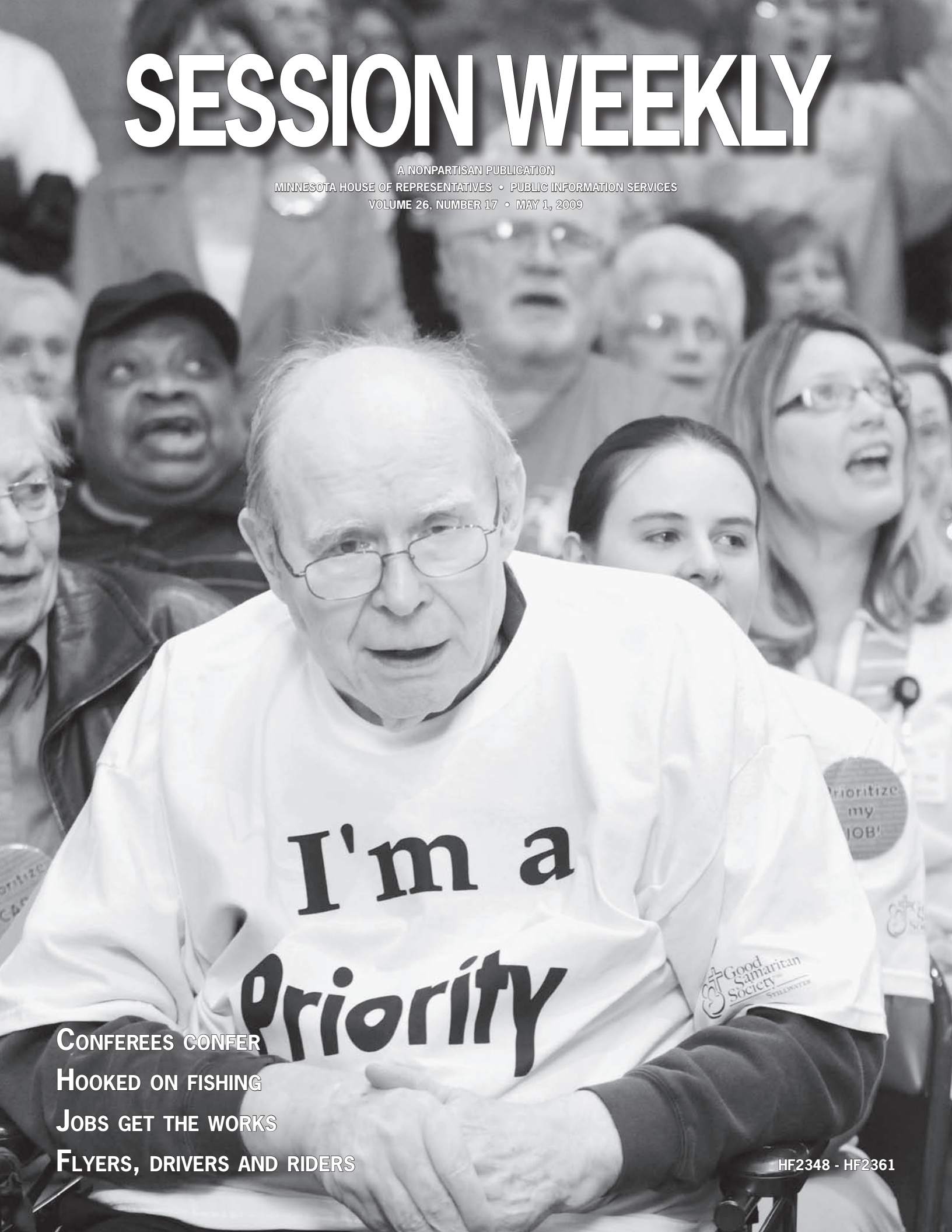


SESSION WEEKLY

A NONPARTISAN PUBLICATION

MINNESOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES • PUBLIC INFORMATION SERVICES

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JOBS GET THE WORKS
FLYERS, DRIVERS AND RIDERS

HF2348 - HF2361

SESSION WEEKLY

Session Weekly is a nonpartisan publication of Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services. During the 2009-2010 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: Merlin Hubenette, 83, and his care attendant Christy Holland from the Good Samaritan Society Center - Stillwater, joined others in the Capitol Rotunda April 28 to rally in support for long-term care funding.

— Photo by: Tom Olmscheid

Wildfire in slow motion

Emerald ash borer ignites prevention policies

By SUSAN HEGARTY

More than 30 years ago, Minnesota legislators created programs to fight Dutch elm disease, a tree fungus spread by the elm bark beetle. The disease stripped boulevards bare and prompted local governments to paint bright red Xs on dying shade trees destined for removal. Could Minnesota be headed down that road again?

Comparisons are being made between the elm bark beetle and the emerald ash borer, a tree pest recently discovered in Victory, Wis., just across the Mississippi River from Houston County, Minn. The emerald ash borer moves two miles per year, living underneath bark and interrupting the natural flow of nutrients in ash trees. It can travel much farther if it is helped by humans moving infected wood.

Rep. Larry Haws (DFL-St. Cloud) was a parks director in the 1970s and clearly remembers the devastation caused by Dutch elm disease. "It was a very scary time. (The elm) was a much larger tree but it wasn't in the ... forests, so this is a very significant challenge that the state of Minnesota is going to be taking on in the protection of our ash trees."

In 1974, the House passed policy bills to identify diseased trees and to give cities and counties authority to remove them. The following year, the state adopted grant-in-aid programs to help cities dispose of the removed trees, citing, "The Legislature finds that an epidemic of Dutch elm disease ... is occurring in Minnesota which threatens the natural environment. Immediate action is therefore necessary..." They appropriated \$1.5 million in 1975 to manage tree diseases, and by 1978 they were awarding \$29.7 million in grants for the purpose, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Ash was the tree of choice for filling the void left by Dutch elm disease. Now those 20- to 30-year-old hardwoods are threatened by the fluorescent green bug that's no bigger than a thumb. Its discovery in western Wisconsin prompted a federal and state quarantine last week that prohibits the movement of ash wood in Houston County beyond county lines, even though the bug or its distinctive D-shaped exit hole have not yet been found in Minnesota.

Déjà vu

Legislators are racing against the clock, before the May 18 adjournment deadline, to protect ash trees and to pass bills designed to prevent the invasion of the emerald ash borer.

Rep. Diane Loeffler (DFL-Mpls) sponsors HF2262 that would appropriate \$1.5 million, the same as the 1975 funding level, for training volunteers and to educate the public in early detection methods. But unlike 1975, when there was a state surplus and approved tax breaks, Minnesota is facing a \$4.6 billion deficit in the next biennium.

So where could funding be found? Voters approved a constitutional amendment last year to authorize a sales tax increase, with proceeds going into an outdoor heritage fund to protect the state's natural resources. Loeffler said the House Cultural and Outdoor Resources Finance Division is considering using a portion of its projected reserve fund toward prevention efforts.

Loeffler's bill also requests \$125,000 for the Forest Protection Task Force, \$30,000 for a "releaf" program and another \$5 million to establish an emergency forest pest response account. Similar to the emergency forest fire account, the emergency pest fund could be tapped in the event of an emerald ash borer infestation.

"Emerald ash borer has been described as a forest fire in slow motion," Loeffler said.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Two vials, one with a larvae and the other with a mature emerald ash borer, sit on top of a map showing the insects' migration west from the East Coast. The display was before the House Cultural and Outdoor Resources Finance Division April 22.

First Reading continued on page 4

"I'm hoping that we will have an inventory, before we're done with this session, of laws and regulations that we need to assist ... in creating that stronger network of early detectors and also the response tools that you need to make sure this doesn't spread."

Rep. Greg Davids (R-Preston) represents the county under quarantine.

"Once they get across, it's not a matter of eradicating; it's a matter of containing, and that's disturbing," he said. "It's frightening what could happen, especially if it worked its way up to Rep. Anzelc's district, which has tremendous amounts of ash trees." Rep. Tom Anzelc (DFL-Balsam Township) represents District 3A in northern Minnesota.

Davids said his district has a large Amish community whose members use wood regularly as an energy supply. He said special consideration will be required when notifying this community, because of their non-reliance on modern technology. He sponsors HF2338, a bill nearly identical to Loeffler's except that it does not include money for grants to local governments or require the funds to be tied to achieving state environmental goals.

Loeffler's bill has no companion. Davids' bill is a companion to SF2108, sponsored by Sen. Sharon Erickson-Ropes (DFL-Winona), which awaits action by the Senate Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Budget Division.

The color purple

Officials from the Agriculture and Natural Resources departments have been working to leverage additional funds from the U.S.

Department of Agriculture. Only \$120,000 each year is spent by the department to look for the emerald ash borer, according to Geir Friisoe, senior program administrator in the department. Most of the funds are used to perform two survey methods:

- 1,000 long purple strips of sticky tape are placed around trees that act much like fly paper. Scientists have determined that the emerald ash borer is attracted to the color purple.
- A single tree in a grove of ash trees may be used as a "trap" for the bug. A strip of bark is removed from the tree to attract the pests to that particular tree, which is then sacrificed to save the surrounding trees. These tactics are used in campgrounds, in



'Emerald ash borer has been described as a forest fire in slow motion.'

— Rep. Diane Loeffler

using stingless wasps.

Loeffler said most infestations are found by the general public, which is why she is advocating for the early detection program. In Michigan, where the pest has had a strong foothold, cities have seen increases in water and electricity consumption as a result of losing their shade trees, Loeffler said.

"We have heard where some states lost control because they didn't have the right kind of plan. Minnesota has been a national leader in gypsy moth (control) and I think we can be a national leader on this," she said. 🐛



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

S. Olin Phillips, left, nursery and forest health section manager with the Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry, and DNR Deputy Commissioner Laurie Martinson answer questions about the emerald ash borer from the House Cultural and Outdoors Resources Finance Division April 22.

densely populated areas and where there are high concentrations of ash trees, including northern Minnesota forests. Friisoe said the department is hoping to receive a grant from the USDA to purchase more sticky traps.

Several legislators have asked about biological remedies. Researchers have gone to China, the native origin of the emerald ash borer, and some eradication success has been shown

Zebra mussels Aquatic invasive season upon us



Zebra mussels

Boating season is when the Department of Natural Resources ramps up efforts to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species found in Minnesota waterways.

Since 1989, when zebra mussels were first found in the Duluth harbor, these tiny shells have spread to several rivers, including the Mississippi River, and nine inland lakes, including the most recent discovery last month in Prior Lake.

"Once they get into a lake, they are there to stay," said Luke Skinner, the Department of Natural Resources invasive species supervisor. Zebra mussels are striped, hard-shell mussels, about the size of a fingernail, that can attach to hard surfaces. For that reason, they can clog water intake valves and suffocate native mussels by attaching to the shells. They filter the water and may impact the food chain in the water body, Skinner said.

Prior to any expected budget deficit, and reacting to a heightened level of concern among stakeholders and legislators, the 2007 Legislature increased funding for invasive species from \$2.4 million to \$4.9 million annually beginning this year. The funds are a combination of General Fund money (\$1.8 million) and a dedicated account from fishing license and boating registration receipts.

Besides zebra mussels, the funds are used to protect and educate the public about Eurasian water milfoil, curly-leaf pondweed, flowering rush, the New Zealand mudsnail and other species.

Specific program expansion includes beefing up inspections and enforcement, and implementing a prevention grant program. In addition, new field staff will work with lake associations.

Boaters can expect beefed up enforcement as well. The DNR will use the increased funding to hire 4.5 full-time staff to enforce the prohibition on the transport of aquatic invasive species. Last year, 22 citations were issued and 18 warnings were given. To prevent a citation, Skinner recommends cleaning and draining all water wells, pulling the drain plug, and letting a boat dry overnight. When selling a used boat lift or dock, make sure there are no invasive species attached.

There were more than 867,800 watercraft registered in the state last year, making the spread of this invasive species highly probable since they can survive in live wells or bait buckets and travel from one lake or river to another on boat trailers.

Information: www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/invasives/index.html.

— S. HEGARTY

Editor's note: The following Highlights are coverage of select bills heard in House committees and other House activities held April 23-30. 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.

BUSINESS

Helping small manufacturers

More companies would be able to take advantage of the state's small business growth acceleration program, under a bill approved April 28 by the House Finance Committee.

HF1081, sponsored by Rep. Tim Mahoney (DFL-St. Paul), would expand eligibility criteria for the program, which helps small manufacturing companies grow by providing grants for technology and business improvements that they otherwise couldn't afford.

Currently the program is open to businesses with 100 or fewer full-time employees. The bill would expand the program to include companies with up to 250 employees and set up a three-tiered system of matching contribution requirements as follows:

- companies with fewer than 50 employees must contribute \$1 for every \$3 of grant assistance;
- companies with 50 to 100 employees must contribute \$1 for every \$1 of grant assistance; and
- companies with 101 to 250 employees must contribute \$3 for every \$1 of grant assistance.

Mahoney said the program has proven to be a major boon to participating companies, and that the state has seen a return of \$15 of economic activity generated for every \$1 invested in the program.

The bill now awaits action by the full House. Sen. David Tomassoni (DFL-Chisholm) sponsors the companion, SF698, which has been laid over by the Senate Economic Development and Housing Budget Division.

The bill is also included as part of the omnibus economic development finance bill, HF1169/SF2081*, sponsored by Tomassoni and Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia). The bill includes \$750,000 for the program.

— N. BUSSE

CONSUMERS

Expansion of U stadium liquor sales

For the University of Minnesota, it may be all or nothing when it comes to liquor sales at TCF Bank Stadium that is scheduled to open this fall.

An amendment was successfully tacked onto HF1476, the omnibus liquor bill, during floor discussion April 29 that would require the university to change its plans to allow liquor purchases only in the premium seating area and suites.

Offered by Rep. Leon Lillie (DFL-North St. Paul), the amendment says that a liquor license can be issued only if sales are allowed throughout the stadium. "It should be all or nothing; you can't just have a situation that applies only in the luxury suites. If you're not in a luxury suite you can't have a beer?"

Rep. Phyllis Kahn (DFL-Mpls) said the amendment would make alcohol more easily accessible to underage college students. She added that the Big 10 Conference has rules that apply to university-owned stadiums regarding alcohol use, and this amendment would most likely prohibit any sale of alcoholic beverages

HOT ROD REFLECTION



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

The Capitol is reflected in the chrome hubcap of a 1937 Ford during the annual Minnesota Street Rod Association's Day on the Hill. More than 80 vintage vehicles were showcased on the Capitol Mall April 28.

in the facility.

Rep. Loren Solberg (DFL-Grand Rapids) countered that the Gophers have been playing in the Metrodome for 26 years where alcohol sales are permitted in all seating areas.

The bill, sponsored by Rep.

Joe Atkins (DFL-Inver Grove Heights), is a catch-all for the various liquor-related bills that have been laid over by the House Commerce and Labor Committee. Passed 124-10 by the House, it now goes to the Senate where Sen. Linda Scheid (DFL-Brooklyn Park) is its sponsor.

The bill also addresses an issue Augsburg College in Minneapolis has regarding alcohol consumption by permitting the city to issue an on-sale license. The college has been serving alcohol at selected alumnae events over the years, but found out recently that it didn't have a license to do so.

The bill also provides for consideration of liquor license by issuing authorities for:

- the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center for intercollegiate hockey games;
- the Best Western 8 Superior Inn and Suites and East Bay Suites in Grand Marais; and
- private convention centers outside the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area.

The bill also allows for extended on-sale liquor hours at the Humphrey and Lindbergh airport terminals; would allow license holders selling wine to hold wine-tasting events; and adds a device designed to ensure safe storage and monitoring of alcohol in the home to the list of items that can be sold by liquor stores.

— L. SCHUTZ

What's in the bill

The following are selected bills that have been incorporated in part, or in whole, into the omnibus liquor bill:

HF218 – Kahn
HF1200 – Dill
HF1807 – Zellers
HF1917 – Davnie
HF2130 – Juhnke

be charged with either a misdemeanor — the equivalent of running a stop sign — or a felony. “This bill aims to create a middle ground of a gross misdemeanor. ... It has to be a chargeable crime. I don't want somebody thinking grandma bumps into a car, somebody dies, and she's going to prison.”

Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia) said he couldn't understand how there was no fiscal note, when some comments associated with the fiscal notes expressed financial unease, such as the Department of Corrections estimate that offenders would occupy one to three jail beds per year. “It's pretty expensive to keep somebody in jail, isn't it?”

The Sentencing Guidelines Commission indicated no impact on state prison resources, said Rep. Michael Paymar (DFL-St. Paul), however, it estimates an increase in 28 probation caseloads, which could affect local resources.

Rukavina further expressed concern the bill would limit a judge's ability to look at a circumstance and properly punish an offender. “I'm sure nobody gets in a vehicle and attempts to fall asleep so they can hurt somebody.”

Rep. Pat Garofalo (R-Farmington), a bill co-sponsor, missed the discussion and vote due to a family obligation, but expressed bewilderment later in the meeting.

“You can't argue it has a financial connotation, it is 100 percent policy,” he said. “I'm trying to figure out how the purview of this committee could possibly justify that.”

Rep. Lyndon Carlson, Sr. (DFL-Crystal), the committee chairman, explained to Garofalo how the bill, as introduced, had a fiscal cost that was amended out by a division, before being returned to the full committee. “There was discussion about the penalty and what that would have cost potentially even though the fiscal note said zero,” Carlson said.

“Well, it sounds like we're rewriting fiscal notes, now, too. This committee is really getting out of control on a bipartisan basis. The fiscal notes aren't good enough,” Garofalo said, before Carlson quickly pounded the gavel twice to end the discussion.

A companion bill, SF639, sponsored by Sen. Jim Carlson (DFL-Eagan), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— M. COOK

unemployment benefits as compensation for reducing their work hours while enhancing their high-tech skills.

Signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty April 27 and effective the next day, the new law, sponsored by Rep. Kathy Brynaert (DFL-Mankato) and Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato), allows eligibility for the federally funded Workforce Investment in Regional Economic Development program to take effect; it expires June 30, 2011.

Through WIRED, employers in certain businesses can reduce employees' work hours while those workers take skills training and receive unemployment benefits in proportion to the amount of reduced hours.

Brynaert said the measure is “a win-win for both workers and employers” and that the \$680,000 cost in unemployment benefits will be recouped from employers over a four-year period.

HF1048/SF643*/CH25

— K. BERGGREN

Layoff alternative now law

Signed
by
the
governor

Some employers facing economic hardship will have an alternative to laying off their employees.

A new law, effective Aug. 2, 2009, will allow them to participate in a Department of Employment and Economic Development shared work plan that allows them to reduce some employees' hours while those employees become eligible for unemployment benefits in proportion to the number of their reduced hours.

Employer plans must be approved by the DEED commissioner, who may reject a proposal if it is determined the reason for the application is not to prevent layoffs. Eligible employees must have worked for the employer for one year and, under the plan, must work between 20 and 32 hours a week.

The law, signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty April 30, is sponsored by Rep. Dean Urdahl (R-Grove City) and Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury).

SF1454*/HF2040/CH27

— K. BERGGREN

CRIME

Careless driving bill crashes

A bill whose accompanying fiscal notes from a handful of agencies showed zero direct cost was rejected April 29 by the House Finance Committee on an overwhelming voice vote.

Sponsored by Rep. Karla Bigham (DFL-Cottage Grove), HF45 would increase the penalty for careless driving resulting in the death of another person to a gross misdemeanor.

Bigham said current law provides that when a person is found to be carelessly driving and causes the death of another person they can

EMPLOYMENT

Some high-tech layoffs eased

Signed
by
the
governor

The fear of being laid off will ease for some workers in the renewable energy industry who are now eligible for

ENERGY

Energy policy bill passed

The House voted 100-32 to approve a package of mostly small changes to the state's energy policy April 30.

HF863/SF550*, the omnibus energy policy bill, contains a package of energy policy changes on issues ranging from Community-Based Energy Development to rebates for

residential solar and geothermal energy.

"I think we have a very good bill. It doesn't have any earth-shaking provisions in it, but I do think it has a number of provisions that should move energy policy in the right direction in this state," said Rep. Bill Hilty (DFL-Finlayson), who sponsors the bill with Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon (DFL-Duluth).

The bill now returns to the Senate, where a different version passed 52-15 on April 6.

The bill proposes a variety of energy-related policy changes, including:

- establishing a special utility zone in St. Paul along the future Central Corridor light rail route for Xcel Energy to implement "smart grid" technology and facilitate the installation of renewable energy sources;
- requiring that power companies purchase 200 megawatts of power from small renewable energy projects (less than five megawatts each) by Dec. 31, 2010; and
- specifying that the Public Utilities Commission can require a utility company that overcharges ratepayers to issue a refund.

Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield) successfully offered an amendment that would protect landowners from utility companies looking to site high-voltage transmission lines on their properties. The amendment would prohibit utilities from using the power of eminent domain to take private property in order to construct power lines.

Supporters included Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Jordan), who said it would be fair to make power companies abide by the same eminent domain laws as municipalities. Opponents said the amendment would delay the construction of power lines needed to transmit electricity from mandated renewable energy projects to Minnesota consumers. The amendment passed 98-33.

Rep. Tim Faust (DFL-Hinckley) unsuccessfully offered an amendment that would have repealed the state's prohibition on the construction of new nuclear power plants. Supporters said nuclear power represents a cleaner alternative to coal and gas power that would provide better baseload capacity than wind and other renewable sources.

"If you look at the future of our energy needs, I don't understand why we would take anything off the table," said Rep. Bud Nornes (R-Fergus Falls).

Opponents pointed out that no solution has yet been found for the problem of storing nuclear waste. The amendment failed 72-60.

— N. BUSSE

Stimulus-funded energy projects

Nearly \$200 million in federal money could be made available for state energy projects.

The money would go toward weatherizing

low-income housing and public buildings, training an energy efficiency workforce and providing grants to local governments for energy conservation improvements. The spending measures are estimated to create 1,500 jobs.

Sponsored by Rep. Jeremy Kalin (DFL-North Branch) and Sen. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul), HF680/SF657* was passed 114-19 by the House April 29, five days after the Senate gave its support 48-12. A conference committee is called to resolve the differences between the two bills.

Among its provisions, the bill would appropriate \$131.9 million from federal stimulus funds to the commerce commissioner for weatherization programs.

One issue resulted in two of the eight amendments offered on the House floor.

Rep. Joyce Peppin (R-Rogers) said a \$1.5 million appropriation for the

International Renewable Energy Technology Institute to be located at Minnesota State University, Mankato would put the state's federal stimulus money for energy projects in jeopardy because strings tied to the federal dollars prohibit their use for applied research projects. The bill describes the institute as a "public and private partnership to support applied research in renewable energy."

Rep. Bill Hilty (DFL-Finlayson), chairman of the House Energy Finance and Policy Division, said the institute is a "technology transfer project" and the bill has some "unfortunate wording in the description of the project."

A motion by Rep. Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar) to re-refer the bill to the energy division failed. Instead, supporters vowed to clarify the language in conference committee.

Members passed a different Hackbarth amendment that would include the installation of energy efficient windows among the list of improvements allowed for residences under an existing Housing Finance Agency program.

Rep. Dan Severson (R-Sauk Rapids) successfully amended the bill to include rotating woody crops among the list of renewable energy sources eligible to receive commercial and industrial grants.

Members have been frustrated by a federal provision that prevents spending federal economic stimulus funds to make swimming pools more energy efficient. Several public schools would like to use the funds to heat their pools with solar thermal energy improvements. In a show of defiance to the federal policy, Rep. Joe Hoppe (R-Chaska) offered, then withdrew, an amendment to include swimming pools as approved projects.

Kalin said the Minnesota Office of Energy Security is up against a May 12 deadline to deliver a spending plan to the U. S. Department of Energy in order to receive the \$196.75 million in economic stimulus funds.

— S. HEGARTY

KITE KID

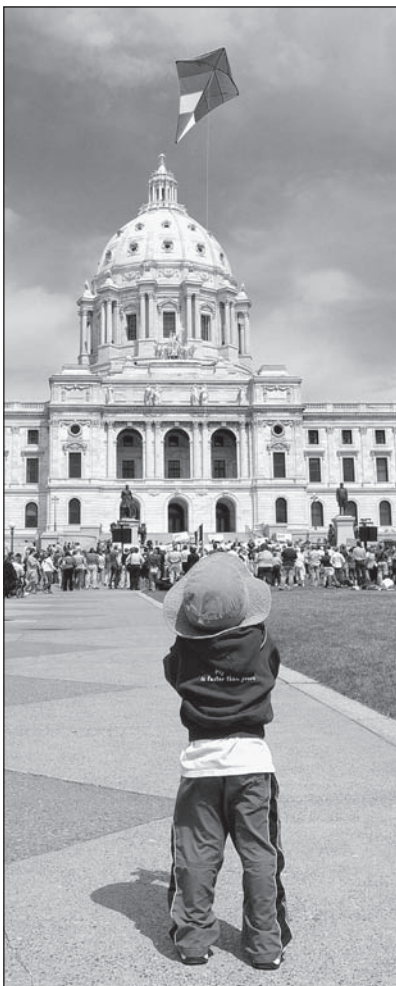


PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Ellak Flannigan-Warren, 4, enjoys flying a kite and the fine weather on the Capitol Mall April 23 during the annual Lobby Day for GLBT Equality Rally.

ENVIRONMENT

Parks and trails use modified

The House Finance Committee approved the House omnibus environment policy bill April 28 after deleting a section that would have renamed the Northshore Trail.

HF1237, sponsored by Rep. Kent Eken (DFL-Twin Valley), includes new regulations regarding state parks, operating watercraft and all-terrain vehicles and dictates when wild rice can be harvested in public waters.

Stricken from the bill on an 11-9 vote was a

provision that would have changed the name of the Northshore Trail to the C. J. Ramstad Memorial Trail between Duluth and Two Harbors.

“Somebody’s got to stop and think about criteria,” said Rep. Alice Hausman (DFL-St. Paul), noting thousands of individuals may be worthy of such an honor.

Ramstad was an avid outdoorsman and publisher of snowmobile and ATV magazines. He was killed in an automobile accident in 2007. Rep. Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar) sponsors HF924 that seeks the name change.

The House Ways and Means Committee will now consider the bill, which includes provisions that:

- delay harvesting of wild rice until Aug. 15;
- allow children under age 12 to ride an off-road motorcycle alone if accompanied by a person age 18 or older;
- allow visitors to purchase multiple-vehicle state park permits;
- eliminate liquor service at John A. Latsch State Park;
- eliminate the need for state park permits for buses carrying students on school-sanctioned visits;
- make it a misdemeanor to pass within 150 feet of a law enforcement watercraft with its emergency lights activated; and

- allow a peace officer to kill a protected wild animal if it poses an immediate threat to public safety.

The bill also modifies the Reinvest in Minnesota conservation program to include protection of environmentally sensitive areas, flood-prone areas and for carbon sequestration.

In addition, beginning Jan. 1, 2012, owners of 1-ton pickup trucks may purchase critical habitat license plates, which may also be personalized.

Sen. Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley) sponsors a companion, SF1110, which awaits action by the Senate Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Budget Division.

— S. HEGARTY

GAME & FISH

Amendments stall, leapfrog bills

A controversial amendment to an omnibus bill approved by the House Finance Committee April 28 prompted the bill’s sponsor to ask for the bill to be laid over.

At the request of Rep. David Dill (DFL-Crane Lake), the committee laid over HF1238, the House Game, Fish and Forestry Division’s omnibus bill, which will stay with the Finance Committee until, as its sponsor, he requests

that it be heard again. Dill was reacting to a 12-11 vote to approve Rep. Michael Paymar’s (DFL-St. Paul) amendment that would require background checks on people attempting to purchase a firearm at a gun show.

It would also require a licensed gun dealer to be on-site at shows. It defines a gun show as a place where 20 or more firearms are sold, and would make violations a gross misdemeanor.

Paymar said background checks have blocked 1.6 million firearm purchases by felons and others who are prohibited from owning them.

“I do not want this on my bill,” Dill said. He told Paymar that the amendment should have been its own bill and introduced in one of two House public safety committees where it would have had “an appropriate hearing.”

Rep. Tony Cornish (R-Good Thunder) said the amendment may be illegal based on two legal opinions.

The committee also approved an amendment that they had deleted from a different bill. The provision would rename a portion of the Northshore Trail as the C. J. Ramstad Memorial Trail.

“I think it was a mistake to take it out of Rep. Eken’s bill this morning,” said the amendment’s sponsor, Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar).

FIRST MEETING



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher speaks to members of the press outside Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s office April 28 after legislative leaders met with the governor to discuss the budget.

Rep. Alice Hausman (DFL-Mpls) and Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville) said there should be criteria established for naming trails. "We seem to have a propensity for naming everything after white men," Greiling said.

Rep. Lyndon Carlson Sr. (DFL-Crystal), chairman of the committee, said the discussion about criteria was "in no way a reflection on this particular person." Ramstad was a nationally known publisher of snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle articles who was killed in an automobile accident in 2007. The trail that would be named in his honor is used by snowmobilers.

The Senate companion, SF1116, awaits action by the Senate Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Budget Division and is sponsored by Sen. Satveer Chaudhary, (DFL-Fridley).

— S. HEGARTY

GOVERNMENT

House approves Iran divestiture

Companies helping to finance Iran's nuclear ambitions would no longer get any business from the state of Minnesota, under a bill passed 82-46 by the House April 25.

Under HF111, the State Board of Investment would be required to divest any assets it currently holds in companies doing business with Iran's energy sector. The goal is to discourage companies from helping the country, which the U.S. government classifies as a state sponsor of terrorism, from pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Ryan Winkler (DFL-Golden Valley), said the bill is narrowly focused on only companies that could be seen as providing funding for potential terrorist activities.

"To put this in perspective, we're talking about 14 companies that divestment would affect," Winkler said.

He said it makes sense for the state to avoid investing in regions of the world where political instability could put state assets at risk.

"I think this is actually consistent with trying to pursue a good investment strategy," he said.

Opponents say the bill would have Minnesota venture unnecessarily into foreign policy. Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer (R-Big Lake), a former investment board member, noted that the board already has the authority to divest its holdings in companies it sees as risky. She said decisions on investing state workers' pension funds are best left to the board itself.

"This is unnecessary, and it puts our pensions at risk. Do not mess with our folks'

pensions. They're having a hard enough time already," Kiffmeyer said, adding that the bill would unnecessarily politicize a board that exists for the sole purpose of investing.

Howard Bicker, the board's executive director, testified at a February committee hearing that the bill would affect approximately \$280 million of state investments, or slightly more than 1 percent of the state's total investment portfolio.

The bill now awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee. Sen. Terri Bonoff (DFL-Minnetonka) is the Senate sponsor.

— N. BUSSE

Stimulus oversight funding passed

The House passed a bill that would provide \$1.1 million for Minnesota Management and Budget and the Office of the State Auditor to help monitor and oversee federal stimulus spending.

Sponsored by Rep. Loren Solberg (DFL-Grand Rapids), HF2251 would provide \$700,000 to MMB and \$385,000 to the auditor to track money appropriated from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The money would be available beginning in the current fiscal year, and unspent funds would carry over into the next biennium.

Passed 118-15 by the House on April 28, it now goes to the Senate, where Sen. Richard Cohen (DFL-St. Paul) is the sponsor.

The bill also includes a provision that would set up a special account in the state treasury to receive stimulus funds. The account would help state officials track expenditures made using the stimulus.

Rep. Mary Liz Holberg (R-Lakeville) urged support for the bill, but said it falls short of what state agencies would need to properly monitor federal stimulus funds.

"This may be only the beginning as far as the amount of money that these agencies are going to need," Holberg said.

Solberg emphasized that the money is intended to address short-term oversight needs. He said MMB officials are awaiting clarification from the federal government on what the oversight requirements will be for the state.

Additional funding for state oversight of federal stimulus spending is included in HF1781/SF2082*, the omnibus state government finance bill. Sponsored by Rep. Phyllis Kahn (DFL-Mpls) and Sen. Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley), that bill awaits action by a conference committee.

— N. BUSSE

HOUSING

Protecting problem properties

Rep. Jeff Hayden (DFL-Mpls) said that Minneapolis had about 3,000 foreclosed properties last year and is on pace for about the same this year. But the state's largest city is far from alone during the current foreclosure crisis.

A bill he sponsors with Sen. Linda Higgins (DFL-Mpls) aims to clarify rules and regulations for how cities can secure foreclosed and abandoned properties so they cannot be used for improper purposes.

Amended to include the House language, HF1394/SF1147* was approved 102-32 by the House April 29. The Senate did not concur with the changes and a conference committee has been requested.

Aspects of the bill include:

- specification of certain notice requirements;
- permission for a political subdivision to request reduction of the mortgagor's redemption period to five weeks on a foreclosed abandoned property, like a property or mortgage owner can;
- extension of the deadline for action by a property owner from six to 14 days from being ordered to secure the premise, and failure to do so could result in municipal action; and
- classification of the sale or gift of alcohol in an abandoned property as a public nuisance in certain circumstances.

It also expands a property protection requirement by requiring the holder of a sheriff's certificate of sale — the official document granted to the purchaser of real property sold at a mortgage foreclosure sale — to secure and protect the premise if there is prima facie evidence the property has been abandoned. If the locks are changed, the mortgagor must be provided a key.

An amendment successfully offered by Rep. Joe Mullery (DFL-Mpls), based on HF19, would permit a mortgagor or owner to postpone by five months a scheduled sheriff's sale of their foreclosed property, in exchange for having five weeks to redeem the property after the postponed sale occurs. Only the foreclosure conductor, such as a bank, can now postpone a sheriff's sale.

"In Minneapolis, we've had some entrepreneurial folks decide to take the abandoned property and have parties and sell alcohol," Hayden said, adding that oftentimes the homes have to be torn down because of partier damage or if thieves take things like copper piping and other items that can be resold.

If you have Internet access, visit the Legislature's
Web page at: www.leg.mn

"We're hoping to get to those properties in a quick and fair amount of time so whatever the disposition of the property is we can hopefully get good families back in them."

— M. COOK

HUMAN SERVICES

Training for shaken baby syndrome

**Signed
by
the
governor**

Signed April 27 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, a new law will increase shaken baby syndrome training for certain providers caring for children up to age 5. The law takes effect Aug. 1, 2009.

Sponsored by Rep. Phil Sterner (DFL-Rosemount) and Sen. Sharon Erickson Ropes (DFL-Winona), the law requires 30 minutes of training for both shaken baby syndrome and sudden infant death syndrome for licensed chemical dependency treatment programs that serve clients with children, licensed child care centers and providers, and child foster care providers that care for children. The training is required at least once every five years.

Current training is only required for those caring for infants.

"Most people do not know that shaken baby syndrome not only affects infants, but children up to the age of 5," said Sterner during a House floor debate. An estimated 1,500 to 3,000 children are diagnosed with the syndrome each year, he said.

HF782/SF978*/CH26

— P. OSTBERG

INDUSTRY

Plumbing standards cleared up

Some clogs in the state's plumbing and licensing standards would be flushed out in a bill sponsored by Rep. Tim Mahoney (DFL-St. Paul).

HF927 was approved by the House Finance Committee April 29 and sent to the House Ways and Means Committee. Its companion, SF1004, sponsored by Sen. Linda Scheid (DFL-Brooklyn Park) awaits action by the full Senate.

Provisions in the bill would:

- prohibit people from advertising services for which they are not licensed;
- allow the Board of Plumbing to apply uniform standards to well or septic systems as well as municipal systems;
- give the board licensing authority over those installing or repairing water conditioner systems and require those workers to be licensed or to work under a person with a water-conditioning-contractor license, except for those holding a master

or journeyman plumber's license; and

- require all state plumbing inspectors and those contracted by the department to be licensed master or journeyman plumbers with five years of documented experience.

The bill would also require installers of piped medical gas and vacuum systems that deliver oxygen, nitrous oxide or other medical gases in medical and dental facilities to hold a plumber's license and to be certified by the board, with some exceptions. The license would need to be renewed annually.

Mahoney said that the installation and inspection of such equipment has not been adequately regulated in the past.

An amendment successfully offered by Rep. Larry Howes (R-Walker) would specify a two-week period between Oct. 1 and Oct. 15, 2009, as "the last and only chance" for applications for a restricted journeyman plumber license.

Mahoney saw his amendment adopted as well. It would require school districts to provide at least eight hours of training to boiler operators. A funding provision for the policy and a two-year period to determine whether there is a cost impact to school districts is included in the omnibus K-12 education finance bill.

— K. BERGGREN

LAW

'Tidying up' with more specificity

**Signed
by
the
governor**

Sometimes legislation is just a little "tidying up." That is a description given by Rep. Gail Kulick Jackson (DFL-Milaca) to a new law she sponsors with Sen. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis

Park).

Signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty April 30, the law makes technical changes to various real estate deed provisions. It has varying effective dates.

Specifically the law addresses 2008 changes to a statute regarding transfer of death deeds, and adds some specificity. It clarifies that upon the death of a property owner, an affidavit must include the name and mailing address of the person to whom future property tax statements should be sent.

The law also makes changes in the certificate of title issued by the county registrar for common interest communities, such as condominiums, townhouses or planned community.

HF332/SF261*/CH30

— L. SCHUTZ

SAFETY

Ignition pilot program extension

**Signed
by
the
governor**

Expansion and extension of an ignition interlock pilot project that helps repeat DWI offenders get their driver's license back earlier received gubernatorial approval.

Beltrami and Hennepin counties now participate in a pilot project that is scheduled to end on June 30.

Under the voluntary program, an ignition interlock device is installed on a vehicle and hooked up to its starter system. Before starting the vehicle, an offender must blow into a breathalyzer tube. If the device detects alcohol, the vehicle won't start.

"There's been a lot of success and we'd like to expand it," said Rep. Joe Mullery (DFL-Mpls), who sponsors the law with Sen. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park). Signed April 30 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, it takes effect Aug. 1, 2009.

According to Jean Ryan, the impaired driving coordinator with the Public Safety Department's Office of Traffic Safety, there have been about 75 participants in Hennepin County and three in Beltrami County.

"It's been extremely effective. There haven't been a lot of people trying to start their vehicle with the device after they've been drinking," she told the House Transportation and Transit Policy and Oversight Division March 27. "For those people that have jobs and they want to get a limited license to get to and from their job, it does provide that opportunity for them to get a limited license. But it still instills public safety on roadways."

The participant pays a monthly fee of about \$70 for the device, but supporters hope that cost would decrease if demand increases.

It is up to probation agencies to decide if they are willing to monitor the device if a person chooses to use the ignition interlock. "The probation officer in charge of the program in Hennepin County said they saved an awful lot of money by doing this," Mullery said.

HF525/SF462*/CH29

— M. COOK

TECHNOLOGY

Bioscience infrastructure grants

State colleges and universities would be eligible for bioscience business infrastructure grants, under a bill awaiting action by the governor.

Sponsored by Rep. Tim Mahoney (DFL-St. Paul) and Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato),

HF868/SF684* would make the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system eligible to receive money under the state's bioscience business development infrastructure program.

The program, run by the Department of Employment and Economic Development, allows state General Obligation bonds to be used for grants to cover capital costs for bioscience-related business facilities.

Currently only local governments are eligible for the grants. Mahoney said the bill would address issues at Minnesota State University, Mankato and the University of Minnesota Morris — both of which intend to go ahead with bioscience projects previously authorized by the Legislature.

"They were both awarded money in the last bonding bill, but they can't accept it," Mahoney explained.

In addition, the bill would specify that local governments or institutions receiving grant money must pay for at least half of the cost of the completed project using non-state funds.

It was passed unanimously, 134-0, by the House April 29. The Senate passed it 62-3 on March 5.

— N. BUSSE

TRANSPORTATION

Truck limitations near lift bridge

A stroke or two of the governor's pen could stop 18-wheelers from rolling over a bridge in need of replacement.

In an effort to relieve congestion and increase safety, Rep. Matt Dean (R-Dellwood) and Sen. Ray Vandever (R-Forest Lake) sponsor HF1204/SF1091*, which would prohibit motor vehicles longer than 55 feet from using Highway 36 between Highway 95 and the Stillwater Lift Bridge.

The bill was approved 133-0 by the House April 29; 67-0 by the Senate April 6.

City officials initially wanted a truck weight prohibition, but in working with the Department of Transportation, Dean said the bill was made applicable only to a stretch of road, so it doesn't set a precedent for other bridges. "We've also gone from a weight limitation to a length limitation to allow for more interstate commerce to help folks in Minnesota and Wisconsin. We've tried to accommodate as many people while addressing a safety issue."

The idea is to keep large trucks off the bridge. Most semis exceed the 55-foot limit.

A 2008 Department of Transportation review found the bridge to be "fracture-critical." A new span over the St. Croix River is expected to be open by 2016.

VIETNAM HONOR GUARD



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

ARVN and Vietnam veteran honor guards present the colors as the national anthems of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam are played during opening ceremonies of the National Day of Deep Resentment the 34th Fall of Saigon Memorial Day on the front lawn of the Capitol April 25.

Dean said \$5 million in improvements has been put into the 1,000-foot span in recent years, but it is still not adequate for the truck traffic. He said a truck struck the bridge last summer, closing it for several weeks. Another incident occurred in mid-March.

A saturation study conducted by law enforcement officials found that many of the large, over-the-road trucks going through Stillwater had major violations. More than half of those inspected had to be taken off the road, Dean said. "What is happening is they're sneaking across to avoid the Hudson inspection station (along Interstate 94)."

Signs would be posted on the Minnesota side of the bridge and Wisconsin is requested to do the same on its side.

"We think we finally have a solution that's moderate and modest and effective," said Rep. Julie Bunn (DFL-Lake Elmo). She noted the longer trucks sometimes have to back-up to make a turn in downtown Stillwater and have hit buildings and other city fixtures when doing so.

— M. COOK

Road turnbacks authorized

**Signed
by
the
governor**

A pair of road segments previously on the state's trunk highway system will be turned over to local authorities.

Sponsored by Rep. Rob Eastlund (R-Isanti) and Sen.

Rick Olseen (DFL-Harris), the law, signed April 30 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, removes two short sections of road no longer needed by the state. In both cases, local authorities have agreed to take over maintenance.

The first segment, a stretch of Trunk Highway 290 south of Walker, is an access road to the former Ah-Gwah-Ching state health care facility, which closed in 2007.

The second is a stretch of Trunk Highway 293, an access road to the former Cambridge State Hospital. The 2003 Legislature authorized the sale of a large portion of the campus land to the city, which began redevelopment plans for residential and commercial use.

Provisions in the law take effect the day after the transportation commissioner receives a copy of the respective agreements with the governing body of Cambridge and the Cass County Board chair.

Each year, the department reviews the state's highway system to assure that each road still serves specific statewide purposes. As a result, the department recommends that some roads be turned back to local communities.

HF486*/SF1183/CH28

— M. COOK

Highlights continued on page 21

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The works

Jobs programs get a boost in economic development finance bill

By Nick Busse

Minnesota's economy is still a long way from recovery, according to recent reports from the Department of Employment and Economic Development. But on April 24, the House passed a funding package for jobs and housing programs that might help ease the current economic pain for some Minnesotans.

"We've done our best to try to backfill programs that were cut by the governor and do creative things that will put people back to work in the state of Minnesota," said Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia), the sponsor of HF1169/SF2081*.

Known as the omnibus economic development finance bill, the proposed legislation would provide biennial funding for DEED, the Housing Finance Agency, the Department of Labor and Industry and other state agencies dealing with economic development issues. The bill proposes \$269.2 million in General Fund spending — \$17.5 million more than Gov. Tim Pawlenty recommended.

In addition, the bill would pump an extra \$35.4 million into jobs programs by temporarily raising the workforce development fee paid by employers. The fee, which pays for the state's dislocated worker program, among others, would be raised for the duration of the next biennium and returned to its current rate thereafter.

The new revenue would go toward several programs, notably a \$15 million pilot program similar to the Minnesota Emergency Employment Development wage subsidy that helped employers hire laid-off workers in the early 1980s. Rukavina said the program would be targeted at areas within the state that suffer from particularly high unemployment rates.

The provision has become a source of some controversy, especially among Republicans

who say it would place an added burden on employers who have already been hit hard by the recession. Rep. Keith Downey (R-Edina) unsuccessfully offered an amendment to remove the section of the bill.

"These are difficult times. There's a lot of unemployment in the state; this is going to help it," Rukavina said.

In addition to the economic development provisions, the bill includes funding for the state's housing programs taken from a bill sponsored by Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Mpls). The housing portion of the bill would largely fund HFA programs at levels similar to what was proposed in Pawlenty's budget recommendations. It does not include Pawlenty's proposed 5 percent cut to the economic development and housing challenge program, and it includes \$300,000 for a demonstration project for high-risk adults.

Appropriations for cultural heritage purposes are also included in the bill, incorporated from legislation sponsored by Rep. Mary Murphy (DFL-Hermantown). These include \$45.3 million for the Minnesota Historical Society, \$20.6 million for Explore Minnesota Tourism and \$19.1 million for the Board of the Arts. Operating budget reductions are included for all three of these agencies; however, Pawlenty has proposed deeper cuts. In addition, the governor's proposal to transition the arts board into a private nonprofit and cut its funding completely in the next biennium is not

A Quick Look HF1169/SF2081*

Focus: Department of Employment and Economic Development, Public Facilities Authority, Explore Minnesota Tourism, Housing Finance Agency, Department of Labor and Industry, Bureau of Mediation Services, Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals, Minnesota Historical Society, Board of Accountancy, public broadcasting, Board of the Arts

2010–2011 General Fund appropriation:
\$269.2 million

General Fund amounts are for the biennium.

Funding provisions:

Housing Finance Agency	\$90.4 mil.
Department of Employment and Economic Development	\$79.6 mil.
Department of Labor and Industry...	\$45.6 mil.
Minnesota Historical Society	\$45.3 mil.
Explore Minnesota Tourism	\$20.6 mil.
Board of Arts	\$19.1 mil.
Public broadcasting	\$3.9 mil.
Bureau of Mediation Services	\$3.4 mil.
Workers' Compensation Court of Appeals	\$3.4 mil.

Selected policy provisions:

- forgives \$32.8 million of a \$48 million loan St. Paul owes the state for the Xcel Energy Center
- requires public employers to buy clothing and equipment manufactured in the United States
- allows certain workers to collect unemployment insurance benefits while taking unpaid furloughs as part of their contracts
- strengthens prevailing wage enforcement for contracts for public works projects
- increases accountability requirements for DEED programs
- establishes an 18-member bipartisan working group to create an economic development strategy for the state

included in the bill.

Passed 78-50 by the House, differences between House and Senate language will be resolved in a conference committee. Sen.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Tom Rukavina is the sponsor of the House omnibus economic development finance bill.

David Tomassoni (DFL-Chisholm) is the Senate sponsor.

Policy provisions

A section of the bill would forgive the bulk of a \$48 million no-interest loan that the City of St. Paul took out more than a decade ago to help build the Xcel Energy Center. Under the provision, St. Paul would continue to make payments to the state until 2014, when the remaining \$32.8 million balance of the loan would be forgiven. The city intends to use the money it would have spent on repayment of the loan to finance construction of The Pond — a proposed 120,000-square foot, three-level ice arena across the street from the Xcel.

Supporters argue the city was unfairly made to take out a loan for the Xcel while similar projects in other cities have often been funded directly with state bonding dollars; however, opponents said the city should honor the terms of its original loan. Rep. Sarah Anderson (R-Plymouth) offered and then later

withdrew an amendment that would have removed it from the bill. She called the idea “ridiculous” in a time of economic hardship for the state.

“The money for this is not just going into the city coffers; it’s being used for economic development in the City of St. Paul,” countered Rep. Tim Mahoney (DFL-St. Paul), who sponsored the provision as a standalone bill.

Uniforms, safety equipment and other apparel purchased by public employers for their employees would have to be made in the United States, under a provision sponsored by Rukavina. The provision also states that preference should be given to manufacturers who pay their employees an average annual income equal to at least 150 percent of the

federal poverty guidelines. An exception would be granted in situations where no U.S. manufacturers produce a specific piece of equipment. Anderson unsuccessfully offered an amendment to delete the section from the bill, arguing it amounted to a large

unfunded mandate on communities.

“I just can’t make apologies for the fact that I believe in the American worker,” Rukavina said of the provision.

Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls) successfully amended the bill with a provision that would allow Delta Airlines flight attendants taking unpaid furloughs as part of their contracts to collect unemployment benefits. He said other states had passed similar laws on the subject. 🏰

“These are difficult times. There’s a lot of unemployment in the state; this is going to help it.”

— Rep. Rukavina

Cuts hang in the balance

Much depends on tax increases

By PATTY OSTBERG

After more than eight hours of debate and more than 50 amendments offered, the House passed the omnibus health and human services finance bill 85-49 on April 27. The catch is, funding in the bill depends largely on \$1.5 billion in tax increases contained in the tax bill (HF2323) passed by the House April 25 and now under consideration in a conference committee.

Sponsored by Rep. Thomas Huntley (DFL-Duluth), HF1362 attempts to maximize the state's \$1.8 billion in federal stimulus dollars while making nearly \$400 million in "painful" cuts in service programs. Huntley said cuts contained in the bill are the "best case scenario" if all the funding mechanisms pull through; otherwise, human service cuts could be closer to \$900 million.

Minnesota leads the nation in health care standards, but the bill allocates funds to meet American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 requirements instead of bringing down long-term spending levels, said Rep. Matt Dean (R-Dellwood).

The bill would not reduce eligibility requirements for Medical Assistance or MinnesotaCare, but hospitals, long-term care facilities, the use of personal care attendants and those using public dental assistance would all receive reductions.

After working with disability representatives on which services they use the least, Huntley said, "It's sort of like are we asking people, 'You right-handed or left-handed? 'Cause we'll cut off the arm you don't use as much.'"

Simultaneously the Senate debated and then passed 40 - 23 its version of the omnibus bill, SF695, sponsored by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls). A conference committee has been convened to work out the differences.

Spending reductions include delayed

rebasing for nursing homes; a 3 percent cut to long-term care facilities; certain 3 percent rate reductions to hospitals, including reducing reimbursement rates for those on Medical Assistance and General Assistance Medical Care; and limiting personal care attendant hours to 310 hours per month/per individual. Rebasing includes adjusting for inflation in reimbursement for Medicaid rates.

In an effort to minimize cuts, the bill would make changes to meet federal requirements for receipt of federal stabilization funds. Changes to Medical Assistance could result in a reimbursement rate of 62 percent from the federal government, with the state responsible for 38 percent. The current ratio is 50-50.

The bill lacks in reform and reductions and will have serious problems when the one-time federal money runs out, said House Minority Leader Marty Seifert (R-Marshall). "You cannot build all of these spending bills around a tax bill to pay for them that barely passed."

Gov. Tim Pawlenty has said he will not sign any bill with tax increases.

Huntley said that under the governor's proposal, several hospitals could be forced into bankruptcy through uncompensated care for the 113,000 people who would be kicked off public programs. Those without care will show up in emergency rooms, costing more money in the long run, he said.

Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague)

A Quick Look HF1361

Focus: Department of Health, Department of Human Services, and other health-related boards.

2010-2011 General Fund reduction:
\$439.08 million

2012-2013 General Fund reduction:
\$608.7 million

Selected policy provisions:

- includes certain fee increases for licenses and technical changes
- provides authority to issue a license for five beds in adult foster care homes that meet certain requirements
- removes the asset limitation that households have less than \$7,000 in financial resources to be eligible for food stamps
- makes changes to health information technology and electronic health records laws
- establishes a colorectal cancer prevention act providing screening to uninsured and underinsured women and men
- includes covered dental services for those on public programs and authorizes pilot projects to reduce costs
- creates a state-county chemical health care home pilot project to deliver chemical dependency services more cost-effectively
- makes changes to personal care assistance laws, including the number of working hours and definitions
- forms a steering committee to review the performance and outcomes of human services programs

successfully offered an amendment that would allow any surplus in the Health Care Access Fund to be used to reduce provider tax rates.

Huntley said the fund currently has a surplus, but the amount goes down every year, as it's used for those covered by MinnesotaCare. Using the surplus leaves less to help those needing health care, he said.

Stemming from recommendations in an Office of the Legislative Auditor report on personal care assistance, the bill would change how personal care assistants are paid for working with care recipients. PCAs would be limited to 310 hours of work per month. Currently there is no monthly limit. The bill also has several detailed documentation

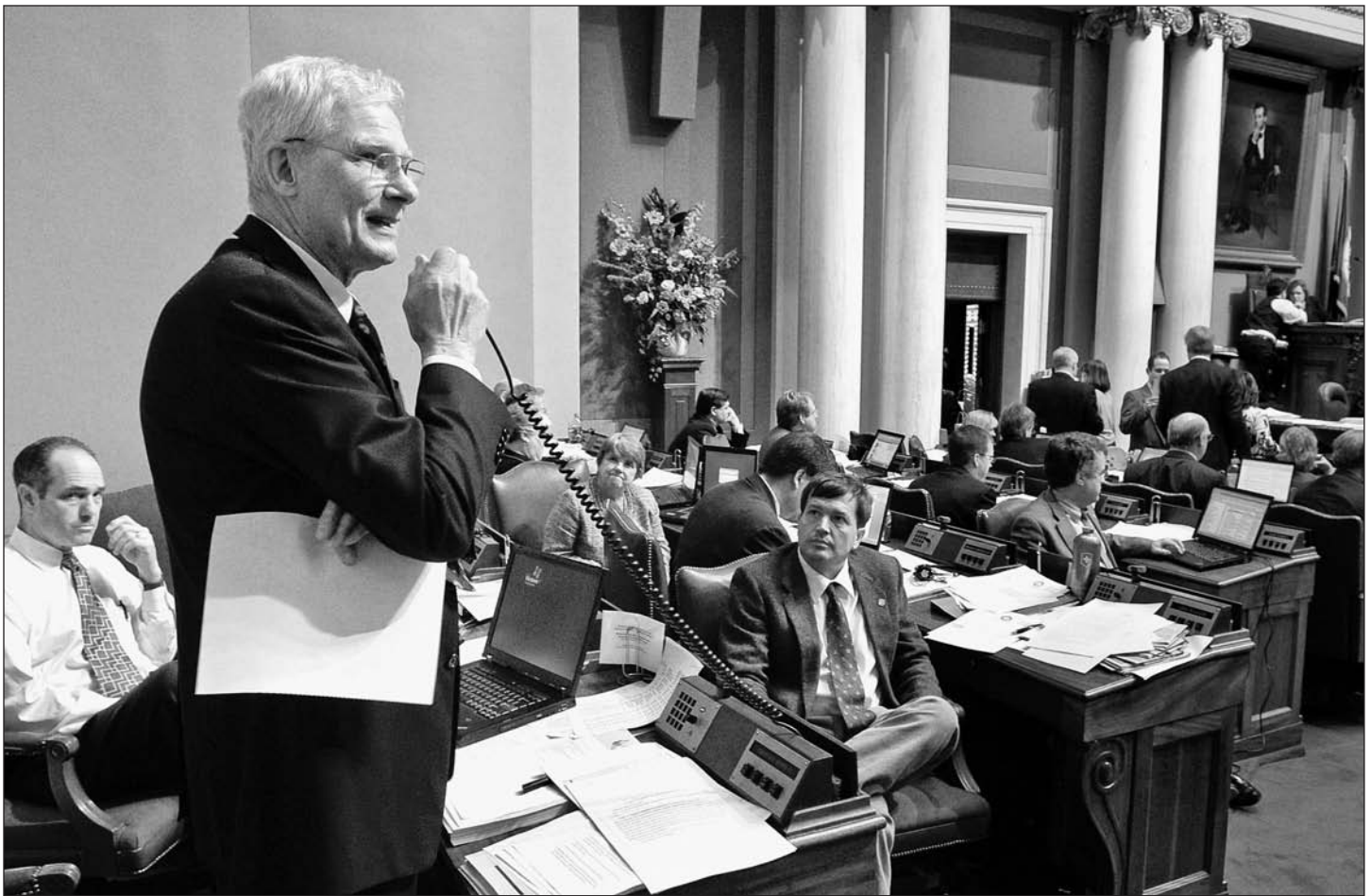


PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rep. Thomas Huntley presents the omnibus health and human services finance bill on the House floor April 27.

requirements, including PCA provider agency information to be kept by the Human Services Department, in an attempt to reform potential areas of fraud or abuse. Owners of PCA companies who have more than a 5 percent interest and all managerial officials would be subject to a background study.

Money would also be invested to meet the federal Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 that could result in an additional \$20 million to increase the

number of children on public health insurance by easing the enrollment process, Huntley said. The additional children "are already eligible — it's just that they don't sign up or their parents don't sign them up," he said.

Another \$4 million would be invested to meet provisions of, and receive funding from, the federal Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act that is designed to help the state convert health records to electronic forms.

In an attempt to set a fixed amount given to providers for treatment of a specified group, a total-cost-of-care pilot project is included in the bill. The human services commissioner would work with interested providers to establish the alternative payment reform for frequent users of high-cost health care services. Hennepin County Medical Center would be the main provider conducting the project, Huntley said. 🏛️

Selected Joint Legislative Services

(Area code 651 unless otherwise noted)

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Circulation 296-3398
Reference 296-8338

Office of the Revisor of Statutes

700 State Office Building 296-2868

Office of the Legislative Auditor

140 Centennial Office Building 296-4708

Legislative Coordinating Commission

72 State Office Building 296-9002

Geographic Information Services

55 State Office Building 296-0098

Fiscal Services Office

45 State Office Building 296-8890

Office on the Economic Status of Women

95 State Office Building 296-8590

Legislative Advisory Commission

Fourth Floor, Centennial Office Building 201-8029

Legislative Audit Commission

140 Centennial Office Building 296-4708

Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources

65 State Office Building 296-2406

Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement

55 State Office Building 296-2750

Great Lakes Commission

585 State Office Building 296-2228

Mississippi River Parkway Commission

222 State St., Suite 400
Madison, WI 53703 866-763-8310

Corrections, courts funding concerns

Omnibus public safety finance bill gets mixed reaction from House

By Mike Cook

At a time when most state agencies will likely need to do more with less, the same could be true for the Department of Corrections.

While some House members have major reservations with the potential ramifications of reductions proposed in the omnibus public safety finance bill, others believe the contents would not change current standards.

"In the bill, we have a combination of cuts, fee increases and reforms," said Rep. Michael Paymar (DFL-St. Paul), the bill's sponsor. "Rather than across-the-board cuts we tried to prioritize, to be creative and to demand efficiencies through reform without jeopardizing public safety."

Amended to include the House language, HF1657/SF802* received House approval April 24 on an 85-45 vote. The Senate version, sponsored by Sen. Linda Higgins (DFL-Mpls), was passed 34-31 April 20. A conference committee began meeting April 29 to work out the differences.

Paymar noted that the \$2.01 billion bill — \$1.8 billion from the General Fund — is better than the budget proposed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty in a number of areas. For example, the bill calls for a 0.79 percent courts reduction; the governor wants a 2.46 percent cut.

While Pawlenty seeks a 2.12 percent increase for the Corrections Department, the bill calls for a 0.55 percent decrease, nor does it cover the department's projected \$22 million deficiency request that the governor proposes. The department expects to receive \$38 million from the federal economic stimulus package.

"The governor made a strong statement that public safety is a funding priority," said Rep. Steve Smith (R-Mound). "This bill forfeits its place at the top of the budget. It takes away \$54 million from the governor's priority proposal. It fails to live up to our most basic obligation of protecting our citizens."

Corrections officials have said that the already underfunded department cannot take more of a hit. Commissioner Joan Fabian told a House division earlier this year that reduced funding in other agencies would not result in someone being stabbed by a shank, beaten up by an inmate or shot during an unannounced visit to a probationer's home.

She said the department has reduced operational expenses by more than \$85 million since fiscal year 2003, while the inmate population has increased. In addition to the approximately 9,300 inmates in prison, Fabian said state and county agents supervise more than 147,000 offenders in the community. "We have no waiting lists, and we can't reduce hours or close a prison."

Among scenarios the department has looked at are cutting staff, treatment reductions or early release scenarios, something the governor opposes because it could compromise public safety.

"We are asking them to make less than a 1 percent cut in a billion-dollar bureaucracy," Paymar said.

The reduction must come from operations support if the efficiency goal is not met. Paymar said the department has added more than 100 full-time equivalent positions to the central office in the past six years. This reduction cannot be achieved by cutting correctional officers.

One efficiency area could be the adult facility per diem cost. The bill directs the

A Quick Look at HF1657/SF802*

Focus: Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, Trial Courts, Tax Court, Uniform Laws Commission, Board on Judicial Standards, Board of Public Defense, Department of Public Safety, Peace Officers Standards and Training Board, Private Detective Board, Department of Human Rights, Department of Corrections and Sentencing Guidelines Commission.

2010-2011 General Fund Appropriation:
\$1.8 billion

General Fund amounts are for the biennium.

Funding Provisions:

Department of Corrections.....	\$893.32 mil.
District courts.....	\$500.24 mil.
Department of Public Safety.....	\$161.48 mil.
Public Defense Board	\$132.66 mil.
Office of Justice Programs.....	\$72.6 mil.
Supreme Court.....	\$63.08 mil.

Selected policy provisions:

- elimination of the short-term offender program
- vehicle fleet reductions to the Corrections and Public Safety departments
- no governor's office staff partially paid by agencies
- the Corrections Department is required to fill all its Challenge Incarceration Program beds
- fee increases

department to cut its \$89.77 daily average — which Paymar said is the nation's third-highest — by 1 percent and cuts department funding by that amount.

Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center), who chairs the House Public Safety Policy and Oversight Committee, said the daily rate at the minimum-security Red Wing facility is \$228.51 compared to \$153.61 at the maximum-security facility in Oak Park Heights.

However, the department could get more inmates because the bill calls for the



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rep. Michael Paymar presents the omnibus public safety finance bill on the House floor April 24.

elimination of the short-term offender program that allows offenders with less than six months remaining on their sentence to serve that time in a local jail. This would take effect with those sentenced on or after July 1, 2009. Pawlenty included this in his budget proposal. Local officials testified earlier this year that daily state reimbursement of \$9-\$10 was far short of the \$50-\$100 actual costs, with the difference falling on local taxpayers.

The bill includes language for the Corrections and Public Safety departments to reduce their vehicle fleets by 20 percent — corrections statewide and public safety just in the Twin Cities metropolitan area — and neither can spend General Fund money for lobbyists. “We already have so much access to the commissioners and the deputy commissioners,” Paymar said.

Court funding/fee increases

District courts (\$3.99 million), the Supreme Court (\$699,000), Court of Appeals (\$165,000) and tax courts (\$50,000) all face reductions under the House proposal.

“In the process, we decided all the departments and courts should share a little bit of the burden here, even though it’s small,” Paymar said. As examples, the Board of Judicial Standards is cut \$28,000 and the

Uniform Laws Commission is cut by \$3,000.

In addition to a \$1 surcharge increase for traffic offenses, the bill contains a dozen court filing fee increases that are expected to raise \$24.3 million. Pawlenty proposed no fee increases in his budget.

“We in Minnesota already have some of the highest court fees in the country. All of those fees represent a challenge to access to our courts, whether it’s the initial filing fee or fee for a motion,” said Rep. Paul Kohls (R-Victoria), who unsuccessfully offered a minority report to the bill April 16. “I think access to our courts is a critical component, not only of justice, but of public safety.”

Paymar countered that when the Republicans were in charge during the state’s 2003 budget crisis, the public safety finance law contained \$95 million in fee increases.

“The courts told us that they were satisfied with where we increased fees so we could better fund the court system. ... The bar association wrote us a letter that also specified that they could live with these fee increases. I think we’ve done, under the circumstances, a good job of taking care of the courts.” Paymar also noted none of the bill provisions would cost the courts money.

Some potential court cost savings are also in the bill: technical improvements would allow

the courts to automate many of their services to save about \$4 million annually and the 90-day requirement for the governor to fill a judgeship is removed.

Other funding/policy provisions

- General Fund reductions of \$1.94 million to the Office of Justice Programs; \$216,000 to the Department of Human Rights; \$100,000 to Alcohol and Gambling Enforcement; \$36,000 to the Sentencing Guidelines Commission; and \$14,000 to the Private Detective Board;
- the Corrections Department is to examine alternatives to chemical dependency treatment in prisons;
- a \$50 increase to registration fees on all licensed attorneys, with proceeds to help fund public defenders;
- a public defender co-pay increase from \$28 to \$75;
- the interest rate on a court judgment over \$50,000 would increase from “simple interest per annum” to 10 percent per year;
- uniform collection policies and procedures would be established for the courts; and
- a two-year extension of the nonviolent drug offender conditional release program.



Funding increases proffered

Omnibus transportation finance bill expected to help trio of areas

By Mike Cook

Flyers, drivers and riders could all benefit from an omnibus transportation finance bill.

Sponsored by Rep. Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston) and Sen. Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing), HF1309*/SF1276 contains no new money, but there are shifts and fund adjustments that could help multiple areas of need.

Passed 86-45 by the House April 25, the bill passed as amended by the Senate two days later. The House did not concur, and a conference committee is scheduled to work out the differences beginning May 1.

The bill contains \$4.28 billion worth of funding, but just \$195.6 million comes from the General Fund. More than \$3.9 billion comes via user-generated highway funds, including \$2.63 billion from the trunk highway fund, \$1.02 billion from the County-State Aid Highway Fund and \$275.4 million from the Municipal State-Aid Street Fund. Three smaller accounts make up the remainder.

The math becomes a bit tricky in the bill, because in order to meet the targeted \$8.4 million General Fund reduction, Metro Transit would be reduced by \$6.9 million, Greater Minnesota Transit by \$2 million, public safety support by \$266,000 and Capitol Security by \$252,000, while passenger and commuter rail would receive an additional \$1 million. In addition to these changes, there would be other reductions based on revenue decline.

However, a change in a tax allocation — a combined effect of this bill and the omnibus tax bill — would result in an increase in transit funding.

"If this were not to pass, Metro Transit and rural transit are really in a bind," Lieder said. "In 2009 and 2010, Metro Transit is

roughly \$62 million short and rural transit \$10 million."

Because the schedule of state payments for operating procedures results in Greater Minnesota transit providers receiving large payments in July and November, some may face uncertain fiscal status before July. Testimony indicated a \$7.56 million immediate need.

The bill would shift that amount from fiscal year 2011 to fiscal year 2009, with the fiscal year 2011 reduction made up using funds from the motor vehicle lease sales tax reallocation. The tax money was supposed to fund a credit for low-income taxpayers to help offset the gas tax increased in the 2008 funding law.

The tax bill would repeal the tax credit, and this bill would reallocate the funding so that 65 percent would go to Metro Transit, 25 percent to Greater Minnesota Transit and 10 percent to roads of regional significance in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

It is anticipated the reallocation would provide the Metropolitan Council with \$37 million. Combined with federal stimulus funds, transfers from two council funds and reserves and administrative efficiencies the shortage should be covered.

In conjunction with the additional funding, neither Metro Transit nor transit providers receiving assistance from the Metropolitan Council could raise fares or cut service from 2009 through 2011. Each must also provide

A Quick Look at HF1309

Focus: Transportation budget and changes to transportation finance and policy that affect the Department of Transportation, Department of Public Safety and the Metropolitan Council.

2010-2011 General Fund Appropriation:
\$195.62 million

General Fund amounts are for the biennium.

Funding Provisions:

Metropolitan Council	\$150.37 mil.
Department of Transportation	\$29.85 mil.
Greater Minnesota Transit	\$27.99 mil.
Department of Public Safety	\$15.4 mil.
State Patrol	\$6.05 mil.

Selected policy provisions:

- repeals the tax credit created for low-income taxpayers to help offset the gas tax increase in 2008
- allows drivers in a 55 mph or 60 mph zone on a two-lane highway to exceed the speed limit by 10 mph to pass another vehicle
- creates a MnDOT grant program for rehabilitation or replacement of fracture-critical bridges on a local road system
- provides MnDOT with powers and authority related to passenger rail
- creates a new account for allocating funds to metropolitan counties for county highways that have regional or statewide significance

free public regular route transit for disabled veterans. The latter comes from HF1356, sponsored by Rep. Jerry Newton (DFL-Coon Rapids).

Rep. Mary Liz Holberg (R-Lakeville) called it "irresponsible" to use funding from a volatile account, the leased motor vehicle sales tax revenue, as a funding source. "Are we going to say, 'No matter how poor a performance is on a bus route, you can't cut that? No matter the cost of fuel you can't raise the fare?'"



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Bernard Lieder presents the omnibus transportation finance bill on the House Floor April 25.

Road construction, policy provisions

With transportation revenues not meeting forecasted levels, the trunk highway fund reserve is to the point where further declines could result in project cancellations.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty recommends a \$150 million reduction for state road construction. "We took \$100 million from the state road construction and we took \$50 million from the other portions, which was divided between state road operations and maintenance of \$21.7 million; state road infrastructure investment, \$17.1 million; MnDOT buildings, \$1.5 million, and from the state patrol," Lieder said. MnDOT department support would receive an \$8.7 million reduction, of which, \$5 million would be an ongoing biennial cut.

Lieder noted that federal dollars help offset other decreases to provide a \$67.6 million biennial increase for state road construction to \$1.17 billion.

A new account would be created, under the bill, to allocate a portion of motor vehicle lease sales tax revenue to metropolitan counties for county highways that have regional or statewide significance.

Rail/air issues

The bill makes MnDOT responsible for all activities — from planning to construction — relating to passenger rail. The department is permitted to enter into all necessary agreements and is authorized to seek private and public funding for passenger rail service. Further, MnDOT would have the necessary power to carry out its passenger rail duties, including the use of eminent domain.

"Right now, MnDOT does not really have an

active function dealing with passenger and commuter rail, so we gave them a \$500,000 increase from the General Fund per fiscal year. That's an ongoing increase," Lieder said. "To accommodate that \$500,000, we took \$250,000 from Greater Minnesota Transit and \$250,000 from the Metropolitan Council."

The bill includes a \$2.25 million increase for airport development grants in fiscal year 2010.

"It's not additional money, but it allows them to spend down some of the money that they have," Lieder said. "For the last biennium they've been hurting because the Legislature took \$15 million out of their normal General Fund allowance and we haven't repaid that."

An amendment successfully offered by Rep. Mike Beard (R-Shakopee) would set in priority repayment of the State Airports Fund.

If a General Fund surplus is anticipated, the fund would be replenished after the state's cash flow account is filled, state budget reserve is filled and state aid shifts to school districts are made whole.

Other changes

Drivers in a 55 mph or 60 mph zone on a two-lane highway could exceed the speed limit by 10 mph to pass another vehicle. This is from HF464, sponsored by Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia).

Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL-Rochester) unsuccessfully tried to amend this out of the bill, saying it would put lives at stake, and would send the wrong message, especially to teenagers, that speeding is OK.

Coming from HF1608, sponsored by Lieder, is the creation of a MnDOT grant program for rehabilitation or replacement of fracture-critical bridges on a local road system.

A \$500,000 transfer from the metropolitan livable communities fund would go to the University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies to develop land use and planning resources and strategies for local governments, and the Metropolitan Council to support greenhouse gas reduction goals by reducing per capita vehicle miles driven. Resource development is required by Dec. 15, 2010, and a report due the Legislature by Jan. 15, 2011. This comes from HF898, sponsored by Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls).

The remaining \$2.85 million of a 1988 loan to the Buffalo Ridge Regional Railroad Authority would be forgiven by MnDOT or converted to a grant. The authority used the money to rehabilitate 41.4 miles of track in Nobles and Rock counties. "The resources aren't there to repay the loan. It's a low-interest, long-term loan with no requirements to make payments on a scheduled time frame," said Rep. Doug Magnus (R-Slayton), who sponsored the provision as HF682. "The operator of the railroad is a disabled person. There's some funding available, he believes, at the federal level for disabled-owned businesses. He'd like to get this loan off the books, move forward and make the railroad more profitable." 🏛️

Frequently called numbers

Area code 651

House Public Information Services

175 State Office Building 296-2146
Meeting Hotline, House
 175 State Office Building 296-9283
Chief Clerk of the House
 211 Capitol 296-2314

House Index

211 Capitol 296-6646
Senate Information
 231 Capitol 296-0504
Secretary of the Senate
 231 Capitol 296-2344
 Voice mail/order bills 296-2343

Senate Index

110 Capitol 296-2887
Meeting Hotline, Senate
 231 Capitol 296-8088

Dealing with difficult reform

Tax bill squeaks by House floor, conferees begin work

By SONJA HEGMAN

Reform has been the major theme throughout session in the House Taxes Committee, but it doesn't come easy.

"Reform is hard. It's not popular, and we understand that," said Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington), House Taxes Committee chairwoman, during the April 25 floor debate on the omnibus tax bill. "It is not right in my mind that those who are in the best financial situation in this state continue to pay less as a percentage of their income than everyone else. I am not fine with sitting here with this embedded unfairness in the tax code and ignoring it. And I don't think the members of the majority are OK with that."

After more than five hours of debate, HF2323/SF2074* was amended to include the House language and passed 68-65. The Senate, which passed its version 35-31 April 24, refused to concur. A conference committee was scheduled to begin its work April 30 on merging the bills.

The House bill would increase the cigarette tax by 54 cents a pack, the liquor tax would rise for the first time since 1987 and top income-earners would be subject to a new 9 percent income tax rate under the \$1.5 billion tax bill.

It also would eliminate many tax deductions, close corporate loopholes and convert the state's mortgage interest deduction into a credit so that all taxpayers qualify for an equal percentage of tax benefit.

"President Reagan did what we're trying to do here," Lenczewski said. "We were charged with really, truly as people said, zero-based budgeting. Turning over every rock, making the tough choices, scrutinizing everything and this committee did."

Some members accused the bill of going after everyone in the state.

"You say this is a more progressive bill, but I disagree with that," said Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague), lead Republican on the House Taxes Committee. "Who will actually be hit by the tax increases in this bill? I notice that there are tax increases to pretty much everybody."

Several amendments were offered to the bill, but none by Republicans, which Brod said was because there were too many provisions to fix.

"This bill hurts jobs, it hurts families and it's the wrong direction to go," she said. "This bill will put additional burden on those folks struggling so hard already to make ends meet."

Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth), House Property and Local Sales Tax Division chairman, said the bill lays the groundwork for a good economic future.

"This reform was not easy, but it made the right choices. We're going to draw a line in the sand and say we're not going to put any more extra burden on our senior citizens on fixed incomes trying to stay in their homes, our young families trying to stay in their neighborhoods so their kids can stay in that school district, for our farmers, for our small businesses. We said enough is enough on high property taxes. And this bill keeps property taxes in check."

Three amendments were adopted, including a technical amendment offered by Lenczewski.



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Rep. Ann Lenczewski presents the omnibus tax bill on the House floor April 25.

Taxes continued on page 23

Policy bill gets big on floor

An omnibus transportation policy bill that its sponsor said was one of the smallest in memory more than doubled in size before receiving House approval April 28.

Sponsored by Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Mpls), HF928*/SF1455 was approved 115-17 and sent to the Senate, where Sen. Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing) is the sponsor. A conference committee is expected to work out the differences.

"We've got a good product to go to the conference committee with some important positions and some good votes," Hornstein said.

Just six bills were included in the original proposal:

- the prohibition of certain acts at rest stops, including improper trash disposal and consuming or possessing open containers of alcohol;
- the conforming of commercial driver's license recordkeeping to federal standards;
- a broadening of the Metropolitan Council capability to make loans to local governments to purchase homestead property in anticipation of a trunk highway project;
- an addition of two members from labor organizations involved in freight and commuter rail lines to a Transportation Department committee that provides commuter rail advice;
- driving into an intersection unless the vehicle can move completely through without blocking cross-traffic would be prohibited; and
- tickets for going up to 10 mph over the speed limit in a 55 mph or 60 mph zone would be kept off a person's driving record.

A dozen more bills were added by the House.

For example, Rep. Kent Eken (DFL-Twin Valley) added a provision to designate a stretch of Highway 200 near Mahnom as "Veterans Memorial Highway," and a portion of highways 34 and 87 as "Becker County Veterans Memorial Highway." Local veteran's clubs are to pay for the signage.

Based on HF571, an amendment from Rep. Brita Sailer (DFL-Park Rapids) would permit counties to allow mini-trucks on local streets, county roads and highways. Generally sold as off-road vehicles for farms and construction sites, she said some people in her area use these fuel-efficient vehicles for other everyday needs. Law enforcement is concerned that they don't meet federal safety standards for highway use.

Highway 19 in New Prague would be closed from 5:30 p.m. Friday to 6 a.m. Sunday one weekend each September for the Dozinky Festival. Rep. Laura Brod (R-New Prague), who offered the amendment that was HF1192, said MnDOT has permitted the highway to be closed for the festival for the last 15 years, but would not permit the closing after 2010.

Other issues successfully amended onto the bill include mounting of GPS units on the bottommost portion of a windshield; clarifying a 2008 law regarding a town road extinguishment; ensuring all railroad employee rights are maintained if MnDOT takes over any passenger rail duties; and buses throughout the state can use the shoulder on an expressway or divided highway in certain conditions.

Charging vehicle tabs a possibility

It could cost more for motor vehicle transactions, but a consumer might be able to use their credit card for payment.

Such are the provisions of a bill approved April 28 by the House Transportation Finance and Policy Division.

Rep. Rick Hansen (DFL-South St. Paul), the sponsor of HF2116, said the measure would improve customer service and let deputy registrar offices maintain their viability. The bill next goes to the House Finance Committee. A companion, SF1701, sponsored by Sen. Dan Sparks (DFL-Austin), awaits action by the Senate Transportation Budget and Policy Division.

The bill would raise the filing fee for motor vehicle transactions by \$1.50, with the fee going to registrar operations, if the transaction occurs at a deputy registrar. The last renewal increase was in 2001; title service increase in 2005. The fee associated with online or mail transactions through Driver and Vehicle Services at the Department of Public Safety would go to the General Fund and the vehicle services operating account.

What's in the bill

The following are selected bills that have been incorporated, in part or in whole, into the omnibus transportation policy bill:

HF568 – Eken
HF570 – Champion
HF571 – Sailer
HF622 – Welti
HF672 – Dettmer
HF1088 – Swails
HF1191 – Hortman
HF1192 – Brod
HF1246 – Urdahl
HF1464 – Nelson
HF1568 – Holberg
HF1672 – Davnie

— M. Cook

According to the Minnesota Deputy Registrars' Association, deputy registrars transfer nearly \$1 billion to the state annually from motor vehicle tax and registration collections. Of the 173 registrars in the state, 60 percent are public offices offered by a county or city. The remaining 40 percent are private offices where a county or city has opted not to provide the service. They operate solely on handling fees.

However, the business model has changed, including increased costs for technology and keeping personal data secure, said Jim Hirst, representing the association.

Grace Wachlarowicz, director of licensing and elections in White Bear Lake, said transactions can take up to 30 minutes. "We get the difficult ones that have to be done face-to-face. ... To train an individual just to know the minimum basics is a minimum of one year of on-the-job training."

Registrars are unable to accept credit cards because they must absorb fees that banks impose on these transactions. The bill would allow a registrar to accept some credit cards for payment, along with a surcharge to cover the registrar's transaction costs.

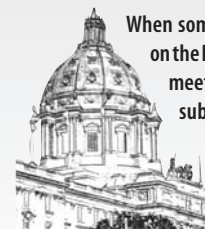
However, the most popular credit card may not be accepted.

DVS Director Pat McCormack said MasterCard, Discover and American Express allow a customer to pay a convenience fee to use their card; Visa does not.

The credit card provision is also in SF3, sponsored by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls). Approved 56-10 by the Senate April 7, it awaits action by the House State and Local Government Operations Reform, Technology and Elections Committee.

— M. Cook

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Come to the Capitol

Directions, Parking, Tours, Visiting the Legislature, Dining

Directions

The Capitol complex is north of I-94, just minutes from downtown St. Paul. It is accessible from the east and west on I-94, and from the north and south on I-35E.

- I-94 eastbound: Exit at Marion Street. Turn left. Go to Aurora Avenue and turn right.
- I-94 westbound: Exit at Marion Street. Turn right. Go to Aurora Avenue and turn right.
- I-35E northbound: Exit at Kellogg Boulevard. Turn left. Go to John Ireland Boulevard and turn right.
- I-35E southbound: Exit at University Avenue. Turn right. Go to Rice Street and turn left.

Parking

Public metered parking is available in Lot Q, north of the Capitol at Cedar Street and Sherburne Avenue; Lot AA, across Rice Street from the State Office Building on Aurora Avenue; Lot F, directly behind the Transportation Building; Lot H, west of the Veterans Service Building; Lot K, across from the Armory on Cedar Street (enter from 12th Street); Lot L, east of the Judicial Center; in the 14th Street Lot at the corner of North Robert Street and 14th Street; and on the orange level of the Centennial Office Building Ramp at Cedar Street and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. There are a few metered parking spots in front of the Capitol along Aurora Avenue.

Capitol Security personnel will issue tickets for expired meters.

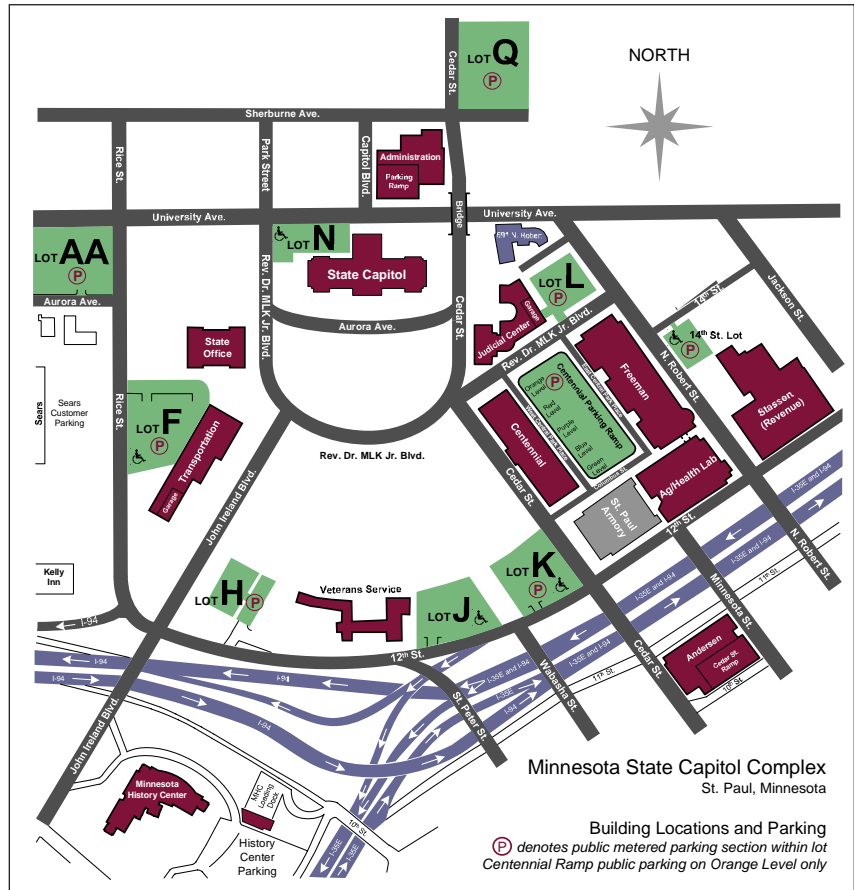
All-day parking permits are available from Plant Management on the ground floor of the Administration Building at 50 Sherburne Ave., north of the Capitol, across University Avenue. Cash or checks are accepted. For more information, call 651-201-2307.

Outdoor disability parking is available in most public lots within the State Capitol Complex. However, most spots can be found in Lot N and Lot F. Disability parking is also available on the orange level of the Centennial Office Parking Ramp and in the 14th Street Lot.

The main disability entrance to the Capitol is on the northwest side of the building just off Lot N. There also are drop-off entrances on the south side under the front steps on the south side and on the northeast side of the building.

Visiting the Legislature

During session, all House and Senate floor sessions are open to the public. No pass is required for spectators to sit in the galleries of either chamber. The House usually meets at 1:00 p.m. Monday and 10:30 a.m. Thursday, and the Senate generally meets at 11 a.m. Monday and Thursday during the first few weeks of session. As the session nears the end, however, both bodies may meet several times a week, often into the night.



Edited map courtesy Minnesota Department of Administration, Plant Management Division

Visitors interested in observing these sessions may call House Public Information Services 651-296-2146 or Senate Information 651-296-0504, with questions.

Committee meetings are open to the public, as well. Visitors wanting to attend a committee meeting may call the meeting hotlines for prerecorded messages with the meeting times and agendas for each day: House 651-296-9283 or Senate 651-296-8088.

If group members want to meet with their individual legislators or testify before a committee arrangements should be made at least a week in advance.

Sometimes groups plan a "legislative day" at the Capitol. For information on reserving a room for group conferences, call the State Office Building room scheduler at 651-296-0306 or the Capitol room scheduler at 651-296-0866.

Tours

Tours of the Capitol are offered through the Capitol Historic Site Program of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Tour guides lead the 45-minute tours on the hour Monday through Friday between 9 a.m.

and 4 p.m. (last tour leaves at 3 p.m.); Saturday between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. (last tour leaves at 2 p.m.); and Sunday between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. (last tour leaves at 3 p.m.). The tours begin at the Capitol information desk. Brochures in about 20 foreign languages also are available there.

Tour rates vary. Generally, 45-minute tours for drop-in visitors to the Capitol are free of charge.

The society offers a number of specialized tours for educational groups ranging from pre-school students to high school seniors. Also, special tour events are scheduled throughout the year. A special events guide is available upon request.

For more information about the tours and fees or to make a reservation, call the Capitol Historic Site Program at 651-296-2881.

Dining

Year-round cafeterias can be found on the ground floor of the Transportation and the Centennial and Stassen buildings.

The small State Office Building cafeteria and the Rathskeller in the State Capitol are open only when the Legislature is in session.

Friday, April 24

HF2348-Hackbarth (R) **Environment Policy & Oversight**

State trail pass required, and money appropriated.

Saturday, April 25

HF2349-Sterner (DFL)

Taxes

Nonprofit eligibility expanded and fundraising sales exemption increased.

HF2350-Sterner (DFL)

Taxes

Nonprofit fundraising sales exemption increased.

HF2351-Masin (DFL)

Transportation & Transit Policy & Oversight Division

Cellular phone use prohibited while driving.

HF2352-Mariani (DFL)

Finance

Low-income workers enabled to meet basic needs, child care assistance provided to low-income workers, working family credit increased and minimum wage increased.

Monday, April 27

HF2353-Morgan (DFL)

Finance

Manufactured home park lot rental new administrative remedy for violations established.

Wednesday, April 29

HF2354-Kahn (DFL)

Commerce & Labor

State lottery director authorized to operate slot machines at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

HF2355-Murdock (R)

Finance

Wadena; utility and street improvement funding provided.

HF2356-Peppin (R)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

State employee insurance plan regulated, plan established as a high deductible health plan and health savings accounts required to be offered to enrollees.

HF2357-Welti (DFL)

Finance

Chatfield; ISD 227; Potter Center for the Arts funding provided.

HF2358-Hausman (DFL)

Finance

Central Corridor Line three stations funding provided.

Thursday, April 30

HF2359-Drazkowski (R)

Finance

St. Charles; lost revenue and adjusting pupil aid reimbursement provided in response to the North Star Foods fire.

HF2360-Davnie (DFL)

K-12 Education Policy & Oversight

Minneapolis; Special School District No. 1; two-member appointment provided on the Minneapolis reapportionment commission and standards established.

HF2361-Howes (R)

Commerce & Labor

Laws regulating home solicitation sales clarified on how they apply to home improvement contracts.

Taxes continued from page 20

Rep. John Ward (DFL-Brainerd) successfully repealed a provision that would have allowed cities and counties to use a hotel and lodging tax used to promote tourism to replace losses to state aid.

Members were most vocal over a provision that would tax homeowners who use high amounts of energy during the winter months. Rep. Dave Olin (DFL-Thief River Falls) successfully offered an amendment to exempt residents receiving energy assistance from an extra energy tax.

House Minority Leader Marty Seifert (R-Marshall) said it's unreasonable to tax heat in a cold state. "The Democrats are so desperate for your tax dollars; they want to tax home heating fuel in the state of Minnesota where it was 20 below zero in January of this year. Unbelievable."

Also included in the bill is the option for counties to impose a half-cent local option sales tax.

"Instead of raising property taxes because of cuts, we're giving another option with the local option sales tax," Marquart said, adding



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

House Taxes Committee staff pile amendments for the proposed tax bill on the counter of the Index Office off the House Chamber floor prior to the members hearing the proposal and amendments April 25.

that the sales tax is estimated to raise \$100 million to help counties with cuts to local government aid and county program aid.


Agreeing that the bill did propose a lot of reform, Rep. Morrie Lanning (R-Moorhead) still was not keen on the idea of the local option sales tax.

"Those states that have given the local

communities the ability to raise taxes are typically the states that don't give aid to local units of government," he said. "Those of you who are concerned about local government aid and county program aid, beware because this might be going down a road we don't want to go down."

Lenczewski said the bill includes things that the governor has signed in the past.

"All legislators are really stressed out about

this deficit. It's tough," she said. "I could tell I struck a chord when I mentioned President Reagan. This bill is progressive, it's not regressive. Yes, parts of it are regressive. But we only have two progressive taxes in Minnesota, the income tax and the estate tax. This is a progressive bill loaded with reform." 

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MINORITY LEADER: MARTY SEIFERT

MINNESOTA INDEX

Hooked on fishing

The Governor's Fishing Opener is scheduled May 8-9 on White Bear Lake. The event marks the official opening of the open-water fishing season in Minnesota.

First year the event was held in the Twin Cities Metro Area	2009
Number of lakes in Minnesota.....	11,842
Number of licensed anglers, annually, in millions.....	1.4
Percent who are male.....	69
Percent who are female	31
Percent who are ages 16-24.....	12
Number coming from the seven-county metro area	755,000
Number of children ages 6-15 who fish at least once each year	388,000
Fishing license revenues generated in 2008, in millions	\$19
Economic impact of state fishing industry, in billions.....	\$4.7
State ranking for highest number of anglers.....	4
Jobs created by fishing in Minnesota.....	43,812
Number of registered watercraft in Minnesota during 2008.....	867,875
Revenue from boat registrations, excluding titling and ELS fees for 2009, in millions (est.).....	\$6.1
Revenue from 2008 boat registrations, in millions.....	\$5.9
Revenue from 2007 boat registrations, in millions.....	\$6.3
Percent of boaters in Twin Cities Metro Area who wear life jackets	18
Record carp taken from Clearwater Lake, Wright County, in pounds, ounces	55.5
Record muskellunge caught on Lake Winnibigoshish, Itasca County, in pounds.....	54
Largest northern pike caught on Basswood Lake, Lake County, in pounds, ounces	45.12
Record lake trout caught on Lake Superior in Cook County, in pounds, ounces.....	43.8
Record walleye caught on Seagull River, Cook County, in pounds, ounces.....	17.8
Record largemouth bass caught on Auburn Lake, Carver County, in pounds, ounces.....	8.15
Largest smallmouth bass caught on West Battle Lake, Ottertail County, in pounds.....	8
Largest bluegill recorded caught on Alice Lake, Hubbard County, in pounds, ounces	2.13
Largest hybrid sunfish caught in Zumbro River, Olmsted County, in pounds, ounces	1.12

— S. HEGARTY

Sources: Department of Natural Resources April 27, 2009 news release; DNR Boating Safety Program, and Office of Management and Budget Services.

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