

SESSION WEEKLY

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WASTEWATER WOES

A FINAL SALUTE

OIL PROBLEMS PEAKING

PERILS OF POVERTY

HF4061 - HF4112



SESSION WEEKLY

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

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On the cover: Winter holds its grip another day with an accumulation of heavy wet snow March 18.

— Photo by: Andrew VonBank



A stinky situation

Cost concerns for small communities with wastewater treatment system needs

PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

The St. Croix Valley Wastewater Treatment Plant in Oak Park Heights, above, serves as a good example of a community seeking to improve its wastewater infrastructure. It was named the best “medium advanced facility” in the Great Lakes region by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2001, according to the Metropolitan Council.

BY BRIAN HOGENSON

The last thing someone wants to encounter while paddling around one of Minnesota’s lakes or rivers is something they flushed out of their homes days earlier. But that’s the reality in far too many Minnesota communities in need of new wastewater treatment infrastructure.

According to the Pollution Control Agency, wastewater is the used water from homes, farms and business in communities. It contains materials that are harmful to ground and surface waters including metals, organic pollutants, sediment, bacteria and viruses. These harmful materials can cause serious environmental contamination and threaten human health.

Because of outdated wastewater infrastructure, or no wastewater infrastructure at all, many communities are pumping sewage into ground and surface waters. And fixing the equipment or expanding capacity is proving to be a budget-buster for small communities that lack resources to fund needed improvements on their own.

After the outhouse

Before running water was available, outhouses were common throughout the

state. When indoor plumbing became the norm, the need to treat water contaminated with human waste became a primary concern for communities. The earliest method was to discharge wastewater into cesspools that had outlet pipes, or straight pipes, leading to ditches and streams. The Works Progress Administration built some simple systems for wastewater collection and treatment in the 1930s, but most rural Minnesotans continued to discharge untreated wastewater into the state’s ground and surface waters.

Many communities that have wastewater treatment facilities in place as well as individual residences with septic systems have outdated infrastructure that was not designed to last this long.

Rep. Jeremy Kalin (DFL-North Branch), who sponsors three bills addressing community wastewater treatment issues, said many wells that were installed in rural areas in the 1960s

and 1970s had an expected lifespan of only 25 years.

Wastewater treatment plants face the same problem as roads, according to Kalin. “There is a lot of expansion and growth but little maintenance on existing structures.”

When these wastewater systems fail, sewage seeps into Minnesota’s aquifers and streams, where it becomes a public health issue, running the risk of contaminating ground and drinking water.

“Nothing is worse for public health than human sewage,” Kalin said.

Upgrading the system

Legislators are making moves to rectify wastewater problems around the state.

Currently, 43 bills relating to wastewater infrastructure improvements and sewer system upgrades have been introduced in the House, with the vast majority designed to help small communities.

“It’s a good investment in our water and in our future,” said Rep. Bud Heidgerken (R-Freeport), the sponsor of two wastewater bills. “We need to help these towns build their infrastructure.”

First Reading continued on page 4

Wastewater challenges

According to "Small Community Wastewater Needs in Minnesota," a PCA report released in February, small communities face special challenges in finding solutions to their wastewater problems.

Many are not connected to a modern wastewater treatment facility. The report identified 48 communities with known or suspected community surface discharges through the use of community straight pipes, as well as an estimated 55 communities with some possible individual straight pipes.

Some barriers for small community wastewater improvements include:

- the low income of community residents combined with the high costs for conventional wastewater collection and treatment creates a situation with insufficient funding available at the local level;
- small communities lack a process for working through the issues that arise in managing a wastewater system;
- lack of technical support by engineers;
- misunderstandings caused by a lack of coordination between multiple organizations and groups;
- regulatory and capacity impediments; and
- residents who have never had to pay for wastewater treatment and disposal object to paying for the service.

A perfect storm

Wastewater issues can create a perfect storm that continues to burden a small community even after the necessary improvements are made. Harris, nestled in north-central Chisago County, is a perfect example.

"That is one of the more severe cases, just because of the size of the community and the cost of fixing it," Rep. Rob Eastlund (R-Isanti) said.

Harris is comprised of about 450 homes, but only 126 are connected to the city wastewater system. The rest of the homes are in outlying areas and use individual septic systems.

In order for Harris to attract business and grow like neighboring communities have in the last decade, a significant upgrade and expansion of the wastewater system was needed, but before that could be accomplished the existing system needed repair.

"Everything around us has been growing, but we haven't been able to grow," Harris

Mayor Rick Smisson said. "Our sewer system is leaking 25 percent into the groundwater per day, so we can't grow with new hookups until we deal with it."

Facilitated by a loan from the Department of Employment and Economic Development, a new system is going online in Harris that includes new wastewater treatment and water treatment plants.

Now that the improvements have been made to the system, the new problem is paying for it.

If Harris does not experience some very significant growth in the coming years and is forced to take the cost of the loan and spread it out across the people on the system, Smisson said sewer and water bills would go to over \$780 per month per household.

That would be considered an impossible utilities burden for most communities, but it would be an even bigger pain for the residents of Harris.

"Seventy percent of the core of the community is below the poverty line," Smisson said. "Thirty percent is considered very poor."

Small communities

represented by Heidgerken face a similar set of unfortunate circumstances.

Because their current system cannot support growth, Heidgerken said St. Martin is requesting funding for wastewater infrastructure in order to attract new businesses. However, without the funding from businesses or the state, they cannot afford to make the needed upgrades without residents paying \$150 - \$200 per month just for their sewer bill.

"I represent a district with 26 little towns and no regional centers," Heidgerken said. "There are many retired people on fixed incomes who sold their farms long ago to retire and now do not have as much money as they thought they would have due to inflation."

Ideas for the future

Smisson said there are steps that can be taken to ease the burden on small communities in search of help for their wastewater systems.

Calling the current system "incredibly inefficient," Smisson said he would like to see groups composed of four or five communities work together to share one system and have joint sewage commissions.

"We shouldn't have to be duplicating these expensive systems for every community," Smisson said.

Smisson said another important move by the Legislature would be to make equipment

Some communities seeking state help in funding wastewater infrastructure


Big Lake Area Sanitary District
Moose Lake
Upper Sioux Community
Willmar
Iron Junction
Gilbert
Faribault
Ellendale
Medford
Blooming Prairie
Grand Rapids
Mora
Quamba
Nashwauk
Effie
Shafer
Rush City
Litchfield
Almelund (Amador Township)
Cass Lake
Peterson
Red Wing
Middle River
Fountain
La Crescent
Deer River
Brownsville
Sandstone
Pine City
Lansing Township
Nicolville
Austin
Racine
New Munich
St. Martin
Bovey
St. Louis

purchases for wastewater infrastructure exempt from sales taxes.

Heidgerken said that a simple change in legislative priorities could work wonders in helping small communities solve their wastewater challenges.

"It ought to be 50 percent of the bonding bill going to the seven-county metro area, 25 percent to regional centers and the rest to Greater Minnesota," Heidgerken said. "Not \$15 million out of a billion-dollar bonding bill."

In the bonding bill passed by the House, \$15.3 million was allocated for the Wastewater Infrastructure Funding Program, \$5 million more than in the Senate bill. A conference committee is expected to work out differences between the bills.

"What's more important, hockey arenas or small towns in my district pumping raw sewage into our streams?" Heidgerken said. "Where are the priorities? Wastewater should be number one." 

Editor's note: The following Highlights are coverage of select bills heard in House committees and other House activities held March 13-20. 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

Infected cattle buyout

Cattle ranchers in northwestern Minnesota continue their struggle to keep herds from falling victim to bovine tuberculosis, a disease that after a 30-year absence reappeared in the state in 2005.

With four infected herds having been detected since fall, the state is moving quickly with measures to help contain the disease. HF4075, introduced this week, is being fast-tracked, and would place new requirements on ranchers in the infected area and appropriate money for the buyout of herds, if necessary.

Rep. Dave Olin (DFL-Thief River Falls), sponsor of the bill, represents the infected area and the ranchers who are struggling to keep their herds healthy and not fall victim to the disease that is carried by deer. He told the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division March 19 the measure would provide for a voluntary buyout of the cattle by the Board of Animal Health. The fiscal impact is expected to be available next week when the division decides whether this should be included in its omnibus bill.

Bill Hartmann, executive director, Minnesota Board of Animal Health, said when new cases were found last fall, containment measures were implemented with the Department of Natural Resources fencing off suspect areas.

The state has now seen a downgrade in its TB status, which will curtail the interstate movement of cattle. It will take at least four years for the state to regain the highest status level — TB-free, Hartmann said.

Under Olin's bill, cattle ranchers with herds in the bovine tuberculosis management zone must comply with new restrictions, which could include fencing or euthanizing the herd. If that is necessary, the ranchers could have their herd bought out by the state.

The companion, SF3728, is sponsored by Sen. Rod Skoe (DFL-Clearbrook) and it awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— L. SCHUTZ

IRAQ MEMORIAL

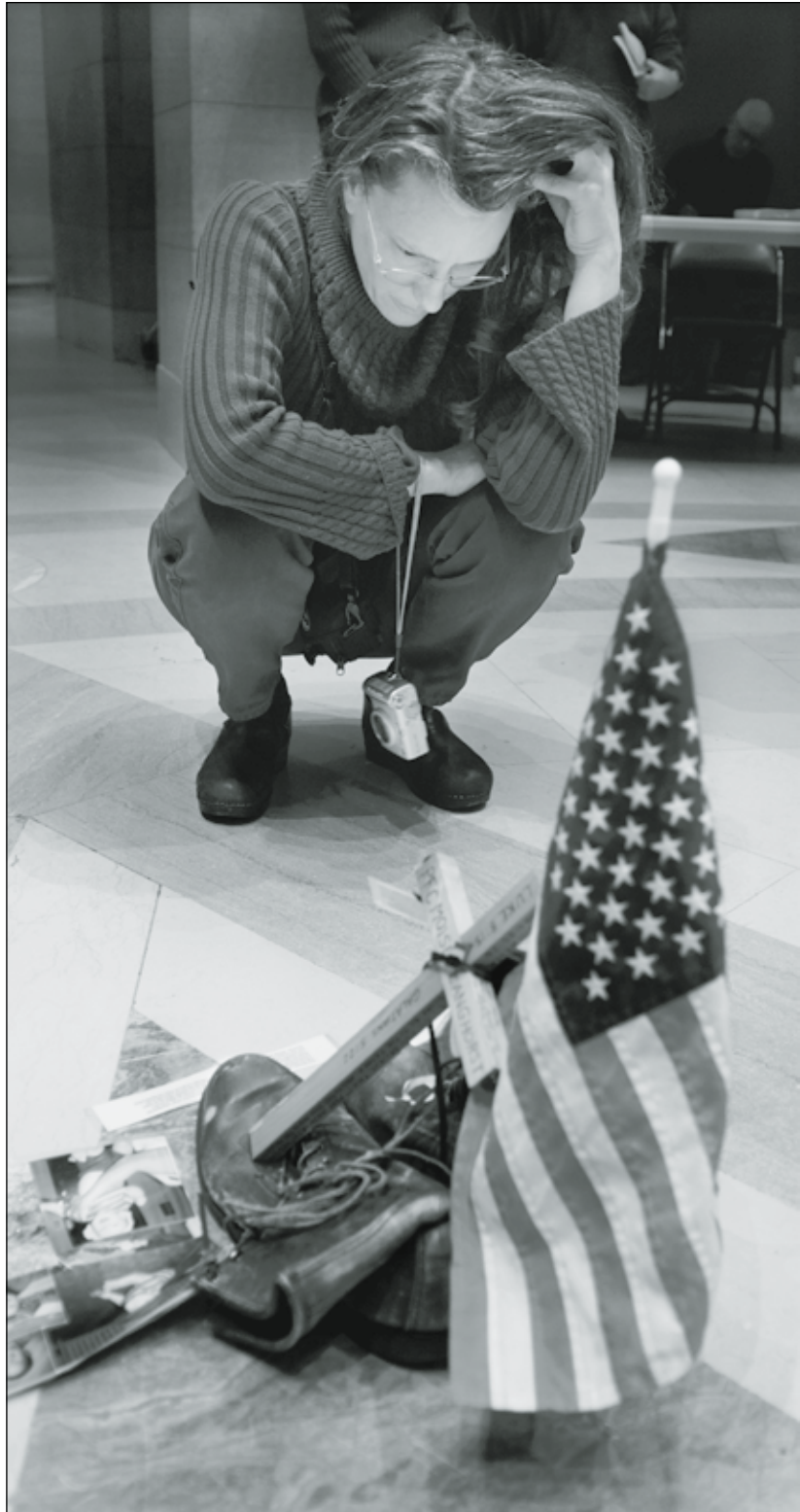


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Amy L. Barankovich pauses in front of the boots, cross and flag of Marine Pfc. Moises Langhorst of Moose Lake, who was killed in Iraq on April 7, 2004. Fifty-nine pairs of boots, one pair for each Minnesota military person killed in Iraq, were placed in the Capitol Rotunda March 19 as part of "Eyes Wide Open," recognizing the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war.

BUDGET

Resolving deficiency spending

**Signed
by
the
governor**

A quartet of budget deficiencies will be remedied.

A new law signed March 14 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, allocates \$479,000 to solve particular problems that a commission and some boards have no other way of resolving.

The Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission is given \$175,000 for administration costs. Last year's appropriation limited the amount of money that could be used for staff purposes. This will allow the staff to remain through this year's celebration.

Special revenue funds will go to the state's Board of Chiropractic Examiners (\$150,000), Board of Dentistry (\$100,000) and Board of Veterinary Medicine (\$54,000). All three have licensing-fee funded accounts within the fund. The additional money is needed to reimburse the boards' costs incurred while conducting contested case hearings involving individuals.

The law, sponsored by Rep. Loren Solberg (DFL-Grand Rapids) and Sen. Richard Cohen (DFL-St. Paul), is effective March 15, 2008.

HF3055*/SF2766/CH155

— M. Cook

CRIME

Emily's Law

Emily Johnson, a 2-year-old from Fergus Falls, was killed by a young man who was less than two weeks away from turning 14 years old.

Emily's parents, Lynn and Travis, spoke before the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 13 in support of HF699, which would lower the age a juvenile could be charged as an adult for a violent offense from 14 to 13.

Sponsored by Rep. Bud Nornes (R-Fergus Falls), the bill was approved and awaits action by the House Public Safety Finance Division. The companion bill, SF718, sponsored by Sen. Dan Skogen (DFL-Hewitt), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The bill would also eliminate a court's ability to expunge a juvenile's criminal record if he or she is convicted of a violent offense.

Lynn Johnson said current state laws regarding juvenile violent crimes are outdated, and that other states have already established stricter laws for these younger offenders. "Do you really think a 13-year-old doesn't know the difference between right and wrong?"

Washington County Attorney Doug Johnson said if juveniles are sent to adult prison, under current law, in this specific situation, they would receive less time than if they were sent to a juvenile facility where they could receive treatment. "You send a 13-year-old to prison; you get nothing but a future criminal."

"I think the line is getting blurred between

juvenile and adult and it's time that we fixed that," said Rep. Tony Cornish (R-Good Thunder). "The world is changing. People are committing crimes at a much younger age and need to be held responsible."

Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center) said that although she believes juveniles should be held accountable for their actions, she has concerns that the lack of available treatment in

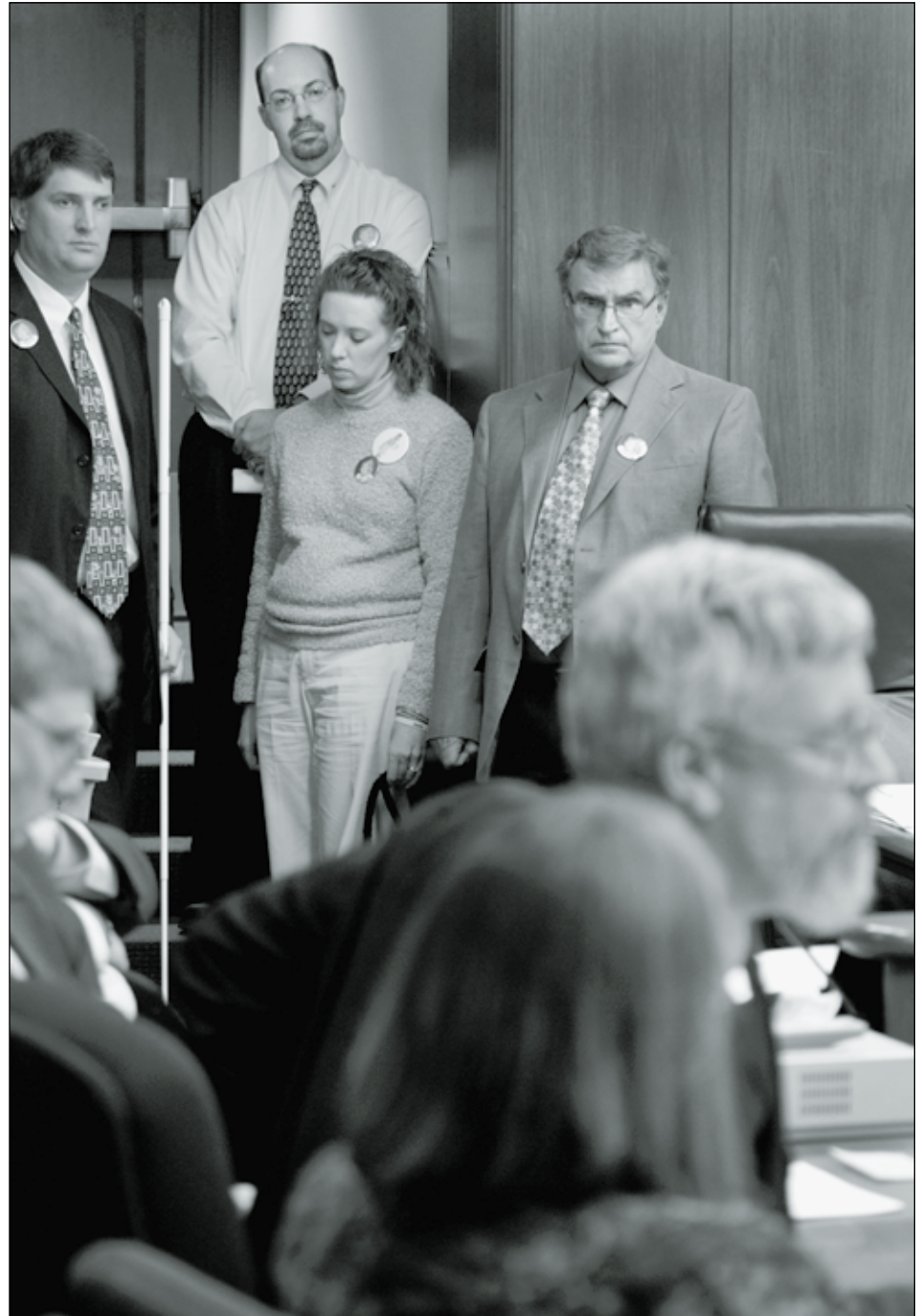


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

State Public Defender John Stuart, front right, is among those testifying against "Emily's Law" during the March 13 hearing of the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee. Watching are Travis and Lynn Johnson, center, along with Rep. Torrey Westrom, left, and Rep. Bud Nornes, right, the sponsor of HF699, which would change the age of adult certification for juvenile violence from 14 to 13. The Johnson's 2-year-old daughter, Emily Lynn, died of a severe head injury one day after an assault by a 13-year-old boy at her Fergus Falls day care.

adult prisons may lead to these young offenders hurting someone else.

How do we make sure, Hilstrom asked, "that there is not one more victim?"

— C. GREEN

'Castle Doctrine' proposal stalls

"This actually will save lives."

This is how Rep. Tony Cornish (R-Good Thunder) began his presentation on HF498, known as the "Castle Doctrine."

Countering the opposition, Cornish said, "This is not a bloodshed bill." Nonetheless, the bill failed to get the approval of the House Public Safety and Civil Justice Committee March 13, on a 9-9 vote.

Current law permits the taking of another's life when someone believes that his or her life is in danger of great bodily harm or death, or they are preventing someone from committing a serious crime in his or her home.

HF498 would allow use of deadly force if someone believes there is an "imminent threat" of substantial or great bodily harm or death to themselves or someone else. This would also apply when someone is on their porch, deck or in their car.

The bill would remove Minnesota common law requiring retreat from attack. Anyone would have the right to stand their ground, and so long as their objective is defensive, they could use deadly force "until the assailant is no longer an imminent threat."

David Gross, an attorney and former prosecutor, said this bill is not about taking life.

"There is no reasonable person in the state of Minnesota who wants blood on their hands," he said. "But what every reasonable person in the state of Minnesota wants less is their blood on someone else's hands."

Opposition was heard from the Minnesota Police & Peace Officers Association, the League of Women's Voters and the Minnesota County Attorneys Association.

"This bill says that in Minnesota, property is more important than life," said Washington County Attorney Doug Johnson. He said that not only would it make it extremely difficult to prove some cases beyond a reasonable doubt, it would inevitably be used as a defense for gang members.

A companion bill, SF446, sponsored by Sen. Pat Pariseau (R-Farmington), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— C. GREEN

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EDUCATION

Belt-tightening ahead?

Proposed cuts from the governor could lead to some serious belt-tightening by state agencies.

On March 17, several state agency representatives gave the House Education Finance and Economic Competitiveness Finance Division their thoughts about Gov. Tim Pawlenty's proposed budget reductions. No action was taken.

Education Commissioner Alice Seagren said the 4 percent proposed reduction would amount to an \$892,000 per year cut for the department. The governor also proposes to reverse statutory operating debt by shifting payments to school districts. The department typically holds back 10 percent of a school district's money until final pupil counts are in so districts aren't overpaid.

School districts in statutory operating debt have been allowed 97 percent of the money up front, but the proposal would bring them back to a straight 90/10 split. Seagren said this will create a 6.1 percent savings to the state, though these districts will have to borrow money to make up the difference

"You are one of the very few areas that has a little bit of an increase, even though it's not much," Rep. Nora Slawik (DFL-Maplewood) said, and asked what would happen if the department's budget was cut.

Among items that would be cut include support for teachers and the principals' institute, Seagren said.

Richard Pfitzenreuter, chief financial officer for the University of Minnesota, said the university is concerned with the level of its proposed cuts.

"We simply feel that \$27 million is too deep and too much in this biennium," he said, adding that the university would have to make cuts somewhere, and would only increase tuition as a last resort.

Dan McElroy, commissioner of the Department of Employment and Economic Development, said the governor's recommendation includes reductions and transfers. The largest is an \$8 million transfer from the Workforce Development Fund, which is used to support displaced workers, as well as another \$2 million from the Minnesota Minerals 21st Century Fund.

— T. HAMMELL

More money for school districts

A duo of onetime provisions could help keep school districts financially afloat, if the House K-12 Finance Division's omnibus bill becomes law.

The division reviewed HF2475, sponsored by Chairwoman Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville), March 19. The bill includes an additional onetime \$51 per student allocation, with the money coming from unused funds in the Quality Compensation for Teachers program, commonly known as Q Comp, as well as the state's General Fund.

The division is expected to begin debating the bill March 25.

Another onetime proposal would allow school districts to transfer \$51 per pupil unit from their capital budgets to their undesignated general fund balance.

Rep. Bud Heidgerken (R-Freeport) originally suggested this as an amendment to an individual school funding bill by Rep. Tim Faust (DFL-Mora). "He suggested that this year, because it's a very hard year for schools," Greiling said.

The bill also dictates that the governor's suggested 4 percent cut from the Department of Education not be spread to the Board of Teaching and the Board of School Administrators.

A companion bill SF2149, sponsored by Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Plummer), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

Teacher reading standards bill fails

A bill calling for more reading instruction assessment has pitted a concerned group of parents against the Board of Teaching, and was controversial for the House E-12 Education Committee.

HF3780, sponsored by Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls) would direct the education commissioner to adopt a reading instruction compliance test for pre-kindergarten and elementary school teachers. A motion to send the bill to the House Finance Committee failed 12-6 on March 14.

Parent Bette Erickson testified that one of her daughters was not able to read by third grade, and even with an elementary education degree, she did not know how to help. Her child is now in college, but others with the problem do not always fare so well.

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"The outlook for children who are not reading proficiently by third grade is dismal," she said. In fourth grade, only 40 percent of students in Minnesota read proficiently.

Mary Kirchhof, literacy coordinator for Edina Public Schools, said the board and the Department of Education are in the final stage of developing new standards.

"What is not in the bill is the research that we do have on what does improve reading instruction practice and student achievement," said Deborah Dillon, professor of literacy education at the University of Minnesota.

Rep. Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton) praised an amendment that would not require current teachers to take the test, but questioned why this issue had to be solved in statute.

Rep. John Benson (DFL-Minnetonka) said he is generally not for mandates, but this problem has been going on for 20 or 30 years. "Each year this goes by we have another group of children who've lost their opportunity."

In the end, the deciding issue was whether teachers needed another test.

Rep. Andy Welti (DFL-Plainview) said when he was in college he had to take a test before he entered the education program and two more when he graduated. "Now you're going to potentially pile on a third test?"

A companion bill, SF3156, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury), awaits action by the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

Bill would change school funding

School districts could lose their levy authority in favor of a new funding mechanism.

Sponsored by Rep. Frank Moe (DFL-Bemidji), HF3107 would eliminate referendum revenue authority for fiscal year 2010 and later, and require the governor's next budget to include recommendations for a different source of school funding to go into effect at that point. It has no Senate companion.

The bill was laid over March 18 by the House K-12 Finance Division for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill.

State law caps the amount of money a district can raise through local property taxes, and school boards are prohibited from raising taxes without explicit statutory authority. However, a district can exceed its levy limit via a successful election for additional operating revenue through the referendum revenue program.

According to the nonpartisan House Research Department, the average amount of referendum revenue is \$760 per pupil unit; \$977 in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and \$538 in Greater Minnesota. Nearly three-dozen districts have no referendum authority.

An amendment to the bill would allow school boards, after a public meeting, to increase district revenue by an amount not to exceed their state revenue allowance limits.

Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth) supports the bill, but doesn't like the amendment. "I don't like it going back on the property taxpayers."

Moe said the Minnesota Constitution requires the Legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools and make provisions that will "secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state."

"We are out of compliance with the state constitution," Moe said.

— T. HAMMELL

Family life and sex ed programs

Schools could be permitted to provide responsible family life and sexuality education for middle and high school students.

HF615, sponsored by Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Mpls), would allow school districts to provide an age-appropriate and medically accurate program for students. The bill would require school districts to consult with parents and guardians of enrolled students when establishing policies, procedures, curriculum and services.

The bill was approved March 18 by the House K-12 Finance Division. It now awaits action by the House Education Finance and Economic Competitiveness Finance Division. Walker said the bill was taken out of the 2007 omnibus bill at the last minute.

She emphasized that the bill is not strictly about sex education, but also includes issues about healthy relationships and physical violence between partners.

Walker said the education is relevant because increasing numbers of young people are involved in sex and physical violence.

"We believe that this mandate is exactly the wrong message," said Tom Prichard, president of the Minnesota Family Council. He said sex education was the reason behind a recent news report of high numbers of sexually transmitted diseases in young people.

Walker said abstinence would be preferred, but too many young people are not receiving the information provided in sex education.

"There has to be a way to standardize this information," Walker said.

"We don't have any control over what teachers teach in the classroom," said Rep. Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton). She unsuccessfully tried to table the bill.

A companion bill, SF588, sponsored by Sen. Sandy Pappas (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— T. HAMMELL

Expenditure limit modification

Campaign committees for candidates not seeking re-election may be exempted from the current \$50 annual limit on charitable contributions.

HF75/SF248*, sponsored by Rep. Gene Pelowski Jr. (DFL-Winona) and Sen. Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley), was approved by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee on March 18 and sent to the House floor. It was approved 56-3 by the Senate on April 13, 2007.

The bill would allow principal campaign committees that dissolve within one year of the date of the contribution to a charity to be exempted from the annual limit. This would allow campaign committees of candidates not seeking reelection to donate a larger amount of unused funds to charities and other community groups.

When former Rep. and Sen. Wes Skoglund (DFL-Mpls) chose not to run for reelection, his volunteer committee wanted to give unused campaign money to the local community, but was told it would be a crime to do that.

"Specifically they wanted to give my campaign money to South High School, Roosevelt High School, and the Minneapolis libraries in the district," Skoglund said.

Skoglund said his committee felt that it was "about time we gave something back to the community," and that this bill would simply allow them to do that.

— B. HOGENSON

ENERGY

Cap-and-trade resolution approved

A House division approved a resolution designed to give legislators a voice in regional talks to develop a cap-and-trade system for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

HF4060, sponsored by Rep. Kate Knuth (DFL-New Brighton), would ask Gov. Tim Pawlenty to take certain principles into account when developing a cap-and-trade program with other signatories to the Midwestern Regional Greenhouse Gas Reduction Accord, including that such a program should:

- include as many emitting industries as possible;
- leave open the possibility of distributing emission allowances through auctions;
- obtain the reductions through the capped sectors themselves rather than those outside the cap; and
- not issue allowances that would exceed the cap.

Under a cap-and-trade system, a strict limit would be placed on the overall amount of greenhouse gas emissions that could be produced in the state. Emitters could then buy and sell emission allowances to one another.

The Pawlenty administration is currently negotiating with other Midwestern governors to develop a model cap-and-trade program that could be implemented on a region-wide basis. Department of Commerce officials have asked lawmakers not to pass any cap-and-trade legislation that could potentially impact the negotiations.

Rep. Doug Magnus (R-Slayton) worries that Knuth's resolution would do just that.

"I think it's fine we make a statement of support, but I hate to do something here that hinders the negotiations," Magnus said.

Knuth said her resolution would merely lay out some "very broad principles," adding, "This is not saying the governor has to negotiate this."

Rep. Kathy Brynaert (DFL-Mankato) praised the resolution as a way of "giving a voice to a legislative presence in the negotiations."

The House Energy Finance and Policy Division approved the bill March 14 and sent it to the House floor. A companion, SF3742, sponsored by Sen. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action by the Senate Business, Industry and Jobs Committee.

— N. BUSSE

ENVIRONMENT

No landfills near groundwater

Rep. Julie Bunn (DFL-Lake Elmo) lives in a community that has been fighting hard to clean up a landfill that has been leeching industrial chemicals into its drinking water supply; if she has her way, other communities won't have to struggle with the same problem in the future.

Bunn sponsors HF3997, which would require future landfills to be sited in locations where they are least likely to contaminate groundwater supplies. Under its provisions, anyone applying for a new landfill permit would be required to have the proposed site tested first to see whether contaminants could potentially infiltrate underground aquifers.

The House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division held an informational hearing on the bill March 18, but took no action. A companion, SF3703, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury), awaits action by the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee.

"This bill raises the question of whether future landfills in our state should be allowed

to be sited on areas that are known to be geologically highly sensitive to groundwater contamination," Bunn said. "It's about drinking water, and future drinking water supplies in our state."

While siting landfills in geologically safe locations might sound like a no-brainer, opponents say the bill contains hidden costs. For example, Xcel Energy has plans to site a new landfill in Bunn's district to dispose of fly ash from its coal power plant in Oak Park Heights. Xcel officials say that because of the unique nature of the waste, it has to be transported and dumped no further than 10 miles from the plant or it becomes difficult to manage.

Roger Clark, manager of environmental services with Xcel, said Bunn's bill would add millions of dollars of costs to the company's customers "with no appreciable environmental benefit." He said the company plans to use a special liner at the proposed landfill facility that would prevent any groundwater contamination.

Bunn countered that such liners have not been proven to be effective, and do not provide long-term solutions.

— N. BUSSE

GAME & FISH

Simpler rules for deer hunters

Deer hunters might find their pastime easier to enjoy, if a proposal to simplify the state's deer hunting rules and regulations becomes law.

"Over time, our regulations have really changed and gotten pretty complex with licenses and zones and what people can and can't do," said Lou Cornicelli, big game program coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources.

Last year, the DNR convened a group of hunters to evaluate the state's deer hunting laws and propose changes that would make the system easier to understand. According to Cornicelli, the group came up with four main recommendations:

- consolidate the number and types of deer hunting licenses available to purchase;
- consolidate the number of deer hunting zones in the state from six to two;
- simplify the process for tagging deer; and
- simplify the rules on what calibers of ammunition can be used to hunt deer.

During a March 18 meeting of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division, legislation reflecting those proposed changes was discussed as a possible amendment to HF3547, the omnibus game and fish bill, sponsored by Rep. David Dill (DFL-Crane Lake).

Dill said he supports the effort to simplify the rules, but also expressed concern about the associated cost. Under the current proposal, Dill said the department would lose approximately \$2 million in revenue to the state's game and fish fund.

Ed Boggess, DNR deputy director of fish and wildlife, confirmed that restructuring the license fee system would result in the loss of revenue, and said it was a difficult choice for the department.

"We don't like to lose revenue that people are voluntarily contributing, but we think a simpler system that allows people to buy what they want and not buy what they don't want makes some sense," he said.

Dill offered and then withdrew the amendment containing the simplification provisions. He said that Sen. Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley) is expected to sponsor the measure in the Senate, and that he would negotiate with Chaudhary when the game and fish bill goes to conference committee later in the session. The bill currently has no Senate companion.

— N. BUSSE

GOVERNMENT

Overseeing combative sports

The Minnesota Boxing Commission is on the verge of receiving a makeover.

HF3913, sponsored by Rep. Bob Gunther (R-Fairmont), would change the name of the commission to the Minnesota Combative Sports Commission in order to better represent its scope, which would be expanded to include jurisdiction over mixed martial arts competitions, in addition to boxing.

The bill was approved March 19 by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee and sent to the House floor.

Gunther said that the state has a moral obligation to make sure that fights are fair, safe and that the combatants are healthy.

Gunther and Rep. Phyllis Kahn (DFL-Mpls) competed in a verbal sparring match when Kahn asked why General Fund resources should be used for a commission to regulate a sport where the primary purpose of the combatants is to injure the brain of another person.

Noting the importance of the commission in "protecting David from Goliath" by ensuring that fights are fair, Gunther said he did not know if injuring the brain of another person was the primary principle of boxing, but said it was an effect of the sport.

"Isn't that what a knockout is?" Kahn responded.

The commission was created in the 2006 to protect the health and safety of professional boxers, and to ensure the fairness of boxing events. It is a re-creation of the old Boxing Board, which had its funding discontinued in 2001.

The commission received a onetime \$50,000 appropriation for Fiscal Year 2007, with the intention that the commission be self-supporting by appropriating all license fees and event revenues to the commission.

Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague) said the bill discriminates against ultimate fighting competitions.

"The majority of the people we've been before think ultimate fighting is a brutal sport and they would just as well not have it in Minnesota," Gunther said. "However, if they can fulfill all the requirements in the bill, they can have a fighting venue."

A companion bill, SF3685, sponsored by Sen. David Tomassoni (DFL-Chisholm), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— B. HOGENSON

Contractual authorization

State labor agreements and compensation plans are one step closer to ratification after receiving House approval.

The bill "ratifies the labor contracts and compensation plans for employees in the executive branch," said Rep. Karla Bigham (DFL-Cottage Grove), the sponsor of HF3138.

Approved 128-1 March 19, the bill now awaits Senate approval. Senate President James Metzen (DFL-South St. Paul) is the Senate sponsor.

The contracts covered by the bill were given interim approval by the joint legislative Subcommittee on Employee Relations.

The bill ratifies labor agreements between the state and the following exclusive representatives of state employees: AFSCME Council 5, Minnesota Association of Professional Employees, State Residential School Education Association, Minnesota Government Engineers Council, Middle Management Association, Minnesota Law Enforcement Association and the Inter Faculty Organization.

In addition, the bill ratifies compensation plans for unrepresented and managerial state employees; the Minnesota State Board of Investment; employees and administrators in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, and Office of Higher Education employees.

Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano) expressed his concern with state employees receiving raises in excess of 3 percent, while private sector employees are likely to see no raises this year.

Rep. Morrie Lanning (R-Moorhead), a subcommittee member, urged House members to pass the bill, but said that the raises included in the contracts could lead to a deeper round of budget cuts than what the state currently faces.

Another member of the subcommittee, Rep. Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover), supported the bill, but added that "the compensation system is broken and long overdue for reform."

— B. HOGENSON

Whistleblower protection extension

Whistleblower protection would be extended to executive branch employees, under provisions of a bill sponsored by Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park).

Hortman said the bill would make executive agency staff, whom she believes are the real experts on the issues, aware that they are not part of the political games and disputes and should be able to provide information, facts and recommendations based on their expertise.

HF3807 was approved March 19 by the House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee and is headed for the House floor.

The bill, designed to prevent political decisions from inhibiting the free flow of accurate information, prohibits employers from disciplining, threatening, or otherwise discriminating against or penalizing an employee as a result of the employee:

- reporting violations of federal or state laws;
- participating in an investigation or hearing;

- refusing to participate in actions that violate the law;
- reporting the true findings of a scientific or technical study; or
- communicating to legislators or elected officials information that the employee believes would relate to improving services provided by the executive branch.

"Political filters get in the way of good ideas coming forward," Hortman said.

Paul Larson, deputy commissioner with the Department of Employee Relations, said he agrees that state employees who want to speak to members of the Legislature should not have fear of retribution. However, he is concerned that not allowing executive agencies to have protocols on how information is released and by whom, could lead to chaos in the workplace.

A companion bill, SF3494, sponsored by Sen. John Doll (DFL-Burnsville), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— B. HOGENSON

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Lower blood donation age

**Signed
by
the
governor**

Starting July 1 of this year, 16 year olds will be able to donate blood with written permission from their parent or guardian. Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed the new law March 18.

Sponsored by Rep. Patti Fritz (DFL-Faribault) and Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato), the change was the idea of high



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Gov. Tim Pawlenty presents the pen he used to sign into law a bill lowering the age for which a person can donate blood to Joe Gibson, the Blooming Prairie teenager who inspired the legislation. Also at the March 18 bill signing are the bill's sponsors, Rep. Patti Fritz, left, and Sen. Kathy Sheran, center right.

school student Joe Gibson, who came up with the proposal after seeing his grandfather's energy increase after blood transfusions during cancer treatments. Gibson said he attempted to give blood at his local high school blood drive soon after, but was turned away because the current age requirement is 17.

Several other states already allow 16 year olds to donate including: California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, Washington and Puerto Rico.

HF1066/SF2471*/CH157

— P. OSTBERG

Interpreter registry

Health care services interpreters could voluntarily join a state roster, under a bill approved March 19 by the House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division.

HF3592, sponsored by Rep. Cy Thao (DFL-St. Paul), would appropriate \$25,000 to the health commissioner to establish the roster and develop a registry. Interpreters could be charged \$50 to be included on the roster.

Thao said the state currently doesn't know how many interpreters are working in hospitals, but spends \$15 million annually to help patients communicate with their doctors. Having hard numbers could help in determining the need and establish guidelines, he said.

By Jan. 1, 2009, the commissioner would need to do the following:

- establish a roster of all available interpreters to address access concerns, particularly in rural areas;
- develop a plan for a registry of spoken language health care interpreters; and
- develop standards for registration with education and training requirements, demonstration of language proficiency and interpreting skills, agreement to abide by a code of ethics and a criminal background check.

The bill now goes to the House Finance Committee. A companion bill, SF3423, sponsored by Sen. Mee Moua (DFL-St. Paul), awaits action in the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

Emergency board terms

**Signed
by
the
governor**

Emergency Medical Services Regulatory Board members will be able to serve unlimited terms, under a new law signed March 14 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

Members are currently only allowed to serve a single four-year term.

Sponsored by Rep. John Ward (DFL-

Brainerd) and Sen. Paul Koering (R-Fort Ripley), the law is effective Aug. 1, 2008.

Supporters said the extension will allow members to carry over their experience.

O.J. Doyle, legislative consultant for the Minnesota Ambulance Association, said the complexity of the emergency medical system takes four years to fully understand. Just when board members begin to comprehend the system, they are prohibited from serving another term. It's also difficult to find qualified candidates, and change would allow those already committed to continue in their service, he said.

The new law also extends by one year, to July 1, 2010, the time period for hospitals to have set up of a statewide trauma system. An extension is needed because system implementation is taking longer than planned, Ward said.

HF2590*/SF2418/CH156

— P. OSTBERG

Community health center funding

A community health center that services nine counties in south-central Minnesota would receive \$350,000, under a bill laid over March 18 for possible inclusion in the House Health Care and Human Services Finance Division omnibus bill.

HF2937, sponsored by Rep. Kathy Brynaert (DFL-Mankato), would allow the human services commissioner to transfer funds to the Open Door Health Center in Mankato to "act as bridge funding to meet the demand for health care services in medically underserved areas."

Brynaert said the clinic works to fill community health care gaps where state services can't meet needs. According to the Minnesota Association of Community Health Care Centers, of the 3,000 patients the clinic serves, about 80 percent are uninsured.

The center's Web site says it offers dental and medical services, such as physical examinations, immunizations, pediatric services and check ups. It serves the counties of: Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca and Watonwan.

A companion bill, SF2631, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

HIGHER EDUCATION

Accessible materials for all

Jeff Thompson, past president of the Minnesota Association of Blind Students, would like the same access to collegiate materials as all other students, but that isn't always the case.

"If it's available to others, it should be

available to us as well," he said.

Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) sponsors HF3752, which would require publishers and all Minnesota higher education institutions to provide blind and other eligible students with accessible education materials when it does so for other students. Within 10 days of a request, publishers would be required to provide the school or student with the material in a preferred format.

It would also require the Office of Higher Education to adopt guidelines for suspending publishers failing to comply, provide a complaint registration process and develop a list of third party transcribers.

The bill was held over March 13 by the House Higher Education and Work Force Development Policy and Finance Division for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill.

"Currently, institutions and services, such as our communications center at Minnesota State Services for the Blind, as well as institutions of higher education, are bearing the burden of making instructional materials accessible, often at considerable taxpayer expense," said Jennifer Dunnam, president of the National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota. She said existing law requires accessibility, but does not specify how it must be done.

Some publishers already do this because of laws in other states; however, the industry has concerns about the bill, including that they may not have the right to distribute versions of their publications in more than one format, such as audio rights to their books.

Elizabeth Delfs, vice-president and senior counsel for Pearson Education, said her company already distributes about 10,000 such files every year across the country. "There are more than 10 states now that do have laws on the books. However, Minnesota's law would be the most extreme, as it is proposed here."

A companion bill, SF3514, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato), awaits action by the Senate Higher Education Committee.

— M. COOK

HOUSING

Cleaning up after the housing crash

Some boarded-up windows on Minneapolis's north side could be pried loose.

On some blocks in the neighborhood, abandoned homes outnumber those with life inside, said Rep. Joe Mullery (DFL-Mpls), who presented HF3536 to the House Taxes Committee on March 18. The bill would expand Minneapolis's authority to spend tax increments from housing replacement districts on vacant sites outside of the districts, if approved locally.

"We desperately need to find ways to finance the city's efforts to redevelop these areas," he said. "We are really having extreme, serious problems up there."

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan, executive director of the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council, said her organization has provided mortgage foreclosure counseling for decades. In the 1960s, homeownership in the area was at less than 25 percent. The number rose to 60 percent in the early 2000s, she said.

"That has all been eroded since 2005. We have seen the foreclosures double in numbers," she said. "We've lost good homeowners. We've lost good people in our community."

The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in the committee's omnibus bill. Sen. D. Scott Dibble (DFL-Mpls) sponsors the companion, SF3534, which awaits action by the Senate Taxes Committee.

"I think this is a good idea, I've not heard a lot of objection to it," said Committee Chairwoman Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington). "Certainly you need a lot more tools than this to solve the problem."

— C. BLANCHARD

Home modifications for disabled

The remodeling of a bathroom to accommodate wheelchair access that adds square footage to a home would be eligible for a waiver, under a bill approved by the House Health and Human Services Committee March 13.

Sponsored by Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano), HF3881 would allow the costs to qualify for home and community-based waiver services for people with disabilities. Under current law, if a modification results in added square footage, it doesn't qualify for waiver money.

Steve Lohse, a Wright County resident, said he wanted to add a wheelchair-accessible bathroom to his family's modest split-level home for his son. Five years ago he slipped and fell resulting in him being wheelchair-bound and mentally disabled.

Lohse said the cost to house his son in state foster care would run more than \$125,000 annually. A onetime construction expenditure of \$80,000 to \$100,000 for a modified bathroom would keep his son at home.

Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL-Rochester) said a modification could add to the value of the home, and asked whether the state would be able to recapture the costs.

A wheelchair-accessible bathroom would not increase the value of a home, because the majority of the homebuyers don't need one, Lohse said.

"Oftentimes it does diminish the number of people who are willing to purchase those



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Steve and Beth Lohse testify with their son, Kyle, before the House Health and Human Services Committee March 13 in support of a bill that would allow certain home modification expenses be eligible for home and community-based waiver programs.

homes," said Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague).

The bill now goes to the House Finance Committee. A companion bill, SF3524, sponsored by Sen. Amy Koch (R-Buffalo), awaits action by the Senate Health, Housing and Family Security Committee.

— P. OSTBERG

HUMANITIES

Seska ... Sess ... Sesquicentennial!

Even our state lawmakers have trouble pronouncing "sesquicentennial."

"I'm just wondering, did you have to be able to say seska... sess... in order to be on the committee?" Rep. Shelley Madore (DFL-Apple Valley) asked Jane Leonard, the executive director of the Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission.

But the issue isn't whether people can pronounce the word, but if the commission has the money to throw the state a rockin' 150th birthday party.

Rep. Diane Loeffler (DFL-Mpls), who serves on the commission, asked the House Minnesota Heritage Finance Division March 17 to approve her bill, HF2895, to dedicate a onetime appropriation of about \$825,000 for the statewide party. The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in the division's omnibus bill.

"Like many entities at this time, in a recession and economic challenges, fundraising is challenging," Loeffler said. "We haven't been able to be as successful as we've hoped."

Last year, the Legislature appropriated \$750,000. Leonard said the money has been doled out to communities around the state and many cities and businesses have matched

the commission's grants, but the commission would like to reach further, she said.

The activities range from an oxcart trek on the historic Pembina Trail to shining the spotlight on "Honorary Capitals for a Day," which include Bemidji, Thief River Falls, Detroit Lakes, New Ulm and Winona.

The state fair is scheduled to host some of the biggest events, with a Minnesota musical tribute show, a big-top tent highlighting the state's achievements and a commemorative tile mosaic mural. The commission has even created a sesquicentennial flag and postage stamp, and hopes to roll out a license plate, Leonard said.

A companion bill, SF2512, sponsored by Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— C. BLANCHARD

Preserving the past for the future

When he was 8 years old, Rep. Al Doty (DFL-Royalton) read letters that his great-grandfather sent home from the Civil War.

"They were wonderful stories about escorting Gen. Sherman, about his wound, about taking the troops out to forage and everything about what the war was really like ... about what happened to deserters in his camp," he told the House Minnesota Heritage Finance Division March 17.

Doty said he was lucky to have the stories about his family's past and felt compelled to sponsor HF2706, which would appropriate a onetime grant of \$184,500 for the military museum at Camp Ripley to preserve those kinds of stories for Minnesota's future generations. The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in the division's omnibus bill.

Jack Johnson, who serves on the board of directors for the Military Historical Society of

HEALTHY PRODUCTS



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Lindsay Dahl, a project coordinator with Health Legacy, holds two baby bottles, the one in her left hand containing bisphenol-A, as she testifies March 19 before the House Housing Policy and Finance and Public Health Finance Division about a proposal to prohibit replacement chemicals in children's products.

Minnesota, said the museum has no full-time staff and operates on a small budget.

The museum documents the experiences of all Minnesotans who serve in the military and conducts interviews with the men and women who return from combat. Johnson said the museum's workload is growing.

"In the past 10 years, nearly every member of the Minnesota National Guard has been federalized at least once," he said. "The history of these deployments, and of Minnesotans serving in the active forces, needs to be systematically documented."

Sen. Paul Koering (R-Fort Ripley) sponsors a companion bill, SF2525. It awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— C. BLANCHARD

If you will be visiting the Capitol in the near future, call the Capitol Historic Site Program at 651-296-2881 to schedule a tour.

MILITARY

New oversight for veterans homes

Responding to 2005 reports citing problems at the Minneapolis Veterans Home, Gov. Tim Pawlenty called for a commission to examine the best approach for management and administration of the state's five veterans homes.

Primary among the recommendations from the Veterans Long-Term Care Advisory Commission was to transfer administration of the facilities from the Minnesota Veterans Homes Board to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Pawlenty, by executive order, abolished the board in November. Two bills held over March 18 for possible inclusion in the House Agriculture, Rural Economics and Veterans Affairs Finance Division omnibus bill, would provide the framework for transfer of responsibilities.

Sponsored by Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar), HF3763 calls for the transfer, and HF3762, sponsored by Rep. Erin Murphy (DFL-St. Paul), sets out the criteria for a new Veterans Health Care Advisory Council that would advise the department on issues regarding the homes, including long-term health needs of veterans.

The nine board members appointed by the governor would include seven members with expertise in health care delivery, long-term care and veterans services; one licensed clinician; and one at-large member.

Juhnke said it is important that lawmakers are represented, even if only as ex-officio members.

Christine Kiel, legislative liaison for the department, said the \$2 million allocated this biennium for operation of the former veterans homes board is on reserve for the new council's use. She said that the new structure may not need a budget that large.

Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes (DFL-Winona) sponsors the companion bills, SF3282 and SF3281. Both await action by the full Senate.

— L. SCHUTZ

TAXES

Moratorium on the Rainbow ruling

A recent court ruling has put some nonprofits in jeopardy of losing their tax exempt status, said Marcia Avner, public policy director for the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits.

The Minnesota Supreme Court ruled last year that Under the Rainbow Child Care Center Inc. should lose its property tax exempt status because the center charged full-price for all its services. The court said the center should offer free or reduced rates in order to qualify as a nonprofit.

Avner told the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division March 14 that if the ruling is enforced by assessors, it will make Minnesota a "dangerously restrictive state" when it comes to applying for nonprofit status. Many organizations could lose their property tax exemption, which could lead them to lose sales tax exemption, too. The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in the division's omnibus bill.

Some community and children's mental health centers have already been approached by assessors questioning their nonprofit status, Avner said.

"Some of the very organizations that, I think many Minnesotans would agree, are providing a public benefit, really need the protection of a somewhat broader look at the criteria," she said.

HF3386, sponsored by Division Chairman

Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth), would place a one-year moratorium on enforcing the ruling, giving the nonprofit community a chance to discuss possible legislative solutions. A companion bill, SF2841, sponsored by Sen. Tarryl Clark (DFL-St. Cloud), awaits action by the Senate Taxes Committee.

Currently, organizations are judged on six criteria, called the North Star Test, to determine tax exemption eligibility. The ruling put emphasis on the third test — whether participants are required to pay. The other tests include criteria such as whether the charity is helpful to the others without material reward, if it's supported by gifts and whether donations generate a profit.

— C. BLANCHARD

Tax bill surprises committee

Got a \$1 billion deficit? Try scrubbing every corporate subsidy off the books.

House Taxes Committee Chairwoman Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington) sponsors HF4103, a bill that would do just that. The bill dedicates 23 pages to repealing corporate tax subsidies, ranging among the JOBZ program, foreign royalties, research credits and the bovine testing credit. The bill would also lower the corporate tax rate by at least one percentage point.

"It should certainly be controversial," she said at the March 19 meeting. She came up with the idea after wondering how to solve the \$938 million biennial deficit without cutting vital programs.

A House researcher identified every corporate state subsidy in the tax code, and this bill would eliminate most of them.

Almost immediately after walking through the bill, committee members raised concern. Some wondered how the governor would sign a bill that scraps JOBZ, a program he created and promotes. Others asked whether getting rid of tax breaks would hurt the state by driving businesses to cut jobs or move elsewhere.

Rep. Randy Demmer (R-Hayfield) said corporate tax breaks give companies an incentive to come to the state.

"Most of the things we're undoing were made for the purpose of creating jobs," he said.

After the meeting, Lenczewski said there were major hurdles to overcome, but she hoped to build the omnibus tax bill around it.

The bill was a surprise even to members of her own caucus, Lenczewski said. She didn't show it to anyone ahead of time, because members would latch on to all kinds of things they didn't want to let go.

However, the bill would lower the corporate

tax rate and raise money so that lawmakers can avoid cuts to health and human services, which would make the bill more palatable to both sides of the political aisle, she said.

"There are a lot more winners than losers," Lenczewski said.

The committee is expected to take up the bill again after the Easter break, and the public will be invited to testify. There is no Senate companion.

— C. BLANCHARD

Governor's property tax proposal

The governor's tax bill didn't exactly get a rave review in the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division on March 14, but it sparked discussion as the division begins to craft its omnibus bill.

"I do appreciate that the governor did not take another hit at local government aid or county program aid," said Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth), the division chairman. "I do think an effective case has been made by our mayors and city council members and commissioners that local government aid and county program aid does provide property tax relief."

Gov. Tim Pawlenty's bill covers three areas related to property taxes: a change to city levy limits; a reduction of the renters' tax credit; and transitional aid for cities affected by a utility tax rule change.

Revenue Commissioner Ward Einess said a change to levy limits would likely distribute millions of dollars in property tax relief. However, Marquart questioned whether the change would cause some cities to lose parts of their budget, forcing them to cut services.

Currently, an eligible renter gets back 19 percent of rent paid over a one-year period. Under the governor's proposal, it would be cut to 16 percent, or an average of about \$119 per renter.

Einess said the lowered percentage better reflects the current amount of property tax paid by landlords, but Rep. Diane Loeffler (DFL-Mpls) questioned whether it would be too much of a decrease for low-income renters.

The governor offered his solution for the controversial utility provision rule change, which lowered the amount of property taxes collected by local governments. The governor's proposal would offer state aid to communities that lost at least 5 percent of their tax base.

The proposal, which would last two years, did not impress every division member. Marquart said he'd like to see a solution that benefits everyone affected by the change, not just those hardest hit.

"This is going to put a squeeze on a lot of these communities," he said.

The governor's tax bill is HF3967, sponsored by Rep. Dean Simpson (R-Perham). Sen. Julianne Ortman (R-Chanhassen) sponsors the companion bill, SF3665, which awaits action by the Senate Taxes Committee.

— C. BLANCHARD

Possible utility tax resolution

A new bill raised some old gripes March 17 in the House Taxes Committee. The governor's tax bill, HF3967, is sponsored by the committee's Republican lead, Rep. Dean Simpson (R-Perham).

The bill includes the governor's solution to the utility tax rule change, an issue that spurred intense debate over a tax bill earlier this session. Republicans said the governor would veto the DFL solution, and the Senate later removed the provision entirely.

The governor proposes a two-year transitional aid for cities that lost 5 percent of their tax base from the rule change. Rep. Sandy Wollschlager (DFL-Cannon Falls), who sponsored the provision that was stripped from the last tax bill, said the governor's proposal was "piecemeal," and she would like to see a different solution.

A discussion resurfaced in the March 14 meeting of the House Property Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division about the governor's proposed changes to levy limits.

The proposal would change how levy limits are calculated and could decrease operating budgets for cities that receive local government aid, said Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth).

Revenue Commissioner Ward Einess said the governor insists that the measure would equalize property tax rates across the state.

"He is a sincere believer that the only tool for holding down property taxes is a levy limit," he said.

Other proposals include a decrease in the renters' tax credit; a proposal to search bank account information for delinquent taxpayers; an extension to some contracts in the JOBZ program; an abolition of the political contribution tax credit; and a decrease in the state sales tax.

The companion bill, SF3665, sponsored by Sen. Julianne Ortman (R-Chanhassen), awaits action by the Senate Taxes Committees.

— C. BLANCHARD

TECHNOLOGY

Broadband task force proposed

Widespread broadband technology in Minnesota is one step closer to fruition after a bill to establish the High-Speed Broadband Task Force was approved by the

House Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology and Elections Committee on March 18 and sent to the House floor.

HF2107/SF1918*, sponsored by Rep. Sandra Masin (DFL-Eagan) and Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon (DFL-Duluth), would create a High-Speed Broadband Task Force to develop a broadband deployment goal for the state and a strategy to achieve it. The Senate passed the bill 55-2 March 17.

Masin described the bill as something that would bring Minnesota into the 21st century by asking the governor to appoint the task force to make legislative recommendations regarding the creation of a state high-speed broadband goal and a plan to implement that goal.

"It attempts to create a balanced representation of metro and rural perspectives," Masin said.

The governor would appoint 19 members to the task force, in addition to four appointed by the Legislature. A report and recommendations would be due from the task force by Nov. 1, 2009, that:

- identifies a level of broadband service, including connection speeds, reasonably needed by 2015;
- describes a set of policies and actions needed to achieve that goal, and estimates the costs of doing so;
- identifies areas in the state that lack infrastructure necessary to support broadband service; and
- evaluates strategies and financing mechanisms used elsewhere to support broadband development.

The task force would expire on March 1, 2010.

— B. HOGENSON

TRANSPORTATION

Governor spending plan hurts transit

Fewer transit routes could be one result of the governor's supplemental transportation budget request.

Sponsored by Rep. Doug Magnus (R-Slayton), HF3964 was shared with the House Transportation Finance Committee March 17. No action was taken.

Under the plan, the Transportation

Department would receive an additional \$6.85 million in the current fiscal year, and a Fiscal Year 2009 reduction of \$2.5 million.

The onetime influx is needed to obtain the state's share of \$1 billion in additional federal bridge funding that was appropriated by Congress earlier this year.

The plan also includes a 4 percent ongoing reduction (\$752,000 in Fiscal Year 2009) in grants to Greater Minnesota transit and a \$1.7 million onetime reduction.

"The reduction is consistent with the governor's ongoing attempt to balance the General Fund deficit, and is consistent with other agencies," said Kevin Gray, MnDOT chief financial officer.

"We're anticipating the adjustment in the governor's proposal to impact the transit systems roughly about 10,000 hours in calendar year 2008 and another 40,000 hours in calendar year 2009," said Tom Gottfried, transit programs section director with the department's Office of Transit. There was an estimated 980,000 hours of Greater Minnesota transit in 2007.

The Twin Cities metropolitan area could also see less service because the governor's plan calls for \$29.9 million in bus system operation reductions for the Metropolitan Council in Fiscal Year 2009, and reduces the base appropriation in the 2010-11 biennium by \$3.2 million per year.

"There would be a fairly significant fare increase or route reductions if this stays as is," said Council Chairman Peter Bell.

Rep. Alice Hausman (DFL-St. Paul) added, "We need to be going the other way."

"I don't want to cut either, but we've got to make some choices here," Magnus said. "We'll be wrestling this for a long time."

The bill allocates \$12 million to the Driver and Vehicle Services Division of the Public Safety Department for the replacement of an outdated driver and vehicle services information system. Also within the department is a \$28,000 cut for a Republican National Convention security coordinator.

A companion bill, SF3686, sponsored by Sen. Michael Jungbauer (R-East Bethel), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— M. Cook

Engineer as a deputy commissioner

To better manage its necessary obligations, a change could be made near the top of the Transportation Department chain of command.

Sponsored by Rep. Terry Morrow (DFL-St. Peter), HF3090 would require that a person appointed to be a deputy commissioner must be a licensed professional engineer.

The bill was approved March 17 by the House Finance Committee and sent to the House floor. A companion bill, SF2925, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury), awaits action by the full Senate.

Current law allows for the commissioner to "establish four positions in the unclassified service at the deputy and assistant commissioner, assistant to the commissioner or personal secretary levels." The bill calls for the new position to remain as an unclassified position, and still leaves room for three others. No more than two of the positions could be at the deputy commissioner level.

"We believe it makes sense because MnDOT is, at its core, an engineering organization. All of the other functions necessary are in support of that technical mission," said Tom Eggum, a senior consultant at TKDA, a consulting engineering, architecture and planning firm.

Eleven states require their transportation commissioner be an engineer.

Morrow said the goal is not to change the commissioner role, but to ensure that a top engineer is in MnDOT's upper echelon.

"I can assure you that under our current system the deputy commissioner consults regularly, daily with the engineers who head the engineering divisions at MnDOT," said Betsy Parker, the department's government affairs director, told the House Transportation Finance Committee Feb. 26. "We have not felt internally any particular lack in terms of having the engineering guidance that we need. The engineers who head the divisions have been in MnDOT for a long time, and are very competent to provide the advice to both the commissioner and the deputy."

— M. Cook

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A final salute

Veterans cemeteries provide for burial close to home



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

The Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery near Little Falls, is funded through a federal initiative establishing state-run cemeteries closer to where veterans and their families live.

By LEE ANN SCHUTZ

Terry Gile struggled to get the metal supports for the blue, red and white memorial wreath into the frozen March ground. He and his mother, Esther, traveled the 35 miles from St. Cloud to the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery to visit the grave of her husband and his father, Laurence.

The World War II veteran died last April and it was his wish to be buried in the veterans cemetery. It means a lot to his family as well. Terry likes the symmetry of the white stones perfectly lined up “like soldiers marching in a parade,” that his father is with people who shared an important part of this country’s history, and that the grounds are so meticulously maintained. But for Esther Gile, the reason is much more personal. “We’ve been up here at least eight times, and it would just be hard to get to the cities, if he was buried at Fort Snelling (National Cemetery).”

The Gile family typify the rationale behind Congress acting to fund more national cemeteries in large population centers, but also its commitment to smaller state-run veterans cemeteries, which would be located closer to where veterans reside.

Minnesota is home to a national veterans cemetery at Fort Snelling, but it also hosts

one state-run veterans cemetery located just outside Camp Ripley near Little Falls. It was established in 1996 and expanded in 2003 with a \$3.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as part of a federal initiative to keep veterans closer to home, even in death. Now plans are in the making for a new veterans cemetery near Duluth.

“You have to take a step back and appreciate what a facility like this can do for a family,” said Dave Swantek, the cemetery director.

Terry Gile agrees, “Spouses of the veterans are at an age, too, that makes it difficult for them to get to visit a cemetery if it is far away.”

Accessibility a priority

Statistics show that only a small percentage of veterans actually participate in the federal benefits for which they are entitled. But for

many, burial in a veterans cemetery is one benefit they want.

When an eligible veteran dies, he or she can be buried in a veterans cemetery at no cost. An eligible spouse or dependent is entitled to burial there for a fee.

The Little Falls cemetery has burial room for about 20,000 veterans and their dependents, and is about 15 percent filled. Swantek said that they have jumped from about 100 burials a year to about 300, largely because of the cemetery’s accessibility to veterans living in the area.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty announced March 12 that the state is applying for an \$8 million federal grant to establish of a new veterans cemetery using 60 acres of land in Jay Cooke State Park that would be transferred from the Department of Natural Resources.

Next to the Twin Cities metropolitan area, St. Louis County has the second largest veterans population in the state. With an estimated 46,000 veterans living within 75 miles of the proposed cemetery, the location would make it easier for families to visit grave sites — an important criterion for the National Cemetery Administration, which awards the grants.

“Congress directs the NCA to have a national or state vets cemetery within

Salute continued on page 22



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Hospitals and providers would be rewarded for keeping people healthy under HF3391, the health care transformation bill. A Health Care Transformation Commission would develop a payment and reward system for providers

BY PATTY OSTBERG

About 93 percent of Minnesotans have insurance, but they aren't getting their money's worth, and the other 7 percent don't have insurance. Whatever percentage you fall under, changes could be just around the corner.

HF3391, sponsored by Rep. Thomas Huntley (DFL-Duluth), would set aggressive timelines to how the state pays providers for health care and how they manage chronic diseases.

"About 75 percent of the money spent on people in health care is spent on those with chronic diseases," Huntley said. The Governor's Health Care Transformation Task Force says the state could manage the diseases better and save about 20 percent in approximately five years.

On Huntley's own admission, the timelines set out in the health care transformation bill are hard to attain. "This is a work in progress ... and I'm not sure some of the timelines are completely realistic, ... I'm trying to end up with a bill that the governor will sign."

The House Health Care and Human

Services Finance Division approved the bill March 17, and sent it to the House Finance Committee. A companion bill, SF3099, sponsored by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the full Senate.

Universal coverage and costs

Universal coverage goals are set in the bill at 94 percent of Minnesotans covered by 2009 and gradually increasing to 98 percent by 2013.

The affordability standard would be increased for people to qualify for MinnesotaCare coverage, and inpatient hospital services caps

would increase from \$10,000 to \$20,000. Affordability standards would be created for individuals and families with incomes of no more than 400 percent of the federal poverty guideline. Affordability is defined as the sum of premiums, deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs paid by a person or family. For example, a family at 375 percent to 400 percent of the guideline would pay 8 percent of their gross monthly income on health care expenses.

How to pay for the added coverage and other costs in the bill has yet to be decided. Huntley said monies could come from the Health Care Access Fund and through savings of managing chronic diseases better. "I guarantee you when this bill gets to the floor we'll have defined, perfect fiscal notes," he said.

It would be hard to determine exactly how much money would be available to cover the uninsured, said Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague). "You're either going to have to find another source of revenue, or you're going to have to chuck them all off. ... It just doesn't work."

continued on next page

Payment restructure

The only way to ensure health care cost control is through restructuring payments to providers, said David Wessner, chief executive officer of Park Nicollet Health Services. He supported an amendment by Huntley that would allow a newly created Health Care Transformation Commission to develop a system to pay providers based on innovation and improved costs and quality. "It is the only real cost control mechanism," he said.

The idea is to pay providers for their performance of keeping people healthy, instead of rewarding for the number of visits and treatments, Huntley said.

Providers would submit bids for the total cost of care based on their prices for a facility and "must reflect the providers' commitment to manage their risk-adjusted patient population within this total cost." The health and human services commissioner would be required to implement this payment system by Jan. 1, 2011.

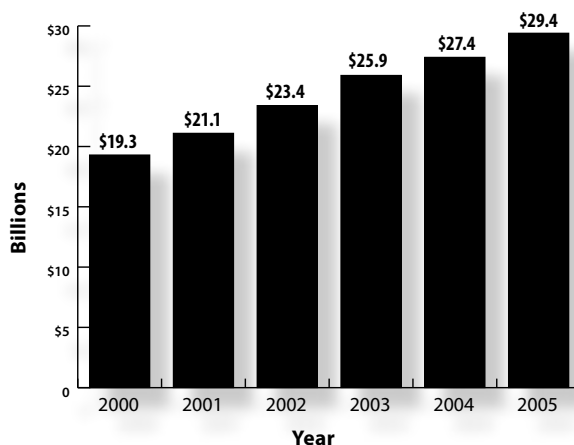
While the change could benefit large insurance companies, it could leave individual providers, like those in rural areas, unable to keep up, said Rep. Steve Gottwalt (R-St. Cloud). "It's a great global idea," but it's untested and we don't know what will happen to small providers, he said, noting they potentially would have to hire more staff to report on the data required for quality measurements.

Measures and insurance

"Our payment system doesn't reward people for doing the right thing," Huntley said. Instead, we should shift the focus to a health care system that tries to keep people out of the hospital.

The governor's task force found that between 2001 and 2007, employer-sponsored coverage fell from 68 percent to 62.5 percent. Enrollment in public insurance programs rose from 21.1 percent to 25.2 percent, and the uninsured

Total Health Care Spending Growth in Minnesota



Source: Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System

rate increased from 6.1 percent to 7.2 percent.

A Health Care Transformation Commission would be created to establish a set of performance-evaluation measures that health care providers could use to set goals, and to track the progress of meeting those goals. By Dec. 15, 2008, the commission is to provide the Legislature with their recommendations.

A Minnesota Health Insurance Exchange would also be created to provide "greater access, choice, portability, and affordability in health insurance products," according to the bill. Health plans would be sold through the exchange to individuals and employers.

By offering a state-created insurance plan and rewarding providers for keeping patients healthy, health costs would go down, Huntley said. "Think about what would happen in Minnesota's economy if we had 20 percent lower costs for health care."

Medical homes

People with chronic diseases can see improvement in overall health when treated

in a health care home scenario. The bill calls for the state to pay providers to coordinate care in public programs resulting in long-term cost savings that could pay for the uninsured, Huntley said.

By July 1, 2009, the health commissioner would be required to have state program enrollees and those with chronic diseases select a primary care clinic or medical group and undergo an initial health assessment to identify preventable health care needs. The homes would coordinate care and develop a comprehensive plan for each enrollee.

Cooperation

The uninsured sometimes wait until a crisis to seek medical care, which tends to be more costly than continued care to keep up with medical needs. After treatment they often end up off of medical assistance until another crisis occurs.

Provisions in the bill seek to automate and increase the cooperation between public programs to decrease the turnover rate. By July 1, 2009, the health commissioner is instructed to improve coordination between state health care and social service programs, and set up an automated process to send out state program renewal forms in various languages.

Universal coverage goals are set in the bill at 94 percent of Minnesotans covered by 2009 and gradually increasing to 98 percent by 2013.

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The coming oil crash

Legislators look to prepare the state for the consequences of peak oil

By Nick Busse

When the average price of gasoline reached a new all-time high of \$3.23 a gallon last week, most Americans had little choice but to take it in stride. For the most part, the reality of expensive gas had become inevitable; like the weather, we can grumble about it, but we can't change it.

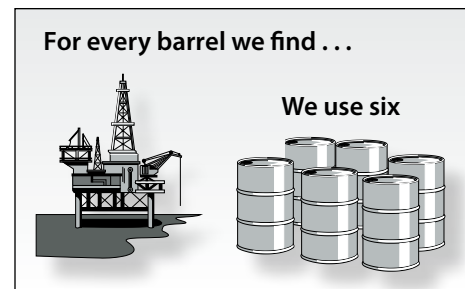
But if the forecast for the price of gasoline looks cloudy now, it's nothing compared to the storm that some experts say is gathering just over the horizon. Believe it or not, the price of gas is likely to rise even higher — a lot higher. And it's not because of greedy oil company executives or volatile Middle Eastern politics.

Sometime within the next 30 years, global demand for oil is projected to finally exceed the human capacity to produce it. We will not run out of oil, per se, but our production capacity will peak, meaning that oil supplies will grow increasingly scarce and significantly

more expensive. This phenomenon is known as "peak oil," and those familiar with the issue claim that it rivals global warming in terms of the problem it poses to humanity.

"This will be the defining challenge of the 21st century," said Matthew Simmons, chairman of the investment bank Simmons & Company International and author of "Twilight in the Desert: The Coming Saudi Oil Shock and the World Economy."

Simmons, one of many scientists and oil industry experts who appeared before members of the House Energy Finance and Policy Division in a series of peak oil



Source: Oregon Department of Energy

informational hearings that began in January, believes that the peak may have already occurred; others predict that production will peak between 2012 and 2015, while more optimistic estimates put it out to approximately 2040.

While the exact timing of peak oil remains in dispute, no one — not even the oil companies — denies that it's going to happen. And while state and local governments can do little to stop peak oil from occurring, a push has begun to get them to prepare for some of its potential consequences, which could include temporary gas shortages, rising food costs, rapid price fluctuations, general economic instability and social unrest.

No good alternatives

Simmons and other experts say that one of the biggest problems with oil is its irreplacability. Ethanol and biodiesel, gasoline's chief competitors, are energy-intensive to produce, and there isn't nearly enough feedstock available to make quantities that would be large enough to replace gasoline. Other technologies like solar, wind and nuclear power are geared toward generating electricity, and offer little hope of solving the transportation needs of a global economy.

Moreover, even if some new miracle technology were to emerge in the next few decades that could replace oil as a fuel source, it's unlikely that it would. Consider the hundreds of millions of cars, trucks, ships and airplanes around the world that run on



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

David Hughes, a geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada, checks the overhead display while giving a Power-Point presentation on peak oil production and other energy sources during at a March 17 hearing of the House Energy Finance and Policy Division.

Oil continued on page 22

Monday, March 17

HF4061-Kahn (DFL)

Finance

Human and civil rights investigation and statutory function fulfillment requirements established.

HF4062-Nelson (DFL)

Taxes

Tax refund provided on fuel used in certain auxiliary power devices.

HF4063-Jaros (DFL)

Finance

Indian Affairs Council allowed to conduct meetings by telephone or by electronic means.

HF4064-Davnie (DFL)

Taxes

Tax incentives and certification provided for green economy businesses.

HF4065-Davnie (DFL)

Finance

Mississippi River license plate created.

HF4066-Otremba (DFL)

Finance

Silver and bronze star medal license plates authorized for awarded veterans.

HF4067-Wagenius (DFL)

Finance

Water contamination prevention standards provided, and required financial assurance instruments specified for nonferrous metallic mineral mining owners.

HF4068-Dittrich (DFL)

Finance

Permanent school fund payment distribution modified, and permanent school fund revenue growth set aside for school technology purposes.

HF4069-Hamilton (R)

Finance

Excessive co-payments on drugs limited to treat multiple sclerosis.

HF4070-Hausman (DFL)

Finance

Public facility funding provided.

HF4071-Tillberry (DFL)

Finance

Safe school levy modified.

HF4072-Hausman (DFL)

Finance

University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities funding provided.

HF4073-Gunther (R)

Taxes

Long-term care insurance credit increased.

HF4074-Lanning (R)

Finance

Legislative Coordinating Commission funding provided for legislators' forum.

HF4075-Olin (DFL)

Finance

Cattle herd requirements within certain areas provided and Board of Animal Health funding provided for the buyout of cattle herds in certain areas.

HF4076-Beard (R)

Finance

Internet access equity aid modified.

HF4077-Paymar (DFL)

Finance

Department of Public Safety and Department of Corrections funding provided.

HF4078-Hornstein (DFL)

Finance

Metropolitan area transit and paratransit capital expenditures additional financing provided; obligation bonds authorized and issued.

HF4079-Madore (DFL)

Finance

Health care reform plans cost analysis funding provided.

HF4080-Hilty (DFL)

Health & Human Services

Environmental learning centers exempted from certain space requirements.

HF4081-Emmer (R)

Health & Human Services

Web site registry and surveillance information public requirement provided.

HF4082-Laine (DFL)

Health & Human Services

Prescription information required to be kept confidential.

HF4083-Rukavina (DFL)

Commerce & Labor

Credit, insurance and other credit information use regulated.

HF4084-Beard (R)

Transportation Finance Division

Insurance standards in road construction consideration required, trucks and vans reclassified for vehicle registration purposes, spotter truck registration method prescribed, mobile equipment registration modified and street study required.

HF4085-Murphy, M. (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Correctional plan retirement provisions clarified.

HF4086-Erickson (R)

Commerce & Labor

Video lottery terminals authorized, revenue use specified, lawful gambling taxes modified and conforming changes provided.

HF4087-Shimanski (R)

Public Safety & Civil Justice

English established as the official state language, illegal immigration offenses and penalties provided.

HF4088-Kahn (DFL)

Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections

Prohibited place names specified relating to public places.

HF4089-Brod (R)

Health & Human Services

Legislative Commission on Autism established.

HF4090-Hornstein (DFL)

Health & Human Services

Mental health fatality review team established.

HF4091-Norton (DFL)

Health & Human Services

Small employer health coverage subsidy program established.

HF4092-Hackbarth (R)

Environment & Natural Resources

Hunting and fishing supplies and equipment sales tax portion dedicated to game and fish purposes, quality wildlife initiative fund and council established, sales tax on fur clothing repealed and constitutional amendment proposed.

HF4093-Anderson, S. (R)

Transportation Finance Division

Fuel-efficient vehicles authorized for operation in high-occupancy vehicle lanes.

HF4094-Murphy, E. (DFL)

Environment & Natural Resources

Solid waste fired boiler requirements modified for burning refuse-derived fuel.

Tuesday, March 18

HF4095-Marquart (DFL)

Commerce & Labor

Prevailing wage requirements modified.

HF4096-Lenczewski (DFL)

Taxes

Alternative minimum taxable income modified to exclude charitable contributions made by non-itemizers.

HF4097-Davnie (DFL)

Taxes

Property tax refund payment allowed to counties when property taxes are delinquent.

HF4098-Marquart (DFL)

Taxes

Agricultural land removed from the tax base for school bonded debt levies.

HF4099-Nornes (R)

Finance

Higher education appropriations reduced and adjusted for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009.

HF4100-Morrow (DFL)

Finance

Driver and vehicle services technology account established, technology surcharge imposed and fees adjusted.

HF4101-Gottwalt (R)**Health & Human Services**

Respite care program created for family adult foster care providers.

HF4102-Gottwalt (R)**Finance**

State health care outreach incentive program established for licensed producers and funding provided.

HF4103-Lenczewski (DFL)**Taxes**

Corporation franchise tax modified, grants authorized, foreign operating corporations eliminated, tax havens defined, subsidies taxed, rate reduced, JOBZ programs and tax credits repealed and exemptions eliminated.

HF4104-Shimanski (R)**Agriculture, Rural Economies & Veterans Affairs**

Gambling revenue lawful purpose added.

HF4105-Tillberry (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Motor vehicle service contracts and coverages regulated and term defined.

HF4106-Clark (DFL)**E-12 Education**

American Indian youth summer programming funding provided.

HF4107-Dill (DFL)**Transportation Finance Division**

Petroleum product distribution provisions modified.

Wednesday, March 19**HF4108-Rukavina (DFL)****Environment & Natural Resources**

Eveleth; Iron Range off-highway vehicle recreation area management plan requirements modified and funding provided for recreational underpass.

HF4109-Murphy, M. (DFL)**Governmental Operations, Reform, Technology & Elections**

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system individual retirement account plan revision permitted in prior retirement benefit coverage elections.

HF4110-Bunn (DFL)**Health & Human Services**

Proposed and mandated health benefits evaluation provided and funding provided.

HF4111-Benson (DFL)**Public Safety & Civil Justice**

Teri Lee Law designated.

HF4112-Murphy, E. (DFL)**Taxes**

Ramsey and Hennepin counties; authority extended to impose a mortgage registry and deed tax.

WHO SCARED WHOM ...

PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Minnesota Zoo naturalist Judy Armstrong holds an African hedgehog that has rolled into a protective ball as 5-year-old Saher Ahasan of Blaine takes a closer look during "Zoo Day at the Capitol" March 18.

Salute continued from page 16

75 miles of 90 percent of the veteran population,” Swantek said. “Once you get further away than 75 miles, people choose a local option. Congress really wants this benefit to be available.”

The state plans to submit a grant application this summer, and should know if it has been approved by the fall, Swantek said. If accepted, construction on the new facility could begin in the summer of 2010.

Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) sponsors HF3749 that would allow for construction of another state veterans cemetery. The House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division laid the bill over March 18 for possible inclusion in its omnibus bill. A Senate companion, SF3450, sponsored by Sen. Yvonne Prettnner Solon (DFL-Duluth), awaits action by the full Senate.

Christine Kiel, legislative liaison for the Veterans Affairs Department, said the federal grant would cover all construction costs, but the state would be responsible for the operation costs. “The Little Falls cemetery runs \$325,000 a year, and has a staff of six. But the new cemetery will have the director and administrator at Little Falls who will also oversee the operations, so we will only need four for maintenance,” she said. 🕌

Oil continued from page 19

petroleum and that would have to be replaced in such a short time frame.

Given that investing in alternative fuels would likely put little more than a dent in the problem, any efforts to mitigate the effects of peak oil are likely to focus instead on conservation, and on softening the impacts of short-term problems like gas shortages and price spikes.

What that could mean for policymakers in the future is largely anyone’s guess; however, Simmons offered a few of his own ideas, such as growing more food locally, ending the “globalized” manufacturing of products and “liberating” the workforce by encouraging more people to work from home.

For the time being, Division Chairman Rep. Bill Hilty (DFL-Finlayson) intends to get the ball rolling with HF995, a resolution that would recognize the “unprecedented challenge” posed by peak oil and ask Gov. Tim Pawlenty to prepare a statewide response plan to deal with it.

It’s a small first step, but one that is intended to address what experts say is one of the biggest obstacles to dealing with the issue: the lack of public discussion about it.

MUSLIM DAY

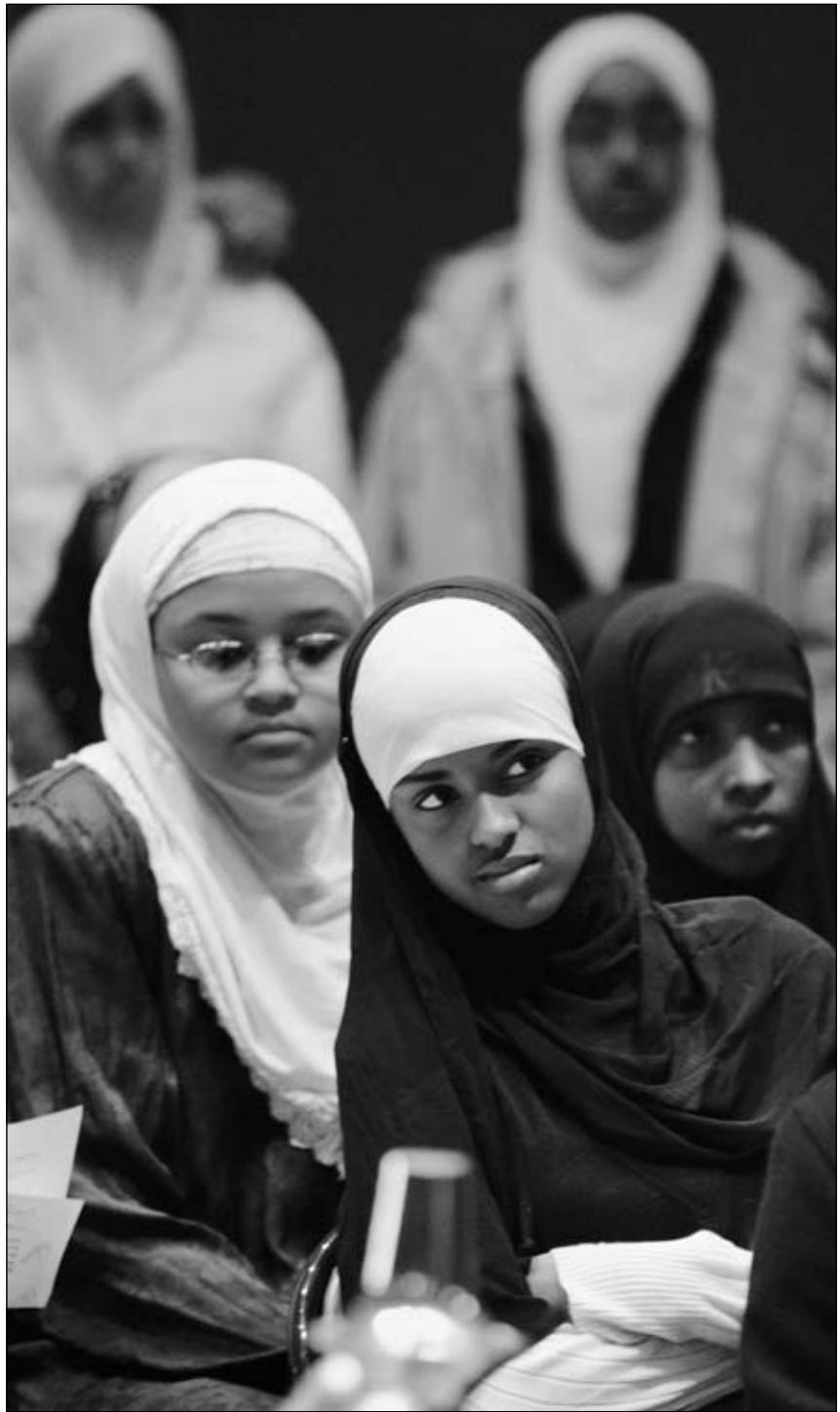


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Eighth grader, Fatima Osman, front, and other students from the Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy in Inver Grove Heights, listen to speakers in the Capitol Rotunda during the March 18 “Muslim Day at the Capitol.”

“Awareness is the first step, and that resolution goes a long way in producing awareness,” said David Hughes, a geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada, at a March 17 division meeting. Hughes said global warming and peak oil represent the two preeminent issues of our time, but noted

that the latter issue is relatively obscure.

Hilty’s resolution currently awaits action by the full House. A companion, SF1948, sponsored by Sen. Jim Carlson (DFL-Eagan), awaits action by the Senate Rules and Administration Committee. 🕌

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43A	Anderson, Sarah (R)	229	5511	66A	Lesch, John (DFL)	537	4224
3A	Anzelc, Tom (DFL)	417	4936	30A	Liebling, Tina (DFL)	393	0573
39B	Atkins, Joe (DFL)	503	4192	1B	Lieder, Bernard (DFL)	423	5091
35A	Beard, Michael (R)	207	8872	55A	Lillie, Leon (DFL)	353	1188
43B	Benson, John (DFL)	517	9934	59A	Loeffler, Diane (DFL)	349	4219
33B	Berns, John (R)	311	4315	37A	Madore, Shelley (DFL)	507	5506
57A	Bigham, Karla (DFL)	529	4342	22A	Magnus, Doug (R)	217	5505
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52B	Dean, Matt (R)	327	3018	64A	Murphy, Erin (DFL)	413	8799
49A	DeLaForest, Chris (R)	323	4231	6B	Murphy, Mary (DFL)	343	2676
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52A	Dettmer, Bob (R)	329	4124	10A	Nornes, Bud (R)	277	4946
6A	Dill, David (DFL)	571	2190	29B	Norton, Kim (DFL)	387	9249
47A	Dittrich, Denise (DFL)	371	5513	1A	Olin, Dave (DFL)	593	9635
58B	Dominguez, Augustine "Willie" (DFL)	539	8659	16B	Olson, Mark (IR)	301	4237
12B	Doty, Al (DFL)	433	4247	11B	Otremba, Mary Ellen (DFL)	445	3201
28B	Drazkowski, Steve (R)	247	2273	37B	Ozment, Dennis (R)	283	4306
17A	Eastlund, Rob (R)	243	5364	42B	Paulsen, Erik (R)	309	7449
2A	Eken, Kent (DFL)	575	9918	64B	Paymar, Michael (DFL)	543	4199
19B	Emmer, Tom (R)	261	4336	31A	Pelowski Jr., Gene (DFL)	491	8637
41A	Erhardt, Ron (R)	245	4363	32A	Peppin, Joyce (R)	331	7806
16A	Erickson, Sondra (R)	279	6746	20A	Peterson, Aaron (DFL)	451	4228
8B	Faust, Tim (DFL)	567	0518	41B	Peterson, Neil W. (R)	213	7803
21B	Finstad, Brad (R)	251	9303	45A	Peterson, Sandra (DFL)	345	4176
26B	Fritz, Patti (DFL)	551	8237	27B	Poppe, Jeanne (DFL)	487	4193
53A	Gardner, Paul (DFL)	581	2907	5A	Rukavina, Tom (DFL)	477	0170
36B	Garofalo, Pat (R)	221	1069	26A	Ruth, Connie (R)	291	5368
15A	Gottwalt, Steve (R)	231	6316	42A	Ruud, Maria (DFL)	515	3964
54A	Greiling, Mindy (DFL)	381	5387	2B	Sailer, Brita (DFL)	577	4265
24A	Gunther, Bob (R)	289	3240	54B	Scalze, Bev (DFL)	357	7153
48A	Hackbarth, Tom (R)	209	2439	21A	Seifert, Marty (R)	267	5374
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15B	Haws, Larry (DFL)	473	6612	44A	Simon, Steve (DFL)	375	9889
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50A	Laine, Carolyn (DFL)	407	4331	32B	Zellers, Kurt (R)	315	5502

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MINNESOTA INDEX

Perils of poverty

Percent of state residents living in poverty in 2006.....	8.1
National rate, as percent.....	12.3
Maximum amount a single person could earn in 2007, and still be considered in poverty.....	\$10,210
Amount for a family of four.....	\$20,650
States in 2005 with higher poverty rates than Minnesota.....	46
Minnesotans living below 200 percent of the poverty guideline in 2005	410,200
In 2000	380,476
In 1990	435,331
Estimated number of Minnesota children under age 18 living in poverty in 2006	152,000
Number in 2000	114,000
Percent of all Minnesota children living in poverty in 2006	12.2
Percent in 2000.....	9
Of Minnesota children living in poverty in 2006, percent that were white	54
Percent that were black.....	24
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Percent of Greater Minnesota residents.....	10
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Percent of nondisabled Minnesotans	7.7
Percent of persons with a mental disability living in poverty.....	26
Percent of persons with a physical disability	21.4

— M. Cook

Sources: Poverty and People with Disabilities; A Report to the Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020, Minnesota State Council on Disability; Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota; Poverty in Minnesota, Testimony to Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020, State Demographer Tom Gillaspay and State Economist Tom Stinson, August 2007.

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