper Red Lake business loan repayment provision modified.

HF3967-Simpson (R)
Taxes
Various tax provisions modified; tax refund, withholding and subtraction changes made; tax system and association created; adjustments provided, federal conforming changes made and money appropriated.

HF3968-Sailer (DFL)
Taxes
Additional county program aid provided to meet the cost of out-of-home placement programs.

HF3969-Kahn (DFL)
Finance
Help America Vote Act funds transfer authorized.

HF3970-Hornstein (DFL)
Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs
Carbon emission planning required in local comprehensive plans.

HF3971-Simon (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Hennepin County; electronic exchange of medical data authorized.

HF3972-Gunther (R)
Finance
Jobs, economic development and housing funding provided, programs established and modified, activities and practices regulated, accounts, assessments and fees provided, code and licensing provisions changed, and money appropriated.

HF3973-Dill (DFL)
Taxes
St. Louis County; levy imposed within territory for the providing support of first responder services.

HF3974-Dominguez (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Domestic fatality review team continuation authorized.

HF3975-Smith (R)
Commerce & Labor
Attorney fees and recovery of damages provided for breach of an insurance policy.

HF3976-Huntley (DFL)
Finance
Health care program provisions changed and funding provided.

HF3977-Brynaert (DFL)
Energy Finance & Policy Division
Power transmission lines, renewable energy obligations, and related activities and costs provisions modified.

HF3978-Hornstein (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Greenhouse gas reduction planning provided, working group established, appointments provided and report required.

HF3979-Thao (DFL)
Public Safety & Civil Justice
Criminal history data access governing provisions modified.

HF3980-Buesgens (R)
Commerce & Labor
State lottery gaming machines established and contracts authorized for the management and placement of machines and power and duties provided for gaming revenue.

HF3981-Juhnke (DFL)
Finance
Veterans affairs, military affairs and the Board of Animal Health funding provided, agriculture appropriations reduced, veteran contribution plate authorized for motorcycles, grant limit and sunset date removed and money appropriated.

HF3982-Thao (DFL)**Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Racial profiling policy adoption required, data analysis required, information provided to motorists involved in traffic stops, racial profiling elimination training required, reports and improvement plans required and money appropriated.

HF3983-Hilstrom (DFL)**Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Metropolitan airport customer parking space data classified.

HF3984-Moe (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Credit scoring regulated in cases of death of a spouse or divorce.

HF3985-Zellers (R)**Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Social Security number use prohibited on the face of certain mailings.

HF3986-Zellers (R)**Commerce & Labor**

2008 Republican National Convention; temporary later closing time allowed for on-sale liquor establishments.

HF3987-DeLaForest (R)**Finance**

Republican National Convention; budget reserve escrow account established and money appropriated.

HF3988-Benson (DFL)**Finance**

Foodshelf programs funding provided.

HF3989-Eastlund (R)**Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Marriage dissolution grounds modified, and prevention notice and waiting period required.

HF3990-Winkler (DFL)**E-12 Education**

Online learning charter schools authorized to conduct board meetings by telephone or other electronic means.

HF3991-Olin (DFL)

Environment & Natural Resources
Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation water quality referral to the International Joint Commission requested by resolution.

HF3992-Ozment (R)**Finance**

Environment and natural resources funding, fish disease control and administrative sites sales proceeds disposition provided; assessment requirements modified; and money appropriated.

HF3993-Haws (DFL)**Higher Education & Work Force Development Policy & Finance Division**

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees modified to include bonding for colleges.

HF3994-Urdahl (R)**Taxes**

Lake improvement association sales tax exemption provided.

HF3995-Mullery (DFL)**Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Assaulting a utility employee or contractor gross misdemeanor established.

HF3996-Eken (DFL)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Native prairie restorations definitions modified.

HF3997-Bunn (DFL)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Land disposal facilities siting prohibited in certain areas.

HF3998-Davnie (DFL)**Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Green Economy Transformation Task Force established to advance the environmental and energy policies of the state, and money appropriated.

HF3999-Davnie (DFL)**Finance**

Green economy priority established, economic development policies conformity with environmental policy provided, and report required.

HF4000-Madore (DFL)**Health & Human Services**

Medicare special needs plans modified.

HF4001-Norton (DFL)**Health & Human Services**

State-funded reinsurance for small employer health coverage provided.

HF4002-Thissen (DFL)**Health & Human Services**

HIV transmission awareness and education program established.

HF4003-Hornstein (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Real estate appraisal influencing prohibited and criminal penalty imposed.

HF4004-Carlson (DFL)**Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Crystal housing development account authorized.

HF4005-Bly (DFL)**Energy Finance & Policy Division**

School boards authorized to form business entities solely for wind energy projects, and exemption from production tax provided.

HF4006-Olin (DFL)**Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Joint powers act entities subjected to open meeting law.

HF4007-Atkins (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Beer kegs purchase and receipt by scrap metal dealers regulated.

HF4008-Morrow (DFL)**Transportation Finance Division**

Commercial driver's license holders alcohol and drug testing results notification required.

HF4009-Peterson, A. (DFL)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Walleye fishing stamp established for the purpose of increased walleye stocking.

Thursday, March 13

HF4010-Kahn (DFL)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Urban riverfront model ordinance required.

HF4011-Smith (R)**Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Employers hiring illegal immigrants penalties provided, documents included in aggravated forgery added, aggravated forgery penalty increased and sex trafficking established as separate crime from promotion of prostitution.

HF4012-Mullery (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Minnesota Subprime Foreclosure Extension Act provided.

HF4013-Hornstein (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Confidential employee definition changed.

HF4014-Fritz (DFL)**Finance**

Steele County; nursing home and assisted living facility and related asset transfer authorized to non-profit corporations and acquisition of membership interest in nonprofit corporations.

HF4015-Hornstein (DFL)**Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Metropolitan Airports Commission directed to enforce certain covenants.

HF4016-Hornstein (DFL)**Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs**

Metropolitan Airport Commission environmental planning and report required.

HF4017-Lieder (DFL)**Taxes**

Northwest Minnesota Multicounty Housing and Redevelopment Authority allowed to levy certain taxes.

HF4018-Greiling (DFL)**Finance**

School debt provisions modified.

HF4019-Greiling (DFL)**Ways & Means**

Referendum ballot language modified in cases of renewal of referendum authority.

HF4020-Marquart (DFL)**Taxes**

Property assessor rotation of duties required and truth in taxation statement provided.

HF4021-Wagenius (DFL)**Finance**

Pollution Control Agency temporarily prohibited from establishing or holding stakeholder groups or meetings.

HF4022-Atkins (DFL)**Taxes**

Aggregate resource preservation property tax provided and criminal penalty provision changed.

HF4023-Solberg (DFL)**Finance**

Health, human services and education forecast adjustments made.

HF4024-Lenczewski (DFL)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Temporary drawdown of public waters provided.

HF4025-Drazkowski (R)**Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections**

Cost-savings initiative suggestion program established for state employees, cost savings used to fund road improvements and transportation endowment fund created.

HF4026-Cornish (R)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Outdoor heritage fund created, receipt disposition provided, and Sportsman's Stakeholders Council created.

HF4027-Sailer (DFL)**Finance**

Waste pesticide collection program modified.

HF4028-Howes (R)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Off-highway vehicle restrictions and damage account modified, seizure and forfeiture provided, violations added to violator record, penalties, account receipts and disposition modified, plates required and registration revocation provided.

HF4029-Howes (R)**Commerce & Labor**

Construction subcontractor prompt payment required.

HF4030-Ruth (R)**Environment & Natural Resources**

Carbon monoxide detectors required in fish houses and dark houses.

HF4031-Norton (DFL)**Health & Human Services**

Health policy claim practices regulated.

HF4032-Howes (R)
Health & Human Services
Smoking ban changes made by adding definitions and an exception and requiring posted signs.

HF4033-Erickson (R)
Transportation Finance Division
Curt Eastlund Memorial Bridge designated.

HF4034-Hausman (DFL)
Finance
Living-at-home/block nurse program base funding provided and community service grant program funds transferred.

HF4035-Emmer (R)
Commerce & Labor
No-fault auto insurance reformed, injured persons prohibited from collecting non-economic damages in certain circumstances, arbitration procedures modified, health care provider balance billing prohibited and civil liability clarified.

HF4036-Demmer (R)
Finance
K-12 education state grants authorized to leverage quality improvements and money appropriated.

HF4037-Hamilton (R)
Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs
Jackson County auditor-treasurer office made appointive.

HF4038-Olin (DFL)
Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs
Bovine tuberculosis control provided.

HF4039-Slawik (DFL)
Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections
Elections; deceptive name use prohibited for candidates, political committees and political funds.

HF4040-Madore (DFL)
Commerce & Labor
Residential real estate sale disclosure requirement supplemental prohibitions clarified.

HF4041-Madore (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Medicare special needs plans modified.

HF4042-Madore (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Managed care ombudsman provision modified and Medicare special needs plans modified.

HF4043-Emmer (R)
Health & Human Services
Health care freedom of choice provided and constitutional amendment proposed.

HF4044-Peterson, S. (DFL)
E-12 Education
Regional pupil transportation centers authorized.

HF4045-Olin (DFL)
Local Government & Metropolitan Affairs
Uniform Municipal Contracting Law contracting procedure threshold amounts modified.

HF4046-Hortman (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Beverage container recycling required by manufacturers and penalties provided.

HF4047-Hortman (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Beverage container deposit and labeling required, container deposit refund return provided and unclaimed deposit payment required.

HF4048-Hortman (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Beverage containers prohibited from placement in solid waste.

HF4049-Laine (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Health care availability and affordability guaranteed for every Minnesotan, Minnesota Health Plan, Board, Fund, Office of Health Quality and Planning, ombudsman for patient advocacy and inspector general established.

HF4050-Laine (DFL)
Health & Human Services
County-based purchaser pilot program created to cover the uninsured.

HF4051-Sailer (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Used paint collection and process pilot program established.

HF4052-Smith (R)
Finance
Natural disaster assistance payment funding provided to match FEMA money, court, public defender, public safety, corrections, human rights and other criminal justice agencies appropriations reduced.

HF4053-Wardlow (R)
E-12 Education
Children under 7 year old enrolled in public school first grade compelled to remain enrolled.

HF4054-Dettmer (R)
Health & Human Services
Board of Medical Practice prohibited from bringing a disciplinary action against a physician for prescribing, administering or dispensing long-term antibiotic therapy for Lyme disease.

HF4055-Madore (DFL)
Finance
Transportation construction project mitigating effects on small businesses report required.

HF4056-Kahn (DFL)
Health & Human Services
Synthetic turf use limited on certain athletic fields, health study required on impacts of crumb rubber use and reports required.

HF4057-Kahn (DFL)
Environment & Natural Resources
Fishing seasons and limits modified.

HF4058-Heidgerken (R)
Finance
School districts' extended time revenue calculation modified.

HF4059-Erhardt (R)
Health & Human Services
Reproductive privacy right established.

HF4060-Knuth (DFL)
Energy Finance & Policy Division
Regional Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Cap and Trade Accord; memorializing the governor to incorporate greenhouse gas emission reduction principles.

Highlights continued from page 16

Winsted man was able to convince his local newspaper to reproduce the patrol's commercial vehicle safety sticker decals.

"He was passing himself off as an agent of the state patrol and was conducting business as if he was inspecting these vehicles, yet he was not, and he was placing decals on vehicles all over the state," he said. "Subsequently two of these vehicles turned up in fatal crashes. Once we conducted our investigation we discovered these decals were on hundreds of vehicles all over Minnesota."

The offender, who was charging \$50-\$150 per inspection, has been prosecuted for fraud and several other misdemeanors.

A companion bill, SF3542, sponsored by Sen. Michael Jungbauer (R-East Bethel),

awaits action by the Senate Transportation Committee.

— M. COOK



New chaplain named

The Rev. Richard Buller was elected by the House March 10 as its chaplain.

Rep. Sandra Peterson (DFL-New Hope) brought forward the only nomination for the position. As mandated by the constitution, lawmakers voted individually by voicing their approval or disapproval.

Buller is a graduate of Mountain Lake High School, Augsburg College and Princeton Theological Seminary. He's currently the pastor

of Valley Community Presbyterian Church in Golden Valley and a board member of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches.

"As we know, all good things come from Mountain Lake," said Rep. Rod Hamilton (R-Mountain Lake), seconding the nomination.

Early in the session, the Rev. Paul Rodgers stepped down from the position after one year of service.

— C. BLANCHARD

Easter schedule

There are no House committee meetings or floor sessions planned for March 20-24. No House committee meetings are planned the morning of March 25, but session is scheduled for noon that day. House offices will be closed March 21.

First Reading continued from page 5

\$105 million of the \$185 million cut to address the 2003 deficit has yet to be restored.

"I have always thought that education of our students is one of the most critical things that's called for in our constitution," said Greiling, chairwoman of the House K-12 Finance Division. "This year we have a 1 percent increase for schools when inflation is 3 percent. ... This is letting cuts remain and there will be a lot more cuts made at the local level with a 1 percent increase."

House Minority Leader Marty Seifert (R-Marshall) reminded Greiling that she sponsored last year's omnibus K-12 education law. She countered that the bill needed 90 House votes for a potential veto override, so it was the governor's bill.

"The governor has more money for K-12 in here," Seifert said. "If you don't like how it's spent, put it to something else."

Public safety

Proposed cuts for public safety agencies have some officials worried that they may be asked to stretch too far.

The governor has proposed \$16.52 million in reductions, including a \$3.1 million cut at the Department of Corrections, \$2.78 million from the Public Defense Board, \$1.39 million at the Department of Public Safety, and \$9.1 million from the Judicial Branch.

Jeff Shorba, deputy state court administrator, told the House Public Safety Finance Division March 12 that because of current budget restraints, 207 court staff positions have been abolished or left vacant. With additional cuts, another 222 positions could be lost which will lead to a further reduction in services the court provides.

Edward Lynch, First District assistant chief judge, said his district has done everything it can to cut costs, but there are "no more rabbits in the hat." The court system is about real people with real problems, Lynch said. "It is no longer a question of the quality of service we can provide; it is a question of whether we can meet our constitutional duty to provide meaningful access to justice for the people of our state."

Rep. Steve Smith (R-Mound) said this "should be the last area" to look for cuts because a primary government role is to provide public safety.

Taxes

In addition to providing modest economic growth, Pawlenty said the sales tax reduction would offset the tax increases — transportation, and the arts and outdoors constitutional amendment — approved so far



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Finance Commissioner Tom Hanson, left, and State Budget Director Jim Schowalter confer as a member of the House Finance Committee makes a comment during the March 10 presentation of the governor's budget-balancing proposal.

this session by the DFL-controlled Legislature. The reduction would save an estimated 2 cents on a \$20 purchase. The decrease is expected to provide \$77 million in tax relief this biennium and \$178 million in 2010-11.

"I think it's strategically important to lower tax burdens in Minnesota, and we want to begin that process in this budget," Pawlenty said.

House Majority Leader Tony Sertich (DFL-Chisholm) indicated the idea could be much like many others from the state's top official.

"A lot of his proposals don't make it past the press release, and he doesn't invest a lot of capital in making that happen," he said. "I'm open to looking at the entire budget and see what impact it has."

Sertich did commend the governor for his plan to close corporate tax loopholes.

"This is the same language that was in the vetoed bill last year that essentially adopts the IRS definition for what a foreign operating corporation is, which, in short, is, you have to be foreign and you actually have to have some operations in order to qualify for this 85 percent exemption from taxation," Pawlenty said.

The plan also shifts a June sales tax payment for some business; repeals a mutual fund cap; and the state has a new ability to match bank records for people who are tax delinquent or have compliance issues. Pawlenty said that better collections should provide an additional \$10 million.

Veterans

The governor's plan proposes increases for two departments with programs that have a direct effect on the military and veterans.

The Department of Military Affairs would see a \$1 million increase, and a lifting of

the current spending cap so that all funds generated by the Support Our Troops license plates can be spent on veterans programs.

Michael Pugliese, Department of Veterans Affairs deputy commissioner, advocated to the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division March 12 for the more than \$6 million increase proposed by the governor. He said "new needs are surfacing" as more veterans return from overseas deployments. The governor's plan includes \$2 million for the State Soldiers Assistance Program, which allocates emergency financial assistance to veterans, dependents and survivors; and \$1.5 million to expand County Veterans Service Office and the Higher Education Veteran Assistance Offices programs. 🇺🇸

— Session Weekly's Courtney Blanchard, Nick Busse, Craig Green, Tom Hammell, Brian Hogen-son, Patty Ostberg and Lee Ann Schutz contributed to this story.

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MINNESOTA INDEX

On guard

Number of Minnesota National Guard soldiers and air personnel either mobilized or returned from deployment in 2007	4,700
Number of Guard personnel killed while on duty in 2007	3
As a percent, Minnesota National Guard members enrolled in some education program in 2007	79
Millions of dollars paid out in 2007 for state tuition reimbursement payments to state Guard members.....	8
In 2007, Minnesota soldiers taking advantage of on-site registration for free deer hunting permits	500
Year the Territorial Militia, the precursor to the Minnesota National Guard, was formed	1850
Number of National Guard units in the state	62
Number of assigned Guard personnel that call St. Paul home.....	1,270
As percent, veterans making up the state's population in 2007	8
Number of veterans living in Minnesota in 2007, as estimate	402,000
As percent, those who were male	94
As percent, those ages 45-64.....	43
As percent, those ages 65-84.....	34
Number of women veterans living in Minnesota in October 2007	23,393
As percent, statewide, veterans receiving federal disability compensation or pension benefits in 2005.....	12
Median annual benefit.....	\$10,280
As percent, statewide, veterans receiving medical benefits in 2005	22
Approximate billions of dollars in federal benefits awarded to Minnesota veterans in 2006.....	1.2
Among homeless men in Minnesota in 2006, percentage who were veterans	24
Annual median income of state veterans in 2005	\$33,973
Rate of poverty of among state veterans, as percent.....	5.8

— L. SCHUTZ

Sources: "County Veterans Service Offices, Office of Legislative Auditor, January 2008"; United States Department of Veterans Affairs; Minnesota National Guard.

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