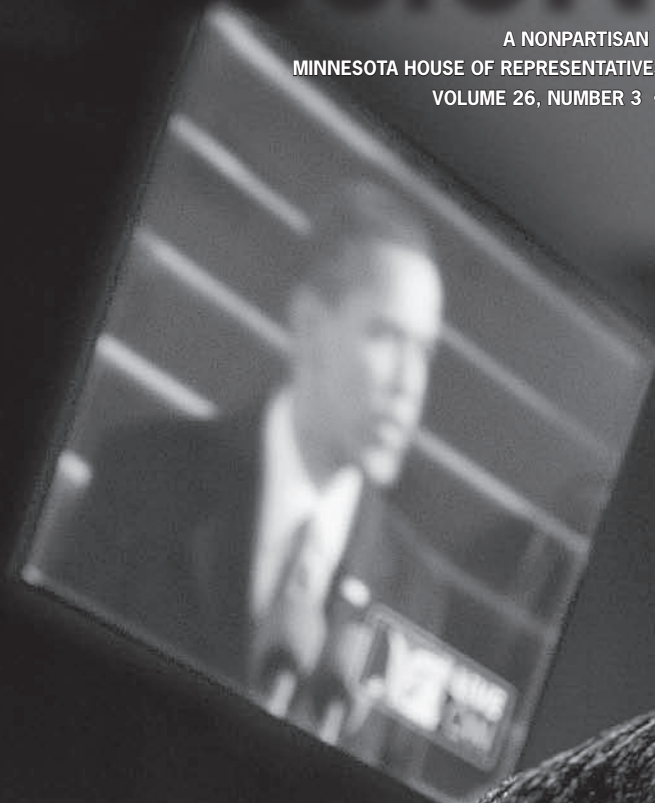


SESSION WEEKLY

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NEW MEMBER PROFILES

GREEN ACRES — NOT SO GREEN

COST-CUTTING — BIG AND SMALL IDEAS

HOUSING TRENDS PAINT TROUBLING PICTURE

HF157 - HF263

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: Mnwabisi Mbangata, a junior at Roseville Area High School taking part in the High School Page Program, watches a television panel on one side of a House hearing room Jan. 20 as Barack Obama gives his inaugural address after being sworn-in as the 44th President of the United States of America.

— Photo by: Tom Olmscheid



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Deb and Neil Krueger, who run a Christmas tree farm in Lake Elmo, testified Jan. 21 before the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division during discussion of the problematic Green Acres legislation.

Maybe not the place for me

Green Acres provision in the 2008 tax law becomes problematic

By SONJA HEGMAN

Neil and Deb Krueger raise Christmas trees on land in Lake Elmo that's been in their family for more than 50 years. But because their land is considered non-agriculture land, or non-productive land, they could face penalties down the road when they transfer it to their children, under changes to the Green Acres program.

"We've taken the steps and have a plan in place to pass our farm onto our children," Neil Krueger told the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division Jan. 21. "We have always run an environmentally friendly, sustainable Christmas tree farm. We don't want our

children penalized. I think the transferring process in place needs to change."

The division heard testimony from several people on the Green Acres program because of changes made to the law in 2008, changing the definition of land allowed in the program.

Deb Krueger described their tree farm as

a "complete ecosystem of marshes, wetlands, streams and woods. It is a complete ag unit and it is not non-productive land." She said it takes 10 to 15 years to grow an average sized Christmas tree, and for every tree that is cut down, two or three are planted to replace it. "Everything is equal part in our farm to the whole system. Sometimes fields will sit idle for a while to give the soil a chance to rest. We choose to keep our farm open, green and complete."

According to the 2008 changes, any land considered "non-productive" will face penalties of up to seven years of back taxes once that "non-productive" land is transferred or sold to someone else. The changes do not apply to "productive" land, or land considered

First Reading continued on page 4

tillable. So any land currently enrolled, productive or not, is grandfathered in and taxes will remain at the Green Acres value. The only way penalties will arise is if the non-productive land is transferred or sold.

"I believe there is a synergistic relationship between the acres where crops might actually be planted and the surrounding landscape in that unit," said Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar), division chairman. "It doesn't matter if you're housing bugs and bees to help pollinate or whether you're preventing soil and other things from eroding off into the wetlands. I think we have to recognize that a farm unit or a production unit isn't necessarily just the tillable acres."

Juhnke said the division will hear several bills on the Green Acres issue the week of Jan. 26, which will then be combined and sent on to the House Taxes Committee.

What happened?

At the beginning of the 2008 legislative session, the Office of the Legislative Auditor presented its audit of the more than 40-year-old Green Acres program to the House Tax Relief and Local Sales Tax Division. The report found several problems with the program, said Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth), division chairman. "They found it wasn't doing what it was supposed to do," he said. "Somehow we allowed the program to change into something it was not intended for."

In a lot of instances this property tax benefit was benefitting wetlands and hunting and recreation land, which it was never intended to do, he said. Also, not all counties were using the program when they had land that could be enrolled.

After the property tax division heard the report, Marquart directed Rep. Lyle Koenen (DFL-Clara City) and Rep. Randy Demmer (R-Hayfield) to work on the issue. Their recommendations were a part of the property tax division report, which then became a part of the omnibus tax bill that left the House floor and was ultimately signed into law, Marquart said. "No one should have been caught off guard that we were making changes to Green Acres."

"In tough economic times and times where property taxes are going up around the state, it's vitally important that our programs are benefitting and doing what they're supposed to be doing and not unfairly putting higher property taxes on others. That's the real key," he said.



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

John Kaproth, who farms near Foley, testifies before the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division Jan. 21 in support of repealing the Green Acres legislation that was included in last year's omnibus tax law.

Controversy

According to some legislators, controversies over the 2008 changes arose after being signed into law, though there were ample opportunities to voice concern before that. Nine public hearings on the program's proposed changes were held during the 2008 session.

Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington), House Taxes Committee chairwoman, said a lot of people misunderstood what happened from the beginning. She said some of the issue is that many legislators don't understand that the state doesn't pay for Green Acres — other property taxpayers do.

"They think, 'OK, now my constituents are losing this tax preference that the state needs to pay for them, and they want it back.' That's not accurate," she said. "The state has never paid for it. It is a shift between local property taxpayers. So who's been paying for it? Their neighbors."

In 2007, Green Acres shifted \$35 million to local property taxpayers who live near land enrolled in the program. Next year, it is projected to shift \$55 million.

2008 Legislative changes to Green Acres ... in a nutshell

- A new class of property was created called "rural vacant land." This is defined as rural undeveloped land not being used for agricultural production. Rural vacant land has the same class rates as agricultural land so it should not result in any changes to tax burdens. It will just be categorized and tracked separately for valuation purposes.
- Land in the new rural vacant land classification will no longer be allowed into the Green Acres program for future enrollments. This is also true for land in government-sponsored conservation programs, such as Reinvest in Minnesota and Conservation Reserve Program.
- All land currently enrolled in the Green Acres program was "grandfathered in" to the program for as long as it stays under its current ownership, with two provisions:
 - when land classified as rural vacant land is removed from the program, it will be subject to a seven-year back tax payment compared to the three-year payment under the old law; and
 - in the future, landowners will not be permitted to withdraw small tracts of rural vacant land from the program in a piecemeal fashion. If any rural vacant land is withdrawn, all of it will have to be withdrawn at that time and will be subject to the seven-year back tax payment.
- A provision was also adopted that allows taxpayers to remove some or all of their rural vacant land from the Green Acres program in 2009, before the major components of the reform are fully implemented, and subject to the three-year payback under the old law rather than the seven-year payback under the new law. This was to allow owners who anticipated selling or transferring their rural vacant land in the relatively near future to do so under the old rules and avoid the higher payback.
- Landowners had to state only their intent to withdraw their land from the program by Jan. 2, 2009, in order to take advantage of the three-year payback under the old law. County assessors have until sometime this summer to estimate the amount of back taxes due and notify taxpayers of that amount. If the taxpayer decides to withdraw their land after receiving the estimate, they have until Nov. 15, 2009, to pay those back taxes.

Information from the House Research Department

"If we're going to do that, it better be legitimate," Lenczewski said. "We found out it wasn't. We're not taking it away from the purpose of the program; we just want people to follow the rules. We don't want people in equal situations paying extremely different taxes." For land in the Twin Cities

Green Acres continued on page 23

Editor's note: The following Highlights are coverage of select bills heard in House committees and other House activities held Jan. 15-22. 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.

BONDING

Wrong name now righted

Stearns County was slated to receive \$492,000 through last year's capital investment law for acquisition of land for new parks and trails.

However, the agency named as the fund recipient, the Central Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Coordination Board, cannot own land.

Sponsored by Rep. Larry Hosch (DFL-St. Joseph), HF56 makes a technical correction to the law by appropriating the money directly to Stearns County, so that 23 acres adjacent to Warner Lake Park can be integrated into the Central Minnesota Parks and Trails System.

It was approved Jan. 21 by the House Finance Committee and Jan. 22 by the House Ways and Means Committee. It now awaits action on the House floor.

A companion, SF55, sponsored by Sen. Michelle Fischbach (R-Paynesville), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— L. SCHUTZ

BUSINESS

What's the development plan?

At a Jan. 20 hearing on the state's economic outlook, the chairman of a House division questioned why the Department of Employment and Economic Development has no comprehensive, statewide economic development plan.

"DEED doesn't have a plan. Has it ever had a plan? Does it ever plan to have a plan?" asked Rep. Tim Mahoney (DFL-St. Paul), chairman of the House Bioscience and Workforce Development Policy and Oversight Division.

Commissioner Dan McElroy responded that Minnesota has a diverse business climate with many different regional economies, and said it makes more sense to pursue "regional strategies" within the state rather than a single overarching plan.

"I do not believe that in a state as diverse as Minnesota, a single economic development

strategy is appropriate. We have a cluster of related economic development strategies in a diverse economy," McElroy said.

The two spoke at the hearing on how recent national economic trends have impacted the state's business activity. No action was taken.

McElroy and Commerce Department Commissioner Glenn Wilson testified that the state's credit markets have tightened in response to the recent housing market crash and the ensuing Wall Street bailout, causing an economic slowdown. Mahoney suggested the state should have a unifying plan to promote an economic recovery.

"Can you explain to me how you go to businesses in the state — or businesses on the east coast, west coast, Sweden, wherever — and say, 'We don't have a plan, but we'd really like you to come and create a business in Minnesota?' I don't follow that," Mahoney said.

McElroy countered that the department's programs had been developed over a long period of time, and that many were designed to meet specific needs. He said changing or consolidating programs might not be advisable.

"It is a big and complex state, so having a lot of programs, we do our best to make them fit the needs where we can," he said.

Meanwhile, Rep. Steve Gottwalt (R-St. Cloud), the division's Republican lead, suggested that any economic recovery plan should include some kind of tax relief to businesses. He argued that the state's corporate tax rate is more burdensome than in competing states.

— N. BUSSE

CONSUMERS

DTV transition concerns heard

Minnesotans have until Feb. 17 to ready their televisions for the switch-over to digital.

Bill Freedman, Federal Communications Commission associate bureau chief, told the House Telecommunications Regulation and Infrastructure Division members the 18 percent of Minnesotans — 21 percent of Duluth-Superior area viewers — who count on analog-only TV for news and entertainment will need to take one of three steps to keep watching: purchase a new television with a built-in digital tuner; connect their analog television to a converter box; or subscribe to a satellite or cable

television service. Some viewers may also require a new antenna.

Information and instructions, including how to install a converter box and how to request a \$40 government-issued coupon, are available at www.dtv.gov. But members were especially concerned whether their senior constituents could handle the changes alone.

Although Chairman Rep. Sheldon Johnson (DFL-St. Paul) endorsed the online help options at the division's Jan. 16 meeting, Rep. Brita Sailer (DFL-Park Rapids) said, "Most likely the folks that will be having the most trouble with this do not have access to the Web site."

Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer (R-Big Lake) painted the picture of a "70-year-old lady crawling behind the TV" to try to read the fine print to see if it's digital-ready. Providing one-to-one help is "the crux of the issue for my people."

Jim du Bois, president and CEO of the Minnesota Broadcasters Association, said "boots on the ground" including 4-H groups and ham radio operators have been recruited to offer hands-on help. Best Buy Government Relations Specialist Mike Hiltner said the company's outreach efforts include training staff in community organizations, such as Meals on Wheels, with direct ties to people in their homes.

"TV stations provide a vital link and lifeline to a lot of folks, particularly people that live in remote areas," Freedman said. "We just want to make sure that on Feb. 18, the day after the scheduled transition date, that everybody has access to their television programming."

— K. BERGGREN

CRIME

Paying for short-term offenders

Parties on both sides of an issue hope a long-term solution can be found in a short time.

At issue is the housing of short-term offenders — felons with six months or less to serve on their sentence or probation violators who are incarcerated for less than six months.

Enacted during the 2003 budget shortfall, current law requires these individuals be housed in county jails, rather than a Department of Corrections facility.

Dakota County Commissioner Nancy Schouweiler called it a way for the state to solve its budget problems by using "the counties' checkbooks."

At the time, it was suggested the plan would

save state dollars and that the inmates would be better served in a local facility. It also included a \$1.2 million appropriation to help counties cover the additional costs.

But from the start, state reimbursement fell far short of covering actual costs.

For example, it cost Hennepin County an additional \$805,966 to house the short-term offenders in Fiscal Year 2004 and \$1.5 million three years later. The state increased its daily reimbursement to \$27.24 per inmate in Fiscal Year 2008, but the county still faced an additional \$933,063 in taxpayer costs. The state's daily reimbursement rate decreased to \$8-\$10 in Fiscal Year 2009.

Tom Merkel, director of community corrections and rehabilitation for Hennepin County, told the House Public Safety Finance Division Jan. 15 that the program needs to "either be dramatically changed or discontinued."

Rep. Michael Paymar (DFL-St. Paul), the division chairman, called the funding "unfair," saying the problem needs to be solved this year. "We've been kicking this around for years."

According to nonpartisan House Fiscal Analysis, "If the Legislature completely funded the local impact at an average per diem rate of \$55 using the current average of 360 beds, the estimated cost to the state would be \$7.227 million per year or \$5.62 million per year in new money."

In addition to cost concerns, Merkel said short-term offenders housed in the Hennepin County facility have had a 74 percent recidivism rate after three years, 60 percent of which were felonies. He said that is in part because the Corrections Department provides effective reentry services.

— M. Cook

ENVIRONMENT

Plan raises eyebrows, not corn

A Jan. 22 presentation of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan raised a few eyebrows among legislators from agricultural and wetland districts.

Deborah Swackhamer, an environmental chemist at the University of Minnesota and one of the plan's authors, highlighted a few of the recommendations at a joint meeting of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division and House Cultural and Outdoor Resources Finance Division. No action was taken.

Swackhamer said that corn production, because of its pesticide use and excess soil erosion, impairs water quality. Pressure to

AG TOUR



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Members of the House Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs Finance Division get a look at the laboratories at the Department of Agriculture during a Jan. 20 tour.

grow more corn for ethanol production also has prompted corn planting on less than optimal land and puts stress on the environment, she added. The plan recommends that perennial plants be grown for production of cellulosic ethanol, a biofuel produced from wood, grasses or the non-edible parts of plants.

That recommendation did not sit well with Rep. Greg Davids (R-Preston), whose district includes agriculture land and a corn ethanol plant. He asked if the plan advocates for replacing such plants with cellulosic ethanol production.

Swackhamer said the plan is not that “black and white.” Rather, it addresses estimates that by the year 2015, Minnesota corn growers will not be able to keep pace with the demand for corn ethanol production. Cellulosic ethanol is viewed as a way to fill that gap and its production methods are less harmful to the environment.

One of the plan’s “critical findings” is a dramatic loss of wetlands and its effect on wildlife habitats.

Rep. Sarah Anderson (R-Plymouth) questioned the accuracy of the data used for the findings. Through personal experience with a family farm, Anderson said mistakes can occur. She requested to see the criteria that researchers used to define a wetland. The age of the data used could also be a factor.

Released in November 2008, the plan took two years to complete and included more than 170 researchers. It was funded by the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund and is an assessment of the health of the state’s natural resources.

— S. HEGARTY

FAMILY

Child care assistance falls short

Many low-income Minnesotans needing subsidized child care don’t have equal access to quality care.

That was the focus of members’ questions during an overview of Department of Human Services early learning and child care assistance programs given to the House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Division Jan. 15.

Cherie Kotilinek, DHS child care assistance program manager, said one program fully subsidizes child care costs for parents enrolled in the Minnesota Family Investment Plan, the state’s cash assistance program to the poorest families. Another, Basic Sliding Fee child care assistance, helps low-income working parents pay for child care through a partial fee reimbursement to care providers — but its waiting list of 7,159 families isn’t likely to be reduced to zero any time soon.

Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville) wondered what parents who are stuck on the list do instead. Kotilinek said her department doesn’t track waiting families, but that community studies indicate they use up savings or “max out” credit cards to pay for care and sometimes just quit their jobs.

While the sliding fee program’s intent is to equalize access to quality care, members were concerned about its limitations.

Kotilinek said reimbursement rates were frozen in 2003 and, although raised by 6 percent in 2006, have not kept pace with market rates in many parts of the state. Parents must pay providers a co-payment of up to 14 percent of their income, but sometimes the sum of subsidy and parent co-pay falls short of the provider’s market rate. Kotilinek said providers may fund raise to make up the difference, “otherwise it’s the parent’s responsibility.”

The disparity “raised a red flag” for Rep. Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul). “We may be driving lower income people out of access, because if I am a provider would I accept a frozen lower rate when the market is going to pay a better rate?”

“I think that’s a question we should all think about and struggle with,” said Rep. Nora Slawik (DFL-Maplewood), the division chairwoman. “It’s hard especially with the fiscal environment now.”

— K. BERGGREN

GOVERNMENT

Compensation fund modifications

What was deemed a technical cleanup bill brought back openness issues.

Sponsored by Rep. Ryan Winkler (DFL-Golden Valley), HF100 would make a handful of modifications to the compensation process for victims of the Interstate 35W bridge collapse.

It was approved Jan. 21 by the House Civil Justice Committee on a divided voice vote and sent to the House floor.

A 2008 law appropriated funds and established a claims structure for survivors of the Aug. 1, 2007, collapse that killed 13 people and injured 85 others. A special master panel is to make offers to each claimant by the end of next month. In return for accepting compensation, survivors will release the state from further liability. If they choose not to accept compensation, they can pursue a lawsuit against the state that would be subject to all existing statutory terms and conditions.

To alleviate some concerns raised by the panel, the bill:

Mark your calendars

On Jan. 28, the following special events will be broadcast live via streaming video through the House Web site:

- A summit on early childhood care and education will occur in the House Chamber from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. All House and Senate members have been invited to attend.
- Members of the House Finance Committee and House Ways and Means Committee are scheduled to convene at 6:30 p.m. to review Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s budget recommendations (pending their official release sometime next week).

The events will also be available for viewing at a later time through the House Web video archives. Visit www.house.mn and use the audio and video navigation links on the left-hand side of the page.

- provides that records and data created by panel members are not subject to the Minnesota Official Records Act or the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, except for the settlement agreement and documentation of the panel’s administrative costs;
 - prohibits a panel member from testifying in any civil or administrative action related to their service, unless a statement or conduct could constitute a crime;
 - clarifies the prohibition on third-party subrogation and recovery; and
 - clarifies that panel members are state employees for the purposes of indemnification.
- “They don’t want to be exposed to legal liability for performing the task we assigned to them,” Winkler said.

Rep. Mary Liz Holberg (R-Lakeville), who voted no last year, again objected. She said more information should be available to taxpayers to provide justification for the settlement amounts.

“We’re just supposed to blindly accept that it was a fair process and everybody got their due,” she said. “There’s way too much hidden information.”

Winkler said hearings would be held later this session on how the process worked.

A companion bill, SF94, sponsored by Sen. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

— M. COOK

Going after state defrauders

Knowingly defrauding state taxpayers is never a good thing.

A bill sponsored by Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-St. Louis Park) could provide an assist in going after such perpetrators.

"This would allow whistleblowers to bring claims on behalf of the government," he said. "The attorney general's office would then have the option to intervene in that case. ... If there's a successful judgment or if there's a settlement, that whistleblower would be entitled to a share of the ultimate settlement or recovery, and the state would be entitled to an amount up to three times the amount of its provable damages."

Following Jan. 21 approval on a split voice vote by the House Civil Justice Committee, HF8 goes to the House Commerce and Labor Committee.

A companion bill, SF82, sponsored by Sen. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park), awaits action by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Because a similar federal law does not cover fraud against state governments, 21 other states have adopted so-called "False Claim Act" to go after defrauders.

"These states have collected hundreds of millions of dollars that would never have been discovered, never have been obtainable, that go directly to the taxpayers," Simon said.

Simon said much success has been in programs jointly administered by state and federal government, such as Medicaid. In 2006, Congress passed a law whereby states passing a False Claims Act would get a 10 percent bonus on all Medicaid fraud recoveries.

"We've only seen the tip of the iceberg in health care fraud," said Neil Thompson, a pharmacist who helped expose Walgreens for defrauding Medicaid. "You'll never see these big awards if you don't protect whistleblowers and you don't incentivize them some way."

A number of opponents, primarily from the health care area, spoke against the bill. They argued the federal law is already an effective weapon; the state now has authority to sanction public health care program vendors; and that the bill would actually cost money, particularly in Medicaid issues.

"The state will be forced to pay an average 20 percent of its total recovery to the whistleblower," wrote Jonathan Diesenhaus, a partner with the Hogan & Hartson law firm in Washington D.C. "This payment to the whistleblower, which the state does not pay currently, would result in a net loss for the state because the payment will be larger than the state's increased share of the fraud recovery."

— M. Cook

HUMAN SERVICES

Fetal alcohol syndrome awareness

An invisible disease often goes untreated, but changes could be forthcoming.

"Having the ability to recognize signs and characteristics of any disorder, specifically one as dramatically impactful as (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) has been imperative to the working relationship established not only between the kids that I work with, but their families as well," said Wade Lennox, a juvenile probation officer with Kanabec County Court Services.

He was one of four testifiers to speak in support of additional fetal alcohol syndrome training at a Jan. 20 joint hearing of the House Public Safety Finance Division and the House Public Safety Policy and Oversight

Committee. No action was taken.

Sara Messelt, executive director of the Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, said approximately 8,500 Minnesota babies are born annually with brain damage caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.

People affected by the disease can suffer from poor judgment, functioning at a level much younger than their age, not understanding consequences of their actions and a lack of ability to learn from their mistakes.

Messelt cited a study of youth ages 12-21 with the disease that showed 60 percent had legal trouble and 32 percent had been incarcerated.

"If we have a juvenile that gets into the correctional system and we don't assess them accurately we're going to see them

over and over and over again," said Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center), chairwoman of the oversight committee.

Linda Walinski, a Kanabec County psychologist and registered nurse, said it would help if probation officers, social workers and those in similar professions were to receive additional training. A training manual already exists, but Messelt called training across the state "very hit and miss."

"Currently, we're not required to receive any training," Lennox said, adding some people get guidance on their own.

Calling the testimony "compelling," Rep. Paul Kohls (R-Victoria) nonetheless questioned adding more unfunded mandates.

Rep. Rob Eastlund (R-Isanti) countered that the state often does this, and said it seems as though this training could be easily added. "Every time we add licensing to a real estate broker we don't pay for it."

— M. Cook



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

Sara Messelt, right, executive director of the Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, answers a question about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome during a Jan. 20 joint meeting of the House Public Safety Finance Division and House Public Safety Policy and Oversight Committee. Psychologist Linda Walinski, left, also testified and took questions.

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RECREATION

DNR budget review scrutinized

The grandest project depends on the success of its smallest component.

This was the proverbial message directed to Bob Meier, Department of Natural Resources assistant commissioner, Jan. 20 by the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division. Or, put another way, members might have asked, "Is the devil in the details?"

Meier, armed with charts, graphs and budget review materials, explained his agency's performance-based strategy for developing its new biennial budget. The only problem was that division members wanted more details than were readily available.

For example, the number of people who fish, hunt, boat and visit state parks each year has declined during the past decade, according to agency measurements. Should opportunities be cut, or should parents be allowed to fish for free if they bring along their children, as a means to entice more outdoor recreation?

As the state's population shifts and baby boomers retire, what effect might this have on outdoor recreation offerings? Twenty- to 40-year-olds aren't showing up on Minnesota lakes or in the parks as often these days. How many people use the system of trails in Minnesota, a measuring tool that was missing from the recreation chart? As it turns out, trail use is steady or on the rise, according to staff. Perhaps that is where the 20- to 40-year-olds can be found, said division members.

Division Chairwoman Rep. Jean Wagenius (DFL-Mpls) said there are aspects of DNR-budgeted programs that need more in-depth study. She'd like to hear from constituents as well.

In addition to outdoor recreation, the DNR also grapples with protecting natural resources, such as land reclamation issues and the economic development of natural resources, such as the forest and mining industries.

— S. HEGARTY

TAXES

Tax fix gets members stirred up

Heads butted during two House Taxes Committee hearings over a bill that would retroactively correct a mistake.

Sponsored by Rep. Ann Lenczewski (DFL-Bloomington), HF95 makes changes to the 2008 tax law as specified in a letter sent by House and Senate leadership to the governor after the Legislature adjourned last May. The leaders agreed to the change so the legislation

would not get a governor's veto.

The bill was approved by the committee Jan. 21, and by the House Ways and Means Committee on Jan. 22. It now awaits action on the House floor.

The bill replaces two employer credits intended to encourage employers to provide section 125 plans for health care and to credit certain individuals participating in those plans. It also would repeal a provision that suspends all state maintenance of effort and matching fund requirements for counties while levy limits are in effect.

"I have a problem with leadership binding us to votes," said Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL-Rochester) during the Jan. 20 hearing. Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia) also spoke in support of members having a say.

Discussion on the bill continued the next day when Rep. Greg Davids (R-Preston) tried to shift the scope of the bill through an amendment focused only on the county funding requirements.

Although the amendment failed, it prompted comments from several testifiers about county funding mandates and the need for change.

Lenczewski said the topic would likely be revisited throughout session.

A companion bill, SF49, sponsored by Sen. Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook), was heard Jan. 22 by the Senate Taxes Committee.

— S. HEGMAN

TRANSPORTATION

Spending airport money properly

Aviators want money returned that they believe was hijacked last May.

Included in last session's plan to resolve the state's biennial budget deficit was a \$15 million transfer from an airport development and assistance fund to the state's General Fund. It was a last-minute insertion after being in neither the House or Senate budget-balancing proposal.

Sponsored by Rep. Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston), HF73 would return the money to the State Airports Fund. It was approved Jan. 20 by the House Transportation Finance and Policy Division and sent to the House Finance Committee.

"This is a trust issue," said Rep. Dan Severson (R-Sauk Rapids).

The bill would also repeal a portion of the 2008 law that reduced the base appropriation for airport development from \$20.3 million to \$14.3 million. The fund helps pay for improvements at airports outside the governance of the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Three taxes comprise the fund dollars: an aircraft fuel tax, aircraft registration tax and an airline flight property tax.

Payers of those taxes want assurance the money gets used for its intended purpose. Supporters note that 41 projects scheduled for this year — from reflective centerline striping to maintaining navigation aids — are now in a holding pattern.

"What is hard to explain to our management is the fact that it cost \$300 to register a 1995 Citation VII in Boise, Idaho, and \$51,000 for the same aircraft in Minnesota," said Jon Krall, aviation director at Supervalu Inc. and a board member of the Minnesota Business Aviation Association. "I explain that the money does go directly into the State Airports Fund to maintain the great system of airports in Minnesota. Well, I used to be able to say that."

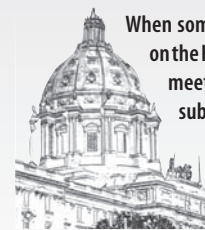
In the 2003 budget crisis, \$15 million was also taken from the fund, and it had yet to be fully replenished. More projects have been delayed since then.

"Is it too much to ask that the \$185,000-plus collected from our company goes to support the Minnesota airport system? I don't think so," Krall said.

A companion bill, SF15, sponsored by Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope), awaits action by the Senate Finance Committee.

— M. COOK

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Housing trends paint troubling picture

Roof overhead takes a greater percentage of resident's wages

By SUSAN HEGARTY

“We’re No. 1” resonates differently when it’s said about housing trends in Minnesota than when it’s shouted at a sporting event.

Yet, that’s exactly where Minnesota ranks among other states for the increasing rate at which homeowners are spending their incomes to put a roof over their heads.

During testimony presented to the House Housing Finance and Policy and Public Health Finance Division Jan. 21, Chip Halbach, executive director of Minnesota Housing Partnership, called the ranking a key indicator of “severe distress.”

“If you’re paying more than half of your gross income for housing you are likely cutting back on other essential family and household expenses, like purchase of food, health care, day care and other things that are critically important to daily life,” Halbach said.

The division took no action.

Currently, one in eight Minnesota households spends more than 50 percent of its income on housing. In 2007, 12.3 percent, or 250,000 Minnesota households spent the majority of their wages on housing. By comparison, 12.7 percent of Wisconsin households and 19.7 percent of Florida households spend 50 percent or more for housing.

Another trend is a widening gap between home prices and income, Halbach said.

Between 2001 and 2007, home prices rose 34 percent while household income among owner occupied homes rose only 12 percent. Likewise, rent and utilities rose 12 percent while tenants, on average, saw only a 4 percent increase in their wages.

Affordability and availability remain top agenda items for housing advocacy groups.

Affordable rental properties, calculated at \$700 or less per month, began to disappear and the average rent has now increased to more than \$900 per month, according to Halbach. Duluth and St. Cloud have the highest rates of rent increases compared to incomes, he added.

“That’s one of the reasons we see much more demand for these super scarce federal rent subsidies,” said Halbach. At one point, there were 14,000 applicants for 30 subsidies.

Some renters are waiting as long as 10 years for Section 8 housing vouchers and fewer recipients are willing or able to relinquish those vouchers, which have no time usage limitations.

Homeless

“No community is improved by having people living under its bridges, and these kinds of barriers can be overcome,” Patrick Wood, policy advocate with the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, told the division.

Between 2002 and 2006, there was a downward trend in the number of Minnesotans who were homeless, but today these numbers have risen above 2002 levels. A 2006 Wilder Research study estimated that 9,000 individuals were homeless in Minnesota. The typical risk factors and reasons why someone becomes homeless remain — divorce, job loss

and health issue — but ballooning adjustable rate mortgages have forced people out of their homes and contributed to the rise in homelessness, according to Halbach. In St. Paul, foreclosures are estimated to grow from 2,200 in 2008 to 4,000 in 2009.


Foreclosures

During the next 24 months, a second wave of homeowners are at risk of losing their homes when their Alt-A subprime loans reset at higher rates, according to Cecile Bedor, co-chair of the Minnesota Foreclosure Partners Council. More than \$500 million in Alt-A loans have been granted throughout Minnesota, with a high concentration inside the 11-county Twin Cities metropolitan area, Bedor said. Some estimate that up to 70 percent of Alt-A borrowers will default on their loans, she said.

Legislators question the statistic, saying the problem stems from deregulation in the mortgage industry and lenders who prey on vulnerable borrowers.

“Lack of regulation and subprime loans, meaning they didn’t have the money,” said Rep. Carolyn Laine (DFL-Columbia Heights). The problem is exacerbated due to a “lack of decency” among lenders, she added.

To fully understand the plight of homeless people in the state, legislators were invited to tag along when staff and volunteers in the “A Day in the Life” program make site visits to homeless people on the street and in transitional housing.

“It is truly an experience that if you haven’t had, and you’re on a committee, that you’re deciding housing decisions for your constituents, then you need to be out there and see what they see and feel what they feel. It will change how you think of this, how you relate to it,” said Melanie Magee, a program volunteer from Prior Lake. 

Reforming education, saving money

Bipartisan support shown for mandate reduction and shared services

By KRIS BERGGREN

Ideas for reforming K-12 education with the best chance of bipartisan support, given the enormous and growing deficit, are pragmatic, such as improving cost efficiencies through sharing services and collective purchasing among districts and mandate reductions.

"We are simply not going to have as much money as we want to spend," said Rep. Pat Garofalo (R-Farmington), Republican lead on the House K-12 Education Finance Division. "Whether we raise taxes or not, we are simply not going to be able to spend more money. That is not a position; that is just math."

On the other hand, Rep Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville), the division chairwoman, believes there will ultimately be a tax increase this session, which will help fund the three top education priorities of the House, Senate and governor. They are, respectively:

- a start to implementing HF2, commonly referred to as the New Minnesota Miracle;
- appropriations for special education funding; and
- expanding Q-Comp, the teacher incentive fund linked to student progress.

"I think in the end this will get so ugly there will be three Republicans who join the Democrats" to approve a tax increase, Greiling said.

A number of reform ideas were offered to the division at its Jan. 20 hearing, and to the House K-12 Education Policy and Oversight

Committee the following day. No action was taken.

For now, both Garofalo and Greiling favor reducing burdensome mandates and sharing services. Greiling said the division will form groups to sift through dozens of suggestions gleaned from hearings, recommendations from a June 2008 legislative auditor's report and constituent input.

"Many will be stabbed with many daggers before they see the light of day," Greiling said, but some will make it into legislation.

Sharing services saves money

One idea proffered by education advocates was lowering costs through bulk purchasing of everything from pencils to payroll services.

In addition to creating a lending library of math and science materials, Grace Kelliher, director of governmental relations for the Minnesota School Boards Association, suggested a traveling team of specialists as a means of sharing resources and expertise, an idea she said is working in Alabama.

Earl Athman, business manager for the Minnesota Association of School Business Officials, suggested collectively purchasing utilities rather than paper or other materials that require storage.

Rep. Carol McFarlane (R-White Bear Lake) noted many districts now share services and talent to mixed reviews. "My intermediate district asked if they could testify it is an effective way to save and do things," she said.

Mandate reductions widely sought

An eight-page laundry list of legislative mandates compiled by education advocates highlights the sheer volume of rules governing daily district business which can erode tight budgets and sometimes instructional time.

While no single mandate is unreasonable, Charlie Kyte, executive director of the Minnesota Association of School



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Gov. Tim Pawlenty and legislative leaders say that education funding remains a top priority. As education reform ideas are considered, early learning is called the "backbone of future learning."

Reform continued on page 23

How a Bill Becomes

Idea

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

Legal form

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

Authors

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

General Register

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

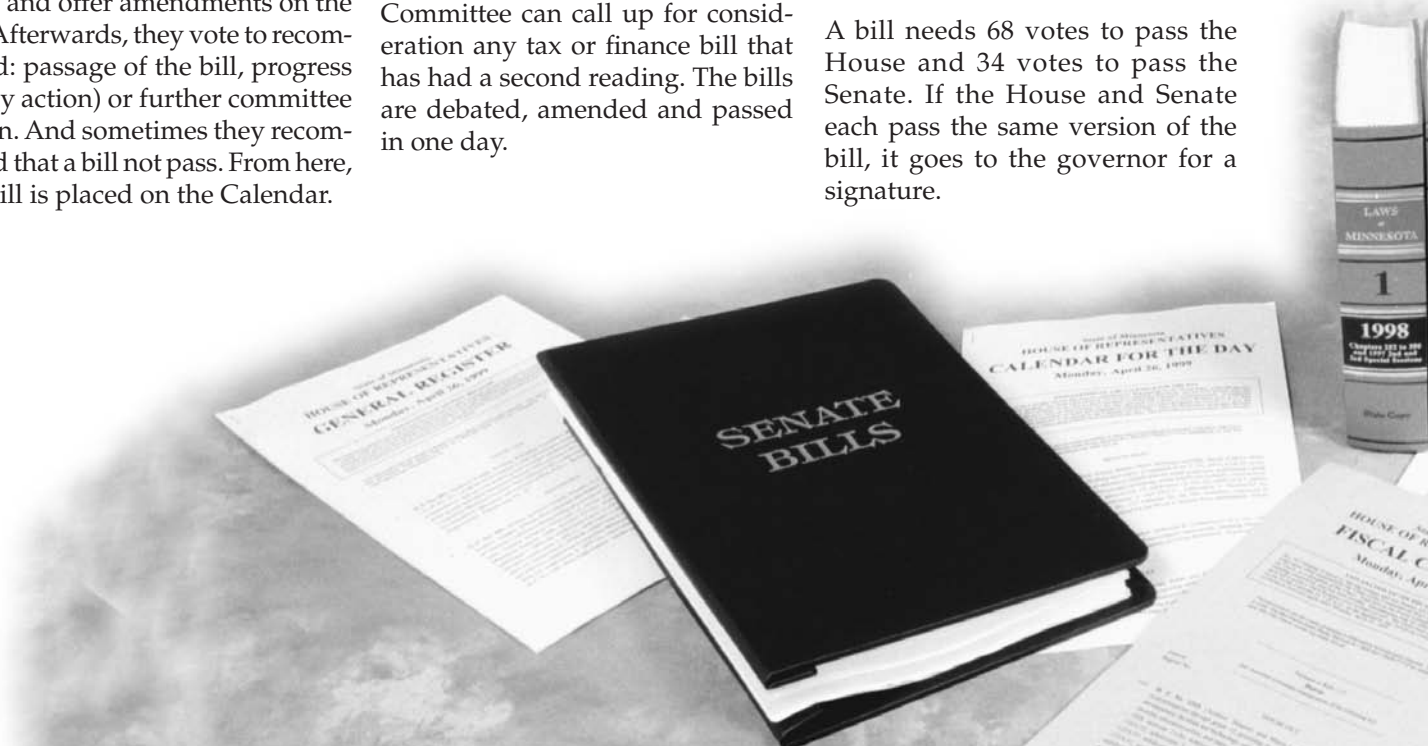
In the Senate, a different procedure is used. Bills are listed on the General Orders agenda. Senate members, acting as the "committee of the whole," have a chance to debate the issue and offer amendments on the bill. Afterwards, they vote to recommend: passage of the bill, progress (delay action) or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

Calendar for the Day

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

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

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



a Law in Minnesota

Introduction

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

Committee

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

Floor

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

Conference

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

Floor

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

Governor

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



Doing greater good

Jackson views public service as a calling

By NICK BUSSE

With the state facing a historic budget crisis, some people seem to wonder whether Rep. Gail Kulick Jackson (DFL-Milaca) got more than she bargained for when she ran for office.



Rep.
Gail Kulick Jackson

“People will practically offer their condolences,” Jackson says, “like, ‘Oh, boy, I know you wanted this, but ...’”

Far from being disappointed, however, the lawyer and mother of three says she’s happy to be in St. Paul during such difficult times. What’s more, she says she came to the Capitol with a mission: to keep a human face on the tough decisions that lie ahead.

“This is not about just doing math,” she says about fixing the budget deficit. “If it were, it would be really easy. We would just change the math for the state to balance the budget. But everything is going to have an impact on people.”

Jackson says she understands those impacts well. Through her experience as a volunteer attorney — as well as her time on the local school board, chamber of commerce and the board of a health care nonprofit — she’s gained an appreciation of what state funding, or a lack thereof, can mean to her community.

“I know a lot of the people whose lives have been held together, either temporarily or permanently, by programs that the state of Minnesota provides. And when I picture those families and those faces without that — and what could happen to them — that’s the information that I better keep in front of

DISTRICT 16A
<p>Population: (2007 est.) 43,641 Largest City: Princeton Counties: Benton, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Sherburne Top Concerns: Jobs, Health Care and “keeping a human face” on issues that affect Minnesotans</p>

me when I make these decisions,” she says.

Jackson, who sang opera and studied classical music before pursuing a law career, hopes to address issues unique to rural Minnesota, such as a lack of jobs with health benefits and a struggling rural health care industry. She says she’s done what she can on the local level, but hopes to leverage more resources as a state lawmaker.

“There’s only so much you can do with very limited small-town resources — and yet I see this gigantic need. ... You realize that, boy, there are bigger things to be done.”

A heritage of involvement

Kiffmeyer brings lifelong work ethic to her seat

By KRIS BERGGREN

As the oldest of 14 children, Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer (R-Big Lake) is no stranger to responsibility. She grew up caring for her siblings in their tiny hometown of Peters, near Brainerd, even buying them pajamas when her parents couldn’t afford Christmas gifts.



Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer

“It was always my job to be in charge and get things done,” said Kiffmeyer, already well-known at the Capitol as secretary of state from 1999-2006. Now, as the representative for District 16B, she’s turned her can-do attitude to the needs of her Sherburne County constituents.

Repealing last year’s changes to the so-called “Green Acres” law is easily “the hottest,

biggest issue on my radar screen,” Kiffmeyer said. In her district, where farmland meets exurban bedroom communities and strip malls, the lines between agricultural and commercial development tracts can blur, and nailing down tax classification is critical to generating property tax revenue.

Other key issues include stemming home foreclosures, which hit many counties outlying the Twin Cities metropolitan area in a big way; transportation, including completing the Northstar commuter rail; and education equity.

Cooking for her large family instilled a lifelong passion for baking. Kiffmeyer is famous for the homemade bread with honey cinnamon butter she served to legislators on special occasions in the House Retiring Room when her husband, Ralph Kiffmeyer, was in office in 1985-86.

Colleagues should note Kiffmeyer put fiscal

DISTRICT 16B
<p>Population: (2007 est.) 49,745 Largest City: Big Lake Township County: Sherburne Top Concern: Repealing 2008 Green Acres legislation</p>

conservatism into practice through supply-side scaling: She buys her wheat by the ton and grinds it herself. She used to purchase through a grassroots cooperative — then switched to a Red River Valley source no longer in business. Now she buys nitrogen-packed wheat from Montana farmers through a Minnesota buying club and stores it in a pole barn at her Big Lake home.

Kiffmeyer is proud of the heritage of community involvement she and her husband have passed on to their four children and 14 grandchildren who are active in Boy Scouts, their churches and nonprofit organizations. Formerly a registered nurse, Kiffmeyer owns an organizational consulting business.

Passionate about business

Loon calls for economic recovery through job creation

By KRIS BERGGREN

Rep. Jenifer Loon (R-Eden Prairie) had long considered running for public office but thought she'd wait until her daughters,



Rep. Jenifer Loon

Erica, a high school sophomore, and Rachel, a sixth-grader, were older, perhaps off to college. However, she saw a rare opportunity when former Rep. Erik Paulsen decided to run for the congressional seat vacated by former

U.S. Rep. Jim Ramstad.

"An open seat doesn't come along every day," Loon said.

Furthermore, she welcomed the chance to be a role model. "As a mom of two girls, I want them to know you can have a family and a professional life. I want them to know the door is never closed to them."

Though new to the House, Loon is a political pro who was "always interested in the legislative process." The South Dakota native majored in government and international relations at Augustana College, took an internship in then U.S. Sen. Larry Pressler's office, and was later hired there as a legislative assistant. She also worked for the Small Business Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Loon believes her passion for small-business growth makes her a "good fit" for a district where, she said, "there are 2,200-2,400 businesses; most are small or sole proprietorships." Nurturing small businesses will stimulate economic recovery through job creation faster than any other measure, she believes. Specifically, she's interested in "tax and regulatory issues, access to capital and government regulation related to small business, especially women- and minority-

DISTRICT 42B
Population: (2007 est.) 41,805
Largest City: Eden Prairie
County: Hennepin
Top Concern: Job growth/small business development

owned businesses."

Another top priority is education. Loon, an active member of parent-teacher organizations, said Eden Prairie schools, like many districts statewide, are educating a growing number of English language learners and children of color, and she's concerned about the achievement gap.

Even though the budget crisis threatens to overshadow idealism, Loon wants to promote "a top-notch education for our kids in Minnesota. We can't say 'Down the road we will figure out how to better educate our kids.' This could be a good year to dig into policy, not things that are monetary-driven."

No shortcut to service

Newton relishes opportunity to make tough decisions

By SUSAN HEGARTY

Rep. Jerry Newton (DFL-Coon Rapids) traveled a lot of miles, many overseas, before landing a House seat in St. Paul.



Rep. Jerry Newton

After attending Osseo High School, Newton began a 23-year career in the military that took him to France, Belgium, Turkey and Vietnam. His children attended NATO schools while Newton steadily achieved the rank of

command sergeant major. He returned to Minnesota in 1985 and inherited his father's grocery store business.

His experience with foreign school systems gave him a broad perspective on education finance and policy, both public and private. Newton drew from that knowledge when he

served for eight years on the Anoka-Hennepin School Board. He counts an anti-bullying policy among his top accomplishments.

Now, he couldn't be happier than to serve on both K-12 education committees during his first term as a state legislator. His district is experiencing declining school enrollments and an inequitable source of school funding, he said.

"I'm a strong supporter of the 'New Minnesota Miracle' and seeing that over a period of time phased in. ... It does provide for the equity I'm looking for in school finance," Newton said.

Newton also serves as vice chairman for the House Veterans Affairs Division. Besides a concern for the welfare of veterans home residents, Newton said he would like to ensure that returning veterans are welcomed home with health care options to help them deal with their physical and emotional pain.

DISTRICT 49B
Population: (2007 est.) 37,788
Largest City: Coon Rapids
County: Anoka
Top Concern: Budget deficit

While serving on the Coon Rapids City Council, Newton helped shape legislation that is now a national standard for railroad safety, and at the same time, quieted train whistles in residential neighborhoods. He also helped form the Highway 10 Corridor Coalition to ease traffic congestion, two experiences that will serve him well on the House Transportation Finance and Policy Division.

After 21 years in the grocery business, Newton is now retired and spends his leisure time tracing his family's roots, which carries him back overseas in mind, if not body. "I prefer to be here (at the Legislature) at this time rather than any other time because it's a mess. I'm hoping I can make an impact."

Working to unite

Obermueller hopes to represent by connecting

By MIKE COOK

All-inclusive could describe the governing philosophy of Rep. Mike Obermueller.

The first-term Eagan DFLer, who ran on the theme of “Working for You,” wants ideas from his constituents, and he will do his darndest to make sure they are received.



Rep.
Mike Obermueller

Like most members, Obermueller plans to have listening sessions throughout the year, but unlike many, he also plans to door-knock in the interim. “I enjoy talking to people one-on-one about the issues that are important to them. ... I think that’s what this job is all about. I think people generally will say, ‘If I understand what’s going on and why you spent money here and you

didn’t spend money here, although it’s painful for me and I think it’s the wrong choice, at least I know you were thinking about it and not just throwing darts at the wall.”

Obermueller, whose hometown includes a number of large employers, including Thomson Reuters, Blue Cross Blue Shield and Delta Dental, puts job creation and maintaining current jobs atop his priority list. Among his assignments, he is vice chairman of the House Bioscience and Workforce Development Policy and Oversight Division.

“It’s all about figuring out how we can make both a short-term and long-term recovery. Stimulating job growth in the short term is the big key so that we can put people back to work, but also not short-changing the future with our decisions. Try to fix our immediate problems without throwing it on the backs of our kids.” He and his wife, Sara, have two sons.

DISTRICT 38B

Population: (2007 est.) 38,708
Largest City: Eagan
County: Dakota
Top Concern: ‘Job creation is Job 1.’

He said open space and education are also among his priorities.

After losing to Lynn Wardlow by 163 votes in 2006 when 16,401 votes were cast, Obermueller beat the three-term Republican incumbent by 519 votes out of 20,905 cast in 2008.

“He did a lot of good things for vets in this state and his heart was in the right place on education,” Obermueller said. “We joked around and actually kind of became good friends, especially the second time around. We used to joke that ‘I wouldn’t run against you, Lynn, but I want your job and this is the only way to get it.’”

Walking the talk

Persell models stewardship of the environment

By SUSAN HEGARTY

Rep. John Persell (DFL-Bemidji) was content with his 30-year career as an environmental policy analyst, but something President Ronald Reagan did upset him. Rather than get mad, he’s now ready to get even.



Rep. John Persell

In 1986, Reagan took solar panels off the roof of the White House that Jimmy Carter put up. “I became very frustrated,” Persell said. So in the 1990s, he began his political involvement, garnering all 87 votes to become a Frohn Township board supervisor.

Persell said people have digressed from stewardship of the environment during the past 50 years. However, he is happy with progress made regarding the treatment of

mercury as a toxic substance. “Minnesota began to lead the way, much to their credit.”

He serves as vice chairman of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division and is pleased to be a member of the House Environment Policy and Oversight Committee. “I’ve been involved in policy, particularly environmental quality policy. That’s been my career for 30 plus years with tribal government.”

Also a member of the House Energy Finance and Policy Division, he is insistent about the need to develop renewable energy sources. “We have to have sustainable management. It’s not just a use it or lose it kind of mentality,” he said.

He walks the talk, too. Persell lives on six acres in Bemidji and produces 60 percent of his own residential electricity from the wind turbine in his yard, the only one of its kind in Beltrami County.

DISTRICT 4A

Population: (2007 est.) 36,836
Largest City: Bemidji
Counties: Beltrami, Cass, Itasca
Top Concern: Sustainability of the environment

An avid outdoorsman and member of the House Game, Fish and Forestry Division, Persell fishes and hunts deer for food, and he cleans his own catch. He said he’s sympathetic to proposed legislation that would ban lead bullets, which proponents say may be harmful to wildlife who ingest the lead shot from discarded carcasses.

Though he doesn’t serve on education committees, the father of three and grandfather of six also supports early childhood education. “It pays us back 12:1 for every dollar we invest.” As a Greater Minnesota representative, he added, “We need to restructure the education funding formula so that rural districts get their cut.”

Making a difference

Tired of complaining, Rosenthal decided to get involved

By Nick Busse

Most lawmakers come to St. Paul hoping to make their mark in some way, but not many can say they literally changed the landscape of



Rep.
Paul Rosenthal

Minnesota's capital city. Rep. Paul Rosenthal (DFL-Edina) managed to do it before he even ran for office.

Rosenthal, a currency trader by day, has spent the last several years aiding in the preservation of the St. Paul Municipal Grain

Terminal — a historical landmark located about a mile from the Capitol, along the Mississippi River.

"It's the oldest farmers' cooperative grain elevator in the country," he explains, adding

that saving the building, which had been slated for demolition, involved multiple government agencies and "a whole series of craziness."

It was as good a training as any, perhaps, for the Legislature. Rosenthal, a newcomer to public office, said he ran because he had reached a point in his life where he was tired of talking about political issues and ready to do something about them.

"I got tired of hearing myself complain. I wanted to show my kids — who were also tired of hearing me complain, and my wife and friends — that if you believe in something, you have to work at it really hard and try and make a difference," he said.

Originally from New York, Rosenthal began his professional career there dealing in commercial real estate. After moving to

DISTRICT 41B

Population: (2007 est.) 36,548
Largest City: Bloomington
County: Hennepin
Top Concerns: Health Care, transportation and the economy

Minnesota nearly two decades ago, he met and married his wife, Elizabeth. The couple have two boys, Jack and Eddy, and ran a paint-your-own-pottery business together for several years before selling it.

He was always drawn to Minnesota, he said. As a child, he remembers his parents working on national campaigns for Minnesota politicians like Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy.

"Minnesota's always that sort of beacon on the hill: socially progressive and fiscally responsible," Rosenthal said, adding that he thinks that reputation has slipped. "We need to try and grasp that mantle again."

Taking the chance

With open seat, Scott knew now is her time to serve

By Mike Cook

A party activist for years, Rep. Peggy Scott (R-Andover) now has a greater opportunity to push forth her beliefs.



Rep. Peggy Scott

"I truly believe in conservative principles: smaller government, more power to the individuals and keep the government out of our lives as much as possible," she said.

She replaces Chris DeLaForest, who spent six years in the seat and door-knocked for Scott's campaign.

"I've kind of always had it in the back of my mind that I wanted to do this, but I never thought Chris was going anywhere," she said. "When he decided to step down, I kind of said

'It's probably now or never.'"

Scott brings a unique perspective to two of her assignments: the House Housing Finance and Policy and Public Health Finance Division and the House Property and Local Sales Tax Division. She and her husband, David, operate a small real estate business from their home.

"We pay non-resident property taxes on the rental properties that we own," she said. "For instance, in the city of St. Paul the property taxes have just increased so much in the last few years that it's difficult to break even."

To encourage a friendlier business climate, Scott suggests reducing the business tax rate, which she said is the highest in the five-state area. "We can not only encourage our businesses to grow, but to help keep their heads above water in this economy."

For many businesses, a good transportation system is crucial. That's one reason Scott

DISTRICT 49A

Population: (2007 est.) 42,753
Largest City: Andover
County: Anoka
Top Concern: 'I'm really, really adamant about getting through this crisis without raising taxes.'

plans to push for a widening of Highway 10 and completion of Highway 610, both located in her district. She'll be able to do that from a seat on the House Transportation Finance and Policy Division. "There's no fast way to get to Anoka County," she said.

Scott also hopes to work on behalf of divorced fathers, who, she says can often get the short end of things when it comes to custody issues, an issue that affected her in-laws.

"I'm a firm believer that children need both parents in their lives and every other weekend and one night a week just doesn't cut it," she said.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Some vending machines in the State Office Building, like the one being used by Steve Munos, facility services supervisor for the House Sergeant-at-Arms office, are fitted with an energy-saving device that reduces refrigeration during late evening and early morning hours.

Leading by example

At their own 'House,' legislators take cost-saving measures to heart

BY SUSAN HEGARTY

As Minnesotans struggle to save money and cut expenses at home and on the job, many might wonder what their elected officials are doing as stewards of their tax dollars to model smart spending and careful conservation at their own "House."

The State of Minnesota employs 134 state representatives, 67 senators and one governor, in addition to more than 50,000 state workers. Focus the lens on any of these facets of government, and it shines a light both on areas of success and areas where there is room for improvement.

It starts at the top

In a bipartisan move, Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty and Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle crossed party and state lines Jan. 13 by directing their respective state agencies to draft cooperative work agreements. For example, the two states could leverage lower

pricing by placing larger orders together. The joint purchasing power is aimed at avoiding nearly \$5 billion deficits in each state. Agency heads have until Feb. 27 to report their suggestions.

Hours after the duo held press conferences, Pawlenty gave a suggestion of his own: state workers should accept a two-year wage freeze.

Legislation is in the works to curb misuse of public funds by government workers, too. Sponsored by Rep. Ryan Winkler (DFL-Golden Valley), HF7 would toughen penalties for state employees who misappropriate public funds, to making the crime punishable by up to one year in jail and a \$3,000 fine. It

Leading continued on next page

awaits action by the House State and Local Government Operations Reform, Technology and Elections Committee. A companion bill, SF107, sponsored by Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope), awaits action by the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee.

House-keeping

At the start of the 2009 session, House Republicans asked fellow legislators to lead by example and amend the temporary joint rules to lower legislators' per diem reimbursements.

Instead, House Majority Leader Tony Sertich (DFL-Chisholm) referred it to the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee, which passed several other resolutions regarding House member allocations on Jan. 7. For example, reimbursement for telephone, Internet and other communication expenses were cut from \$125 to \$75 per month.

When written communication is preferred to electronic, there is the option of using personal stationery. But before returning legislators place their stationery order, they may want to see what's left from last session. Apparently there are "closets filled" with outdated letterhead, according to Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park).

"What happens is people order new stationery when they're on new committees," Hortman said. She suggested that members omit their committees on stationery and simply include their name and district.

Rep. Erin Murphy (DFL-St. Paul) urges members to reduce postage costs by using more electronic mail.

"In my district, there's a high premium placed on electronic communication," she said.

House members are also encouraged to use a postage meter for large mailings; however, they may ask for rolls of stamps "for convenience" for smaller mailings, said House Controller Paul Schweizer. As a whole, House members never use the entire postage allowance, and if they did, Schweizer said it would only add to the deficit because he takes that into account when he prepares the budget.

Paper(less)

The paper trail in state government is enormous. There are green sheets for this and yellow sheets for that. Paper size varies from standard 8.5 x 11 inch sheets to legal-size 8.5 x 14 inch sheets. But that is changing, according to House Chief Sergeant-at-Arms Sandra Dicke, whose duties include monitoring

Share your ideas

Do you have an idea about how the state can cut costs to help balance the budget? House representatives would like to hear it. Submit ideas at www.house.mn/budgetsuggestions.asp.

House paper use.

"Paper use has gone down considerably. So many things that we used to have hard copy for — meeting notices, bills, journals, anything you wanted — is now online," Dicke said.

Two House committees are testing a new policy that, if successful, may be expanded next year. They are printing reports on standard-size paper rather than legal size. Standard paper is less expensive and the copy machines used for printing standard size paper are less expensive than multi-size paper printers.

Paper cutbacks transcend the boardroom to the bathroom at the State Office Building. Those who drop by the first-floor bathrooms can contribute to the cause when drying their hands. The Dyson Airblade hand dryers in both the men's and women's restrooms blast air at 400 mph. The 12-second drying time is estimated to reduce energy use by up to 80 percent over typical dryers, still used on other floors. The paper towel dispensers are still available, but not recommended.

"They're inefficient. You try to pull one down and eight come down," Dicke said. As older hand dryers wear out, they will be replaced with the energy-saving style, she said.

The three R's


In the basement supply room of the State Office Building, shelves are filled with used office supplies. Need a three-ring binder? They've got it. Need an electrical cord? Just ask.

Previous policymakers passed legislation that requires state workers to reduce, reuse and recycle through the Resource Recovery Program. Waste amounts are carefully monitored. For example, occupants of the State Office Building generated 26,000 more pounds of waste between July and December 2008 than they did during the same six months of 2007, according to David Fielding, director of the Department of Administration's Plant Management Division.

"While an increase in total waste is not necessarily good news, the fact that 98 percent of that increase was recycled waste is another instance of leading by example," Fielding said.

The program's Web site offers ways that employees can save money or acquire used government-issued goods.

Rep. Brita Sailer (DFL-Park Rapids) said she is preparing to publish an electronic newsletter that will remind House staff and visitors about ways to curb expenses in the Capitol Complex. She expects to distribute the first issue within the next week to Republican and DFL members, staff, visitors and lobbyists.

State employees who already adhere to the three Rs — reduce, reuse, recycle — don't go unnoticed. Each year, the most efficient employee groups from around the state are recognized at the MnGREAT (Minnesota Government Reaching Environmental Achievements Together) Awards. A list of past recipients, such as the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center and the Rice Creek Watershed District, is available online at www.pca.state.mn.us. 

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Employment and	
Economic Development	651-259-7114
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Mediation Services	651-649-5421
Metropolitan Council	651-602-1000
Military Affairs	651-268-8919
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	888-646-6367
Pollution Control Agency	651-296-6300
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Public Safety General Information	651-201-7000
Revenue General Information	651-296-3403
Transportation	651-296-3000
	800-657-3774
Veterans Affairs	651-296-2562

Thursday, Jan. 22

HF157-Mullery (DFL)

State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections

Zoning for owner-occupied residential uses authorized.

HF158-Peppin (R)

State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections

Per diem payments prohibited to members during certain special sessions.

HF159-Simon (DFL)

Commerce & Labor

Alcohol control device sale allowed at exclusive liquor stores.

HF160-Simon (DFL)

Environment Policy & Oversight

Cass County; private sale required of surplus state land bordering public water.

HF161-Thissen (DFL)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

Medical response unit reimbursement pilot program established, emergency medical services programs funded.

HF162-Hansen (DFL)

Environment Policy & Oversight

Drainage system provisions modified.

HF163-Bly (DFL)

Finance

Rice County; nursing facilities designated as metro for purposes of determining reimbursement rates.

HF164-Falk (DFL)

Finance

State plan required for a green infrastructure, funding provided to create energy-efficient residences, bonds authorized to fund energy-efficient public buildings, renewable energy for public schools, green industrial parks, and a solar certification laboratory.

HF165-Emmer (R)

State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections

Certain public fund use and government contracts prohibited.

HF166-Sanders (R)

Commerce & Labor

Retail sales of recalled toys prohibited.

HF167-Gardner (DFL)

State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections

Ethnic and cultural diversity activity authority extended.

HF168-Emmer (R)

State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections

Fiscal emergency declaration authorized for governor, and fiscal emergency declaration effect specified on legislative procedures.

HF169-Emmer (R)

Commerce & Labor

Labor union membership prohibited as a condition of employment, and constitutional amendment proposed.

HF170-Gardner (DFL)

Commerce & Labor

Residents allowed to decline reception of local telephone directories.

HF171-Emmer (R)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

Freedom of choice in health care constitutional amendment proposed.

HF172-Hilstrom (DFL)

State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections

Affirmation of oath for election judge clarified.

HF173-Hilstrom (DFL)

Finance

Map of money used to support children required.

HF174-Thissen (DFL)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

Minnesota health security account created, Minnesota health security program established, eligibility criteria, covered services, and administrative procedures specified, program expansion and service delivery report required, health care access for all adults ensured.

HF175-Thissen (DFL)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

Chemical dependency treatment fund eligibility expanded.

HF176-Emmer (R)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

Death record replacement required when ordered by the court.

HF177-Thissen (DFL)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

Moratorium on radiation therapy facility construction extended in certain counties.

HF178-Morrow (DFL)

Finance

American Red Cross special license plates established.

HF179-Davnie (DFL)

Early Childhood Finance & Policy Division

Head Start program modified.

HF180-Paymar (DFL)

Public Safety Policy & Oversight

Heads of law enforcement agencies penalty established for those who allow nonlicensed employees and peace officer agents to carry firearms.

HF181-Thissen (DFL)

Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight

MinnesotaCare eligibility provisions modified.

HF182-Hilty (DFL)

Finance

Carlton County; water main improvements funding provided.

HF183-McNamara (R)

State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections

Long-distance phone records approved.

HF184-Dettmer (R)

Finance

Green Acres law 2008 changes repealed.

HF185-Hilty (DFL)

Finance

Carlton; water and sewer utility improvement project funding provided.

HF186-Hilty (DFL)

Finance

Willow River; wastewater treatment facility funding provided.

HF187-Hilty (DFL)

Finance

Barnum; well improvement funding provided.

HF188-Hilty (DFL)

Finance

Carlton County; water distribution improvements funding provided.

HF189-Anzelc (DFL)

Finance

Big Fork; pond rehabilitation and expansion grant provided for sewer projects.

HF190-Anzelc (DFL)

Finance

Coleraine, Bovey, Taconite; aerobic digester grant provided.

HF191-Anzelc (DFL)

Finance

Rainy River Community College asset preservation funding provided for tuck-pointing on the gymnasium building.

HF192-Hilstrom (DFL)

Taxes

Imposition and refund of sales tax on capital equipment eliminated and obsolete provision eliminated.

HF193-Norton (DFL)

Finance

Rochester; National Volleyball Center funding provided.

HF194-Norton (DFL)**K-12 Education Policy & Oversight**

Labor Day school start provision repealed.

HF195-Norton (DFL)**K-12 Education Policy & Oversight**

Labor Day school start provisions modified for two years.

HF196-Nelson (DFL)**Finance**

Hennepin County; Highway 610 funding provided.

HF197-Brod (R)**Taxes**

New Prague; wastewater treatment facility construction materials exempted.

HF198-Brod (R)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Reapportionment method established.

HF199-Brod (R)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

State expenditures searchable database required, and state and local government transparency and openness required.

HF200-Abeler (R)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Broker use for medical transportation services prohibited, county social workers allowed to make level of need determinations, special transportation services renamed and medical transportation requirements modified.

HF201-Thao (DFL)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

County publication of individual claim threshold amount increased.

HF202-Brod (R)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Deceptive or misleading contribution solicitations prohibited.

HF203-Slawik (DFL)**Finance**

Minnesota child savings account initiative established.

HF204-Winkler (DFL)**Taxes**

Establishing housing improvement districts without special legislation deadline removed.

HF205-Anzelc (DFL)**Finance**

Nashwauk; wastewater infrastructure grant provided.

HF206-Anzelc (DFL)**Finance**

George Washington State Forest, Kabetogama State Forest; forest bridge replacement funding provided.

HF207-Anzelc (DFL)**Finance**

Effie; wastewater infrastructure grant provided.

HF208-Dill (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Secured creditor mailed notification type changed required in connection with foreclosure of a mechanics lien on a motor vehicle.

HF209-Slawik (DFL)**Finance**

Unique identification number assignment required for all Minnesota children upon enrollment.

HF210-Slawik (DFL)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Autism spectrum disorder pilot program, task force, and surveillance system and registry established.

HF211-Swails (DFL)**Civil Justice**

Statutory housing warranties recovery for breaches regulated.

HF212-Simon (DFL)**Public Safety Policy & Oversight**

Pretrial filing of a transcript for admission into evidence of law enforcement vehicle recordings prerequisite eliminated.

HF213-Mullery (DFL)**Public Safety Policy & Oversight**

Arrest record use prohibited for private employment purposes, immunity from negligent hiring provided as it relates to use of criminal records and state liability imposed.

HF214-Bly (DFL)**Finance**

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

HF215-Morrow (DFL)**Taxes**

North Mankato; tax increment financing district requirements changed.

HF216-Faust (DFL)**Finance**

Minnesota agricultural property tax law modified.

HF217-Faust (DFL)**Finance**

Minnesota agricultural property tax law modified.

HF218-Ruud (DFL)**Taxes**

Minnetonka; city and economic development authority authorized to extend the duration of a tax increment financing district.

HF219-Brynaert (DFL)**Taxes**

Mankato; tax increment financing district requirements changed.

HF220-Juhnke (DFL)**Finance**

Eurasian water milfoil control pilot project required.

HF221-Tillberry (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Gross receipt tax on pull-tabs and tipboards provided to be imposed and paid on a site-by-site basis.

HF222-Slawik (DFL)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Multiple unit residences allowed certain persons for campaign and election purposes.

HF223-Slawik (DFL)**Finance**

Words Work grant provided for early childhood literacy.

HF224-Simon (DFL)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Retention elections for judges established, judicial performance commission created and constitutional amendment proposed.

HF225-Ward (DFL)**Finance**

Brainerd State Hospital campus funding provided for building to serve as a veterans nursing home.

HF226-Ruud (DFL)**Finance**

Intermediate school district operating a day treatment program authorized to be considered a care and treatment day program.

HF227-Benson (DFL)**Finance**

Cost-of-living revenue provided and operating cost differential of state school districts study required.

HF228-Koenen (DFL)**Finance**

Montevideo; wastewater treatment facility funding provided.

HF229-Koenen (DFL)**Finance**

Olivia; southwest area storm sewer system funding provided.

HF230-Magnus (R)**Environment Policy & Oversight**

Casey Jones Trail extended.

HF231-Lillie (DFL)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Teacher assistant employment excluded from retirement coverage to qualify for deferred annuities augmentation.

HF232-Brown (DFL)**Finance**

Rose Creek; sewer system upgrade funding provided.

HF233-Slawik (DFL)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Autism spectrum disorder task force created, appointments provided and report required.

HF234-Slawik (DFL)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Autism spectrum disorder coverage required.

HF235-Simon (DFL)**Energy Finance & Policy Division**

Public utility prohibited from acquiring non-utility company.

HF236-Hornstein (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport airline operations maintained, and contractual obligations and rights enforced.

HF237-Demmer (R)**Transportation & Transit Policy & Oversight Division**

Rochester; permits issued to complete the construction of a new interchange at Highway 52 and 65th Street N.W.

HF238-Hornstein (DFL)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Metropolitan Airports Commission environmental planning required.

HF239-Gardner (DFL)**Commerce & Labor**

Homeowners permitted to recover all damages incurred due to faulty construction.

HF240-Norton (DFL)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Licensure for physician assistants created.

HF241-Cornish (R)**Transportation & Transit Policy & Oversight Division**

Driver's license or Minnesota identification card photograph requirements modified.

HF242-Anzelc (DFL)**Finance**

Coleraine; downtown corridor redevelopment funding provided.

HF243-Anzelc (DFL)**Finance**

Bovey; sewer collection rehabilitation grant provided.

HF244-Anzelc (DFL)**Finance**

Itasca County; Balsam Lake dam repair funding provided.

HF245-Brynaert (DFL)**Taxes**

Public safety radio equipment exemption expanded.

HF246-Slawik (DFL)**Finance**

Child care assistance provider rates modified, quality and improvement system created and child care improvement grants modified.

HF247-Thissen (DFL)**Taxes**

Long-term care savings plan provided and income tax subtraction provided for contributions made to the long-term care savings plan.

HF248-Paymar (DFL)**Public Safety Policy & Oversight**

Existing domestic fatality review team continuation authorized and all judicial districts permitted to create domestic fatality review teams.

HF249-Thissen (DFL)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Emeritus status requirements modified for licensed psychologists, inactive licensure status for licensed psychologists created, licensed psychologists authorized to provide a final determination not to certify, and licensed psychologist added to Health Care Reform Review Council.

HF250-Knuth (DFL)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Children protected from toxic chemicals in products, disclosure required by manufacturers of children's products containing high concern chemicals, Pollution Control Agency authorized to designate priority chemicals and safe alternatives required, exemption process provided, interstate clearinghouse participation authorized, and implementation plans and safe product framework reports required.

HF251-Benson (DFL)**Public Safety Policy & Oversight**

Teri Lee Law specification designated.

HF252-Benson (DFL)**Finance**

State reimbursement increased for school lunch aid from 12 to 15 cents per meal.

HF253-Tillberry (DFL)**Public Safety Policy & Oversight**

Dog and cat breeder standards of care provided.

HF254-Thissen (DFL)**Public Safety Policy & Oversight**

Law enforcement required to provide violent crime alerts to citizens who request notification, and crime alerts required to be distributed in a format that disabled citizens can access.

HF255-Slawik (DFL)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Deceptive names of candidates, political committees and political funds prohibited.

HF256-Howes (R)**Finance**

Cass County; new hospital funding provided.

HF257-Howes (R)**Health Care & Human Services Policy & Oversight**

Smoking permitted in certain bars.

HF258-Murphy, M. (DFL)**Taxes**

Property tax refund program extended to residents of certain nursing homes.

HF259-Lillie (DFL)**Finance**

Minnesota to Chicago High Speed Rail Corridor funding provided.

HF260-Hausman (DFL)**State & Local Government Operations Reform, Technology & Elections**

Minneapolis Firefighters Relief Association surviving spouse benefit eligibility specified.

HF261-Otremba (DFL)**Finance**

Staples, Todd County; highway overpass funding provided.

HF262-Anzelc (DFL)**Finance**

Nashauk; sewer extension and expansion project funding provided.

HF263-Hausman (DFL)**Finance**

Central Corridor Line funding provided.

Legislative Information Web Sites**General House information**

www.house.mn

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www.house.mn/hinfo/hinfo.htm

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www.house.mn/hinfo/sdaily.htm

Session Weekly

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www.house.mn/cco/rules/permrule/permrule.htm

House educational programs

www.house.mn/sergeant/sergeant.htm#Education

Green Acres continued from page 4

metropolitan area, the Green Acres program reduced the taxes of land enrolled in 2007 from an average of \$13,800 per acre to \$3,600 per acre. Which means about \$10,000 per acre was shifted to other property taxpayers.

Also, Green Acres was never a conservation program, or a “green” program, like we think of it today, Lenczewski said. “It’s actually the anti-green. It’s till-everything-up-and-throw-dirt-to-the-wind. It was never a conserve program. But there is a common purpose of conserving ag land for the future so that if someday we need to feed our people we have a way to do it.” But, according to the current law and its original intent, ag land does not include wetlands or wooded areas used for recreation.

“So,” Lenczewski said, “you can imagine if you’re the next property over and you don’t have producible ag land, you may already resent that you’re paying your neighbor’s taxes. Now you find out they’ve got a whole bunch of land in there that’s not supposed to be in there and you’re paying for that too.”

Some legislators wanted to eliminate the program, Lenczewski said, but instead it was brought back to what it was intended to be.

“What’s the net effect of that? You’re probably going to hear in the hearings from people who were getting the benefit and are not getting it now,” she said. “What you won’t see are all the people who’ve been paying for it because they’re not tracking this.” 🐾

Education continued from page 11

Administrators, said, “In total it’s smothering the school districts.”

Themes emerged throughout the hearings.

For example, the desire to reduce mandates limiting local control over the school calendar. Advocates said that could open the door to a four-day week — which has saved some districts transportation costs — to summer school or other extended-day options to enhance learning and retention or to adjust start times to “when it’s best for kids,” as Kelliher put it.

The business officials association would eliminate state support for nonpublic textbooks, school nurse services and counseling. The school board association suggests discontinuing transporting charter and non-public school students on the state’s dime or charge parents a fee for transportation services.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Roger Aronson, legislative counsel for the Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association, testifies Jan. 20 before the House K-12 Education Finance Division on recommendations for education investment, reductions and reform.

Other reform ideas on the table

There is also at least some bipartisan support for a third reform — charter schools.

They’re considered by some an entrepreneurial way to test new ideas in education or create learning environments that work well for certain groups of students, though some traditionalists perceive them as an end run around the system that drains money from districts.

“We have to be open to anything that helps children,” said Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka). He admits charters must sharpen their fiscal accountability including their leasing arrangements, sponsorship relations and oversight practices. He promised “some action this session” on improving charters’ fiscal accountability.

Early learning also made the list of reform ideas.

Seen as the backbone of future learning, principals and school administrators want to see their future students get a head start. Roger Aronson, legislative counsel for the Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association, called all-day kindergarten and early childhood education “reforms sitting on the shelf waiting to happen.”

Accountability remains a thorny issue in

the reform discussion.

While testing has established a baseline from which to build, and more rigorous standards have set the bar higher, some accountability measures deeply trouble those charged with administering them, such as the Education Department’s Graduation Requirement Assessment for Diploma.

Student progress is a condition of the governor’s proposal to boost Q-Comp funding and other financial incentives to districts, but legislators and educators have differing views on how best to measure gains. 🐾

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MINNESOTA INDEX

Giving time

Estimated number of Minnesotans who volunteered each year from 2005 to 2007, in millions	1.6
Estimated million hours of service per year	175.7
Average volunteer rate for Minnesotans between 2005 and 2007, as percent	39.7
National rank	3
National average, as percent	27.2
State volunteer rate in 2004, as percent	41.1
Percent in 1989	34.8
Average volunteer hours per capita per year	43.7
State rank	14
Midwest 2007 volunteer ranking among regions	1
Percentage rate for volunteering	32.2
Millions of Americans who volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2006 and September 2007	60.8
Total hours volunteered, in billions	8.1
Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area 2007 volunteer ranking nationally	1
Estimated annual number of volunteers in 2007	900,700
In 2005	927,600
In 2004	994,300
In millions, number of hours donated in 2007	116.3
In 2005	117.5
In 2004	117.8
Estimated annual economic contribution, in billions, by Minnesota volunteers	\$3.4
By Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area volunteers	\$2.1
Percentage of Minnesota volunteers who volunteer for a religious organization	35.7
Percent for educational organization	24.9
Percent for social services	13.5
Percent of state volunteers who perform fund-raising duties	29
Percent who collect/distribute food	28.3
National volunteer retention rate, as percent	64.3
Percent in Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area	77.1
By percentage, those 45 years and older who say they volunteer out of personal responsibility to help others	65
Percentage who say volunteering makes life more satisfying	58

— L. SCHUTZ, M. COOK

Resources: Volunteering in America, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, AARP survey on volunteering,
Bureau of Labor Statistics, Corporation for National and Community Service.

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