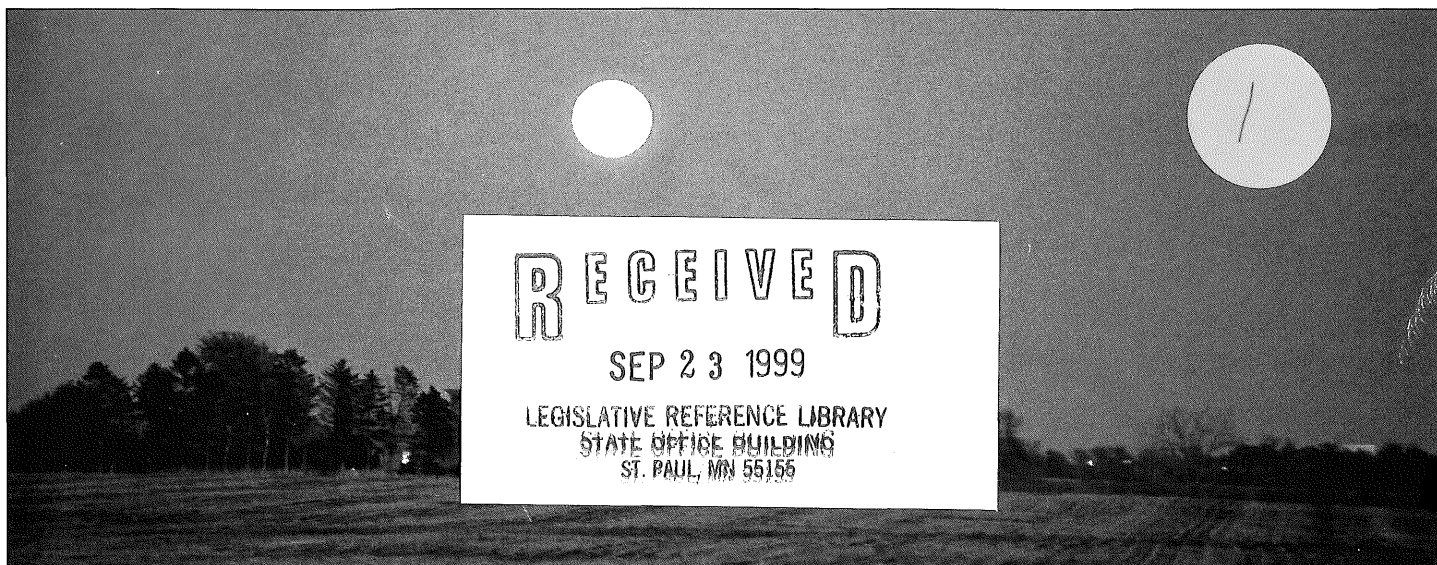


97, Oct. 31

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MINI-SESSION REPORT

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Communities in west central Minnesota were in the spotlight during the Minnesota House of Representatives Harvest Moon Mini-Session Oct. 15-17.

Willmar, Minnesota . . .

House members attend '97 Harvest Moon Mini-Session



While farmers harvested their crops, approximately 100 Minnesota House members and their staffs invaded west central Minnesota Oct. 15-17 to take part in the 1997 Harvest Moon Mini-Session based in Willmar.

They were greeted on the first day by Mayor Lester J. Heitke at a welcome luncheon at the Holiday Inn Convention Center, and he thanked them for picking Willmar. "We certainly do appreciate the exposure and the public relations," he said.

Willmar, he said, was once an old railroad town, founded in 1870 and named for railroad investor Leon Willmar (See related story, page 19). With a population of approximately 19,500, the city is considered a regional center for west central Minnesota. With a growing economy and nearly full employment, there is a lack of housing, he said. "We need more housing, we need better transportation."

That's the kind of thing legislators were there to hear about, said House Speaker Phil Carruthers (DFL-Brooklyn Center). "This is for us to listen, for us to hear what's on people's minds," he said. And they heard about the issues at 32 hearings, six meals, and one town meeting.

Mini-sessions allow lawmakers to see firsthand how certain policies affect different sections of the state. Their purpose is to bring the Legislature to outstate Minnesota, to people who can't easily make it to St. Paul. The Harvest Moon Mini-Session in Willmar and surrounding areas was the 14th such event since 1987, when the House began to hold mini-sessions outside the city of St. Paul.

Some of the topics under discussion at this mini-session were: planning, regional government, transportation, rural development, economic development, education, housing, agriculture, the environment, and a proposed new stadium for the Minnesota Twins.

Newer, better, and more roads seem to be a critical need for the area, as Heitke indicated, and several people at the Town Meeting Oct. 16 expressed a growing concern about juvenile crime, particularly in Willmar. One student from the University of Minnesota-Morris even said he doesn't shop in Willmar because of the increase in crime, and another man said repeat juvenile offenders should be tried as adults, and not subject to the normal juvenile privacy laws.

At a community dinner prior to the town meeting, former Minnesota Twins' greats Harmon Killebrew and Tony Oliva circulated through the crowd, introducing themselves.

They then left for a Minnesota Twins rally at the high school, which also preceded the town meeting.

Legislators toured some of the industries and points of interest in the area, including Jennie-O Foods and the Child Care Resource Center in Willmar, a sustainable farm operation in Kerkhoven, bicycle trails in Montevideo, the Hutchinson 3M plant, MinAqua Fisheries and the Southern Minnesota Sugar Factory in Renville, Metro Dairy, a 600-cow dairy operation in Waverly, and Tyler Industries in Benson.

They also saw a First Responder (medical emergency) demonstration at the Kennedy Elementary School in Willmar.

Legislators were paired with community residents for a one-to-one Dutch Treat dinner in a local restaurant on the first night of the mini-session. This opportunity gave people a chance to discuss their concerns with legislators in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Carruthers said he was grateful for the chance to meet so many residents and local officials. "What we've really done here in west central Minnesota is develop relationships. Most of all, thank you for your friendship," he said.

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Kandiyohi County . . .

Where the Capitol might have been

A lonely gravel road in rural Kandiyohi County leads to a site once selected for construction of a new state capitol building.

When Congress established the Territory of Minnesota in 1849, it called for a temporary seat of government to be selected, and later, for a permanent site to be chosen by a vote of the people.

After statehood in 1858, Minnesota's first governor, Henry Sibley, appointed a three-man commission to conduct a search and select a site for a new capitol building.

That group submitted a recommendation to the governor just 13 days later calling for the Kandiyohi County site to become the state capital, according to *Where Buffalo Fish Abound*, a book written by Donald Miller and published by the Kandiyohi County Historical Society.

A town site for the proposed capital had been surveyed and platted by the Kandiyohi Townsite Company, but no further development of the land had taken place. On the plat map, a large space at the center of the would-be town was marked "Capitol Square."

Plans called for a capitol to be constructed on a commanding hill overlooking the spot where lakes Minnetaga and Kasota bump against each other. Supporters argued that the proposed site was near the center of the state, making it more suitable than St. Paul.

In 1861, a bill calling for the capital to be moved from St. Paul to the Kandiyohi County site was introduced in the Legislature. The measure passed the House on a 25-12 vote, but the Senate rejected the plan. In 1869, proponents of the Kandiyohi County site revived the matter, and the House and Senate both approved a bill ordering the change.

But Gov. William Marshall vetoed the bill, citing a lack of public support for the move and the need for a public vote on any such proposal. An attempt to override the veto failed, as did later legislative efforts to revive plans to move the capital.

The state auditor eventually auctioned off the Kandiyohi County lands in 1901, the same year construction began on the present Capitol.

The site once selected to be Minnesota's capital is about six miles southeast of Willmar. A white clapboard farmhouse, red barn, and silo now occupy the spot where a new capitol might have stood.

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Highlights

Willmar Town Meeting . . .

Rising juvenile crime surfaces as a major concern

Road signs urging support for a new baseball stadium for the Minnesota Twins greeted Minnesota House members as they approached Willmar, Minn., site of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session Oct. 15-17.

But the focus for the roughly 250 people assembled for the Town Meeting Oct. 16 in the Willmar High School Theatre was on crime — particularly juvenile crime — followed by concerns in areas of agriculture, welfare, conservation, and the proposed stadium.

Nine House members fielded questions from the stage; some 60 representatives participated from the audience.

Errol Bluhm, of Willmar, began the question and answer period by voicing his concern about rising juvenile crime. "The privacy of juveniles who continue to commit crimes is still protected," he said, adding that it should be modified.

Willmar Mayor Les Heitke, concerned about public safety as it applies to juvenile crime, agreed, saying that judges need some alternatives.

He cited one 17-year-old repeat offender in Willmar as a clear case for removing some aspects of the data privacy act that protects the identity of juvenile criminals. "He's been arrested 37 times. That person has no regard for the law," he said. "Certainly someone with multiple arrests should be treated differently than someone who's been arrested for the first time."

Rep. Al Juhnke, (DFL-Willmar), was sym-



House Speaker Phil Carruthers, at the podium fields a question during an Oct. 15 Town Meeting in Willmar, Minn., conducted as part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session. Members of the public expressed serious concerns about crime, especially among juveniles, and other issues during the meeting. Seated at the table are Majority Leader Ted Winter, Minority Leader Steve Sviggum, Reps. Doug Peterson, Bob Ness, Gary Kubly, Tony Kielkucki, Hilda Bettermann, and Al Juhnke.

pathetic. "We've seen an increase in drive-by shootings and gang activity. [But] we're still a small town out here, and we're proud of that," he said.

Terry Reimer, of Willmar, had a broader, more impassioned view of crime in Willmar.

"I'm mad. I'm angry that we are not doing anything about it. I don't care about privacy. If they're in a gang, we want to know about it. We want to know their name, we want to know where they're from," he said.

Reimer itemized Willmar's arrests from the first half of 1997. (In 1996, there were 2,086 arrests in Willmar.) Reimer voiced frustration with the privacy afforded to juvenile criminals, and asked why his wife can't walk the streets safely at night. He claimed people no longer shop in Willmar because of the rising crime.

Reimer said juveniles who use weapons while committing a crime should be treated and tried as adults.

"Government can't fix everything, and we as people can't get involved if we don't care, but this is your wake-up call," he told the members.

Rep. Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda) agreed that it was not fair for law-abiding citizens to have "that impingement" on their personal freedom, and said lawmakers continue to work with law enforcement agencies to "erode the gang problem."

In a 10-year period beginning in 1985, juvenile arrests in Minnesota rose 31 percent. Among those arrested during 1995 for more serious crimes in Minnesota, 49 percent were under 18.

Juhnke said he understood the "increase in the frustration level of our people out here." He suggested perhaps repeat offenders should have their records made public. "When they have become a habitual felon, maybe that's the time we need to open it up," he said.

Rep. Wes Skoglund (DFL-Mpls) was called from the audience to explain the three bills (HF252, HF253, and HF254) he sponsored pertaining to juvenile crime. Each of the pending bills would amend juvenile court hearing statutes, and each lists conditions under which records would be open.

Rev. Pablo Obregon, of Willmar, told the House members that the Hispanic commu-



Signs urging support for construction of a new baseball stadium welcomed lawmakers and others heading toward Willmar, Minn., on Highway 12 during the Harvest Moon Mini-Session.

nity doesn't want to live in a town or state where they have to fear crime. But he encouraged the citizens to look at these problems "with hope and patience."

Milk prices

Randy Olson, of Sunburg, and a student at the University of Minnesota-Morris, asked how much value the state puts on its dairy farmers. Farmers get 60 cents a gallon for milk, and it costs \$3 at the supermarket. He said in a 10-month period leading to July of 1997, there was a 35 percent drop in milk prices.

"Where did the money go? It doesn't go to the farmers. It's frustrating to think of my parents working themselves into an early grave. Something's seriously wrong with this. How important do you feel the dairy industry is to Minnesota? Because it's dying," he said.

Olson said he wants to follow his parents into dairy farming, but worries that the business will be devalued if farmers are not better compensated.

Winter agreed, saying Minnesota dairy farmers need a higher price for milk and suggested farmers "form a compact," like farmers in the Northeast have done. He suggested both a Midwest compact comprising Minnesota and surrounding states, and a compact within the state.

Winter said it was important to form a united front for the federal government, which controls the milk market prices.

Winter was understanding of farmers who pour out their milk in protest of milk prices, and insisted "we need to look for something to get Minnesota dairy farmers a better price."

Welfare system

Justin Hasse, of Kandiyohi, expressed confusion over the welfare system.

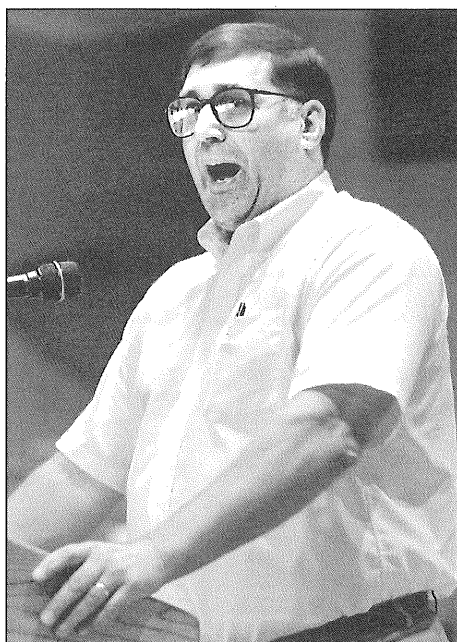
"People walk into our welfare system and walk out with assistance the same day." He said he didn't understand why some people would get such quick aid when he is forced to "wait 30 days."

Juhnke told Hasse that last year's Legislature passed major welfare reform measures.

"It's a case of not being mean, but being lean," Juhnke said.

Starting in January 1998, Minnesotans on welfare must work or lose a portion of their monthly public assistance (HF159). The change was in response to a 1996 federal act that requires states to move welfare recipients to work or face millions of dollars in federal financial sanctions.

Minnesota did soften the landing for legal immigrants. Under the federal law, many legal immigrants were to lose all public assistance benefits, including food stamps, this summer.



Willmar resident Terry Reimer expresses his concerns about the increase in gang-related crimes in the area during a Town Meeting with House members.

Minnesota's law uses state dollars to replace some of those cuts, but still leaves most immigrants hundreds of dollars short each month compared to previous benefits.

Conservation

U.S. Rep. David Minge (D-Minn.) praised the state and Gov. Arne Carlson for helping to clean up the Minnesota River Basin.

Federal dollars from the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP) will be piggybacked with the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) program. Under the arrangement, 50,000 acres of farmland would be taken out of production under CRP, a \$1.8 billion-a-year Department of Agriculture program that pays farmers to retire environmentally sensitive lands for 10-15 years at a time.

Those 50,000 acres of farmland would subsequently qualify for funds from the RIM program. Participation in the RIM program would be voluntary and could extend the period to 30 years or more.

Speaker Phil Carruthers (DFL-Brooklyn Center) opened the Harvest Moon Mini-Session Town Meeting on Oct. 16 by requesting a moment of silence for Department of Natural Resources officer Gary Westby. Westby, a 22-year DNR employee, Vietnam veteran, and father of five was scheduled to appear during the mini-session. But the Spicer, Minn., resident died earlier in the week, the innocent victim of a high-speed police chase.

Minge said these joint efforts would improve water quality and control flood damage.

This melding of state and federal efforts is "an opportunity I don't think will come along that often," Minge said.

Stadium proposal

Most of those who offered their opinions were against any kind of state subsidy for a new baseball stadium for the Minnesota Twins in downtown Minneapolis.

"This is a point that goes beyond what government has done normally," Winter said. "Should we put dollars into private business for its own personal gain, through our public funds?" He said that the public has said, "No."

Minority Leader Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon) said, "I understand the emotion of this issue," but what government ought to be about is issues such as public safety, public education, and public roads. He said when government is involved in "public sports, you get on really thin ice." Audience applause erupted over the remark.

Travis Prentice, of Willmar, was one of the few who urged the legislators to pass a bill to build a stadium, thus preventing the Minnesota Twins from exercising an escape clause from the Metrodome.

"Don't think of it as a baseball team, think of it as a multi-million dollar business," he twice told those assembled.

Rep. Tony Kielkucki (R-Lester Prairie) said his thoughts on the stadium issue also could apply to crime, agriculture, welfare and other concerns advanced at the Town Meeting.

Kielkucki said part of the solution to many of the issues discussed at the meeting is "how we, as a people, respond to our neighbors in need."

"We just can't rely on the federal government or state government to solve all our problems," he said.



AGRICULTURE

Sustainable hog production

In 1977, Jim VanDerPol took over his parents' Kerkhoven, Minn., farm that they had run since 1952. He ran the feeder pigs operation for years and was somewhat pleased with how things were going.

It was profitable, he said, but not so comfortable or healthy — mainly for the pigs — cooped up the way they were in their confinements.

"We weren't happy with our working conditions. It was too dusty, too smelly," he said.

So he got a demonstration grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's en-

ergy and sustainable agriculture program to study low-input and outdoor hog production, which allowed him to move his sows out of their confinements to a pasture that had formerly grown corn. "We did it for a year and never looked back," he said.

VanDerPol took time to take members of the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Dairy Policy and Water Conservation on an Oct. 15 tour of his operation during the Harvest Moon Mini-Session sponsored by the Minnesota House Oct. 15-17.

He and his son, Joshua, who farms the land with him, have 30 to 50 sows in the pasture every season. Each of them have eight to 11 piglets twice a year.

The piglets don't require vaccinations because "the air is better," he said.

Soon the piglets move to an open-air "Porta-hut," and after five to six months, they weigh a sturdy 240 to 250 pounds and they're ready to be sold, usually to a slaughterhouse in Boydon, Iowa.

VanDerPol's hogs are fed a mix of barley, oats, peas, and corn along with whatever grass they eat.

In his first year, 1996, they weaned 191 pigs. "We're extremely happy with those kinds of numbers," he said.

He also has 140 acres of corn, which he uses to help feed the pigs.

"We look at it as a journey to get where we're going," he said.

And that journey is becoming a profitable one. Corn in the area generates a profit of \$25 to \$50 an acre, while his sows will show a profit of \$850 to \$900 an acre.

"This small farm is going to support two families. That's what it's doing now," he said.

And he would never even think of going

back to the old way. "The work is so much more healthy, and there's so much money in it. I'm a capitalist," he said.

The operation is what's known as a sustainable farm. He uses "timed grazing" for his pigs, sheep, and calves, rotating them from one section of the pasture to the other.

Studies from the University of Minnesota show that animals are more productive, healthier, and treat the land better when they move often onto fresh grass.

VanDerPol said the pigs and their young seem happier roaming the pasture, as opposed to being confined.

He said equipment costs can be lower since the animals harvest most of their own feed. Pesticide and fertilizer costs are much lower on an acre of pasture than on an acre of corn, he said, and using less pesticide is easier on the environment.

VanDerPol, a 1970 graduate of the University of Minnesota, worked as a farm animal technician until he decided to become a farmer.

Rep. Gail Skare (DFL-Bemidji) said she was impressed by the operation. "This has been very interesting. I like it. I grew up on a small farm [in Bagley]. It seems like we're going back to that. The animals have got to be happy," she said.

Touring Metro Dairy

Metro Dairy, a large dairy operation in Waverly, Minn., became a tour site for members of the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Dairy Policy and Water Conservation Oct. 17.

Owner Virgil Scherping, wearing a large belt buckle inscribed with "Milk - Naturally

Good," welcomed the visitors as part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session in west central Minnesota Oct. 15-17.

The group assembled on black and white Holstein-patterned sofas in the dairy's front office. There were few takers for the baby blue booties Scherping offered for shoe protection.

The dairy, which opened March 6, is now home to 600 cows and 11 employees, Scherping said. Eventually, he said he would like to expand to 1,300 cows and add two employees.

As the tour proceeded, conversation centered on environmental issues and the use of technology in the dairy operation. Concerned neighbors and environmental leaders have raised questions about the potential health threats posed by feedlots such as Metro Dairy.

A feedlot is any building or lot where animals are confined and manure can accumulate, including manure lagoons used to store waste. An estimated 45,000 feedlots exist in Minnesota.

State lawmakers have been urged to consider the air and water quality issues and support improvements in feedlot regulation.

Scherping was quick to emphasize the difference between dairy and hog feedlots and also to address any environmental concerns. He explained how separating solid and liquid waste into two lagoons made a difference in odor control. He quoted a Nicollet County commissioner, who said, "If I were blindfolded, I wouldn't even know the lagoon is there."

Ironically, an inspector from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) was there that morning. Scherping said neighbors had called the MPCA twice before, when in fact, the odors were emanating from elsewhere. He did, however, stress that "a good operator should welcome an inspection."

Computer technology is prevalent in the dairy's operation. Every cow has an electronic identification number transmitting from a transponder around its neck to the main computer. Workers can access the milk output per cow per milking session from a computerized touch-pad in front of each stall.

Cows at Metro Dairy yield close to 24,000 pounds of milk per cow per year. The state average is 15,000 pounds. Herdsman Kevin Gross attributes part of this success to his feeding practices.

Orange heat sensors attached to the cows' rumps also transmit information to the main computer. With this data, Gross uses a program called HeatWatch to calculate the appropriate day for artificial insemination. The dairy's conception success rate, like their milk output, is above industry average.

Agriculture statistics indicate Minnesota

Fish factory



Members of the House Agriculture Finance and Rural Development Subcommittee toured MinAqua Fisheries in Renville, Minn., Oct. 17. The aquaculture building houses concrete ponds in which Tilapia, mild flavored freshwater fish native to Africa, are raised. The ponds are heated by the wastewater from the nearby beet sugar cooperative.

loses an average of three dairy operations a day. Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) and Rep. Tony Kielkucki (R-Lester Prairie) asked, "What can we as a state do" to help Metro and the dairy industry.

Dvorak pointed out how Metro Dairy contributes to the rural economy by purchasing feed and fuel, and processing milk locally. "Abuse from neighbors," a difficult permitting process, and exorbitant legal fees stand in the way of the rural economic development the dairy represents, he said.

Harold Metzger, plant manager of Mid-America Dairymen, Inc. in Winsted, Minn., told legislators that "from the standpoint of a processor, we need both the small farmer and big guys like this."



CHILDREN

Child care crunch

Fortunately, Willmar resident Micki Schmidt lives in town and needs child care during the day. Schmidt moved to Willmar from Elk River, Minn., after her fiancé took a job with one of Willmar's booming employers, Jennie-O Foods, Inc. With no local ties, and taking a job herself, she called Child Care Choices, a state funded child care resource center in Willmar, and immediately found care for her 2-year-old daughter.

"Every block had a day care listed — I was amazed at how the center worked so quick," Schmidt said.

Schmidt was one of three parents speaking to members of the Family and Early Childhood Education Division of the House Education Committee about child care in outstate Minnesota. Lawmakers were visiting the resource center Oct. 15 as part of the three-day Harvest Moon Mini-Session sponsored by the Minnesota House of Representatives.

The other two parents spoke about problems in finding child care, both having found only temporary child care while working third-shift and odd-hours jobs. Living far from town hindered one parent further, while the other lost child care when a local child care center with flexible hours closed.

Child care centers are better able to give odd-hours care than home providers, but the state subsidy often doesn't cover the higher fees centers must charge due to their higher overhead expenses, said Ellen Moore, director of the resource center. This is one reason why child care centers have trouble staying in business, she said.

Growing population, low unemployment, in-migration of workers without local ties,

and welfare reform are increasing the child care crunch in the four west central counties served by the resource center, according to staff members. Ninety-five percent of state child care subsidies are spent on working families in the four-county area, said Lisa Wubben, Kandiyohi County child care coordinator.

Rep. Arlon Lindner (R-Corcoran) said parents need to closely consider child care costs when deciding whether to have both parents work. As an example, he cited one of the testifying parents who found she earned only grocery money after subtracting child care costs from her pay.

Demand for the center's sliding fee child care referrals in Kandiyohi County grew about 250 percent in the last two years, but the state's funding increase, while generous, was not proportionate, Moore said.

State subsidies for providers will go up about 130 percent from fiscal years 1996-1997 to 1998-1999. Last session, the state tripled grant money available through the center for unlicensed providers to make home improvements for licensing but didn't allot extra money for staff to recruit and assist grant candidates, Moore said.

Funding for administering child care subsidies and services will increase only slightly, Moore said, making staff strain to meet all their commitments. The center refers parents to child care providers while recruiting, training, and giving grant assistance to the providers — all with 3.5 full-time equivalent staff. Staff also collaborates with other human services agencies and area employers when possible, Moore said. Statewide, combined federal and state funding for administering child care will go up 8 percent from 1997 to 1998.

Two licensed home child care providers also testified that the state's extension of fee subsidies to unlicensed providers — a move intended to help parents — is unfair to licensed providers and gives unlicensed providers disincentive to obtain licensing.

"Why go through the licensing process if you can get the subsidy anyway?" asked home care provider Mike Stark.

Child Guide Prevention Program

A pilot program for children that could ease an increasing burden on schools received unanimous support from residents at Kennedy Elementary School in Willmar Oct. 15. The meeting was part of the Minnesota House of Representatives' Harvest Moon Mini-Session held Oct. 15-17.

Educators, parents, social service workers, and county employees praised the Child Guide Prevention Program before members of the

Family and Early Childhood Education Finance Division of the House Education Committee. They also recommended that the state provide funding for the two-year-old program that aims at recognizing potential child behavioral problems.

Bob Foley, director of operations for the Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative, said the program, in effect, strives to "recreate the neighborhoods of our youth, where children were rarely out of sight of someone who cared about them."

The role of a school has flowered from a mere teaching institution to one that provides myriad services such as nutrition, immunization, sex education, driver education, preschool, recreation, and more, Foley said.

The burden, he said, has reached its zenith. But in the Child Guide Prevention Program, elementary students who are identified by teachers, parents, or counselors as needing assistance or direction will receive it.

Aid could be as simple as transportation to an extracurricular activity for a youngster whose family lacks the means. Legislators heard about how the program formed a Cub Scout den, provided a weekly ride to a child's karate class, and allowed another child to join a school sports team.

Foley explained that the general population of elementary students have no hint of behavior problems. But there is a group termed "incipient at-risk," whose demographics, family situation, or other factors suggest risk.

Foley said studies show once a student's behavior produces suspension, detention, or other punishment, it is often too late to redirect those elementary students. The aim of this pilot program is to reach them while they are "salvageable."

Kandiyohi County Attorney Boyd Beccue said the Child Guide Prevention Program emphasizes the value of early intervention.

He said when he began working for the county in 1978, there were "perhaps 75" juvenile cases annually. He cited 1,000 cases last year, and said the increase far exceeds juvenile population growth. He said it took a long time to reach that level, and it will take a long time to reduce it.

Beccue said the program is less expensive and more productive than building juvenile detention centers.

"We have numerous children coming through the system five, six, eight times a year. Those are essentially children we've lost," he said. "A little bit of money in a program like this is going to go a long way to keep kids out of trouble."

Rep. Richard Mulder (R-Ivanhoe) asked Beccue if the program would be so cost-effective that Willmar would continue it without state funding.

Beccue said, "It's not a countywide program, it's a Willmar Public Schools program," so he could not speak for the entity that might fund it. Speaking for himself, he said he would recommend that funding continue even without state help.

Legislators said they hear many "feel-good" stories when they reach committee and asked if there were data to accompany the unanimous testimony in favor of the program.

Beccue said juvenile crime experienced "a slight drop" last year in the county, but most juvenile delinquents are in their mid-teens; the fledgling Child Guide Prevention Program obviously couldn't have affected that.

Larry Kleindl, of Kandiyohi County Social Services, said it would be impossible to determine the outcome of the program for another 10 years.

Kleindl said results will be tracked by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, using a computer program it created to allow child guides to follow children they mentored.



Gary LeBlanc, assistant adjutant general for the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs, testifies on behalf of a pilot program that will make certain National Guard training and community centers available for recreational activities for at-risk youth. The joint meeting of the House State Government Finance Division and the House General Legislation, Veterans Affairs and Elections Committee took place in Willmar, Minn., Oct. 16.



CRIME

Activities for at-risk youth

Alienation and boredom cause kids to get into trouble, according to Russ Ericson, a senior at Willmar Senior High School. Ericson likes to skateboard, but says he is continually harassed by business owners and police.

"They just tell us we can't be wherever we happen to be, and the question is, Where *can* we be?" Ericson said.

Some answers to this question were discussed at a joint hearing of the State Government Finance Division of the House Governmental Operations Committee and the House General Legislation, Veterans Affairs and Elections Committee. They met at the Willmar National Guard Training and Community Center Oct. 16 as part of the House's Harvest Moon Mini-Session.

Ericson was one of several people who pitched ideas before the House panel for using local facilities for two new pilot programs the Legislature approved last legislative session — Guard our Youth and Mighty Kids. He proposed that Willmar's cavernous National Guard building would make a great year-round facility for skateboarding.

Each program received \$800,000 to use over the next two years to provide after-school and weekend youth activities, particularly for at-risk youth. Though Guard our Youth is administered by the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and Mighty Kids is adminis-

tered by the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (MASC), the Legislature's intent is for the two agencies to work together where appropriate.

The statutory language, written broadly to encourage innovation, specifies only that the DMA grant is to make National Guard armories available for youth recreational activities, and the MASC grant is to provide grants for youth sports.

But the open-ended statutory language also led to diverse views concerning potential program activities.

Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia) said MASC should encourage non-sports grants, and Paul Erickson, MASC executive director, agreed, saying that MASC's documents would be amended to emphasize non-competitive, inclusive programs.

Pastor Pablo Obergran, of Paz Y Esperanza Lutheran Church, said the programs could sponsor activities to help bridge the cultural gap between native Minnesotans and Spanish-speaking immigrants, and also urged that activities involve families.

Marilyn Dorn, a Willmar police officer who specializes in crime prevention and education, said Guard facilities could be used to provide physical activities like aerobics classes for families who can't afford health club memberships. Some other ideas floated for kids were music, art, photography, computer, karate, camping, and hiking clubs.

Obstacles to success also were discussed — a major one being that kids won't perceive participation in program activities as being "cool."

Several people objected to use of the term

"at-risk" because, they said, it is stigmatizing.

Some parents forbid their kids from participating in anything for "at-risk" or "underserved" youth because they don't want their family labeled, Dorn said.

Erickson proposed that some grant money be used for transportation to activities. Several speakers agreed, saying that lack of transportation has limited the success of similar programs.

Local resident Francisco Morales had one answer. He offered to teach kids to build and fix bikes after school — right on school grounds. "The kids are already there, so why not use the schools?" he said.



DEVELOPMENT

Land use impact fees

Impact fees are a way for cities to pay for the costs associated with new development, or a hindrance to development, depending on one's point of view.

Members of the Land Use Subcommittee of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee got both sides of the issue from city officials and developers at an Oct. 17 meeting in Willmar. The hearing, chaired by Rep. Joe Opatz, (DFL-St. Cloud), was part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session held Oct. 15-17 in west central Minnesota.

Land use impact fees are a one-time charge against a new development to raise money for new or expanded public facilities or services caused by the new development. The fee usually depends on the development, said Deb

Dyson of the House Research Department. A total of 19 states permit impact fees, most often to pay for roads, water and sewage facilities, parks, recreation, and open space.

Minnesota does not have a law governing impact fees, so some cities are reluctant to levy them, said Bruce Peterson, community development director for Willmar. Willmar has grown 13 percent in the past 10 years, and in the same time, its streets have grown only 10 percent.

Needs for infrastructure and other improvements come with growth, and Willmar will need millions of dollars in capital improvements in coming years. Not all of that was caused by the new development, Peterson conceded.

Cost for improvements to drainage systems, wastewater treatment plants, and water main improvements will approach \$80 million. "Our future growth will be hindered without additional funds," Peterson said.

He said existing developments don't want to share the cost of new development. "They want it to support itself," he said.

An equitable way of assessing those fees, he said, is to relate the fee directly to the cost of the development. The fees should then be separated from other city funds.

"Willmar realizes it has to keep growing to serve the needs of the region. The cost of providing this should not be borne by the general fund.

"We know the matter's controversial and will never be universally accepted. I think it's helpful to the taxpayers of Minnesota," he said.

If the city went ahead and assessed an impact fee without a state law in place, the city and the developer would probably wind up in court. "We could test the waters, but we're not interested in being a municipal guinea pig," Peterson said.

A different perspective was offered by Gary Laurent of Laurent Construction, a builder-developer in Shakopee, Minn. He also is chair of the Public Policy Committee for the Builders' Association of the Twin Cities and a former mayor of Shakopee.

Developers usually pay the cost for development, he said, because a developer who owns undeveloped property continues to pay taxes. Then, when the land begins to develop, the developer usually has to dedicate a certain amount of land for roads, sidewalks, and trails, which are given to the city and often paid for by the developer.

The city will collect fees to inspect the plans for the development, even though the surveying and engineering work was paid for by the developer. "It's always a surprise to us that people think the city puts the street in for us. If that were the case, they should be upset about it," Laurent said.

"I would contend we are paying an impact fee. A lot of the fees that are collected are not necessary in proportion to the service they are providing," he said.

The ultimate payer in this if the state were to permit impact fees would be the consumer, he said. "All fees are eventually paid for by the consumer. Even if they're paid up front, they're not going to be absorbed by the developer. That's how the free enterprise system works. They will get passed along to the consumer, regardless of who they are," Laurent said.

Rural Minnesota's economy

To grow rural Minnesota's economy, the state needs to invest in farm product processing and high-tech businesses, business leaders told members of the House Economic Development and International Trade Committee during an Oct. 16 meeting in Olivia, Minn.

"The farm crisis is over, but the labor, housing, and processing — the crises of abundant opportunity — have just begun," said David Nelson, executive director of the Renville County Economic Development Commission.

Training high-tech workers and getting a fiber optic communication network into outstate areas were discussed along with finding new incentives for affordable housing, making state economic aid more accessible, and extending state aid to value-added agricultural businesses.

Government assistance for high-tech industries is the norm globally, said Ted Christianson, president of Christianson Systems, Inc., and Minnesota must invest more in technology to compete.

Dave Bennett, president of B.D.E. Ltd., said the state should spend more for state technical colleges and sharpen their technical focus by separating them from Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, which was created in a merger of the state universities and Minnesota's community and technical colleges.

Both Christianson and Bennett said the state should invest in a fiber optic communications network in rural Minnesota to support expansion of high-tech businesses.

Both said they primarily do business outside the U.S. and, Christianson said, "fast, reliable, low-cost communication is essential for growth" in emerging international markets. Fiber optics also would help the labor crunch by improving links from outstate businesses to technical colleges and to high-tech workers who are concentrated in metro areas, he said.

Labor is also hard to come by for non-technical jobs in Greater Minnesota. Olivia Mayor William Miller said Renville County needs to draw workers to the area to fill about 313 open jobs with wages starting from \$7.50 to \$12.50 an hour, but the area doesn't have enough affordable housing.

Several business leaders said the state tax increment financing system was too complicated and that state aid could be made more accessible by moving loan and grant administration from the state to the local level.

Several also asked that state policy be amended to make Minnesota Investment Fund and other state loans available to cooperatives and businesses that manufacture food, fuel, and other value-added products that aren't categorized as either agricultural or manufac-

Happy trail



Left to right, Reps. Doug Peterson, Peggy Leppik, Roxann Daggett, and Nora Slawik, look out over a scenic site for a proposed bike trail in Montevideo's Minnesota River Valley.



EDUCATION

K-12 — initiatives or mandates?

Legislative initiatives — even ones that win broad, bipartisan support at the Capitol — can become burdensome mandates on the shoulders of local school district officials.

“We have been trying to not do so much micro-managing from the state level,” Rep. Becky Kelso (DFL-Shakopee) told local school officials during an Oct. 15 roundtable discussion of K-12 issues. “We have tried very hard.”

The meeting, held in Olivia, Minn as part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session, brought together members of the House K-12 Finance Subcommittee on Government Efficiency and Reform and Greater Minnesota school officials who work everyday to implement the policies determined at the Capitol.

Members of the subcommittee heard concerns from district officials, teachers, and others about a variety of education mandates, affecting areas such as school schedules, graduation requirements, and special education.

A seemingly popular law passed earlier this year was one of the issues that drew concern from the local school officials. The law required all public schools to add three days of classroom instruction to their 1997-1998 academic calendar.

“We’re all in agreement with that. However, it came without the funding support,” said Steve Niklaus, superintendent of the Annandale School District.

The Legislature did not provide funds spe-

turing (the categories currently eligible for assistance). Such businesses would include not only ethanol producers, who received a \$49.6 million state subsidy in a law passed during the 1997 session, but also food processors and feedlots.

Two area residents who live near hog barns and food processing facilities objected to state aid for such businesses, saying they cause environmental and health problems. They were referring, in particular, to odor, hydrogen sulfide emissions, and water contamination from hog manure lagoons. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is currently revising feedlot regulations, with changes expected to include extensive study of environmental impacts and new odor control provisions, but no new limits on hydrogen sulfide emissions, said Don Hauge, of the MPCA’s Feedlot Unit, who was not at the hearing.

The meeting was part of the Minnesota House of Representatives’ Harvest Moon Mini-Session Oct. 15-17 held in west central Minnesota.

Upgrading job skills

Customized job training is playing a key role in the economic growth of west central Minnesota, said George Halonen, dean of instruction at Ridgewater Community and Technical College in Hutchinson, Minn.

Public and private entities are collaborating to develop job skills and to add people — some of them coming off welfare — to the workforce, Halonen told members of the Economic Development Finance Division of the House Economic Development and International Trade Committee during an Oct. 15 hearing at the college.

Halonen and others are working with the Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED), the Department of Economic Security, the Private Industry Workforce Council, and key area businesses to develop new career training for individuals.

While some businesses are conducting training on-site, ADC Solitra, 3M, Hutchinson Technology, Inc. (HTI), and almost 100 other private companies across the state pay tuition at educational institutions for trainees and are reimbursed, in part, through a program called Minnesota Job Skills Partnership (MJSP). Ridgewater and other colleges also supply teacher technology to assist businesses in upgrading the skills of workers.

Susan Walia, human resources manager for ADC Solitra, explained the participation of her company, which expanded by moving to Hutchinson in 1995.

“ADC Solitra’s involvement with job skills

partnerships will increase its growth from zero employees to 150 by 1998,” she said.

HTI is among the companies finding new employees or retraining staff through the Job Resources Council on the Ridgewater campus. Tom Gillespie, senior technical training specialist for HTI, said that his company does internal training, but gets “a better price through the college” for new or full-time employees.

Rep. Mike Jaros (DFL-Duluth) said Minnesota State Colleges and Universities must “not de-emphasize technology, but encourage it to keep in touch with higher education so that technology training does not get lost.”

Those sentiments were echoed by Roger Hughes, executive director for MJSP.

“There is growing discussion over the relevancy and role of higher education; in particular, liberal arts education,” Hughes said. “Specifically, liberal arts education does not pay the bills nor keep the hometown economic fires burning.”

Those who foster liberal arts education must understand that a technical education is not a lesser education, according to Hughes. Liberal arts education must be aimed more directly at the workplace, he said.

Jay Novak, commissioner of DTED, said the future of job skills training for a strong workforce depends on “businesses, educational systems, and the state to collaborate through programs like the Jobs Skills Partnership to ensure that both businesses and our educational institutions are meeting the needs of employers and workers.”

Sweet beets



Factory manager Jim DeTar, center, led the House Agriculture Finance and Rural Development Subcommittee on a tour of Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative in Renville, Minn., Oct. 17. Lawmakers were invited to sample freshly cut sugar beets as the product moved past on a conveyer belt.

cifically for the additional school days. Districts were expected to make room for the additional school days during the time their teachers were already under contract.

State law sets no minimum for the number of days in a school year. Most districts schedule about 175 school days each year and contract with teachers for more than 180 days of work.

In effect, the new law means teachers will spend three more days in the classroom, allowing less time for teacher training, parent-teacher conferences, and other activities.

That poses a problem for some school districts, Niklaus said. The implementation of the state's graduation rule (another state mandate) places time for teacher training — or staff development, as it is called — at a premium.

"It's a real dilemma for us," Niklaus said.

Several local school officials also expressed concerns about the rising costs of special education and the strain those costs can put on a school district budget.

Niklaus said districts face a "big deterrent" in trying to control special education costs because any move to limit special education services can result in a costly legal battle with the family involved. Even if the district wins in court, the district's legal expenses can offset savings on special education services.

"We believe in providing special education services, but there is a commonsense limit," Niklaus said. "Sometimes we have to go beyond that limit."

John Boll, chair of the Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City School Board, said the growing cost of special education is a serious problem for school districts, especially smaller rural districts.

"There's no hope, from a school board's position," Boll said. "Where does it end?"

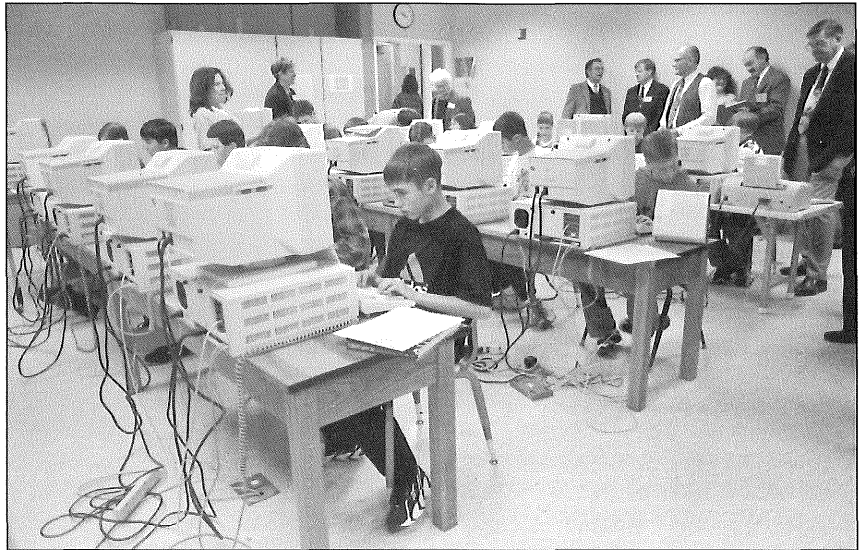
Kelso acknowledged that special education is the area of education most heavily affected by state mandates. But, she said, most of those state mandates are the result of court decisions that have forced the hand of the Legislature.

Kelso said she has supported legislation that would require the state to take over the costs of special education in an effort to alleviate the strain on local district budgets.

"Special education costs have inflated twice as fast as general education costs," Kelso said. "We just can't let this continue to inflate the way it is. It is not acceptable to the public, and I'm not even sure it's popular with the parents of special education students."

Rep. Ken Wolf (R-Burnsville), who chairs the subcommittee, said the most common complaint he hears is that the state does not

Computer research



Eighth grader Eric Schaefer, center, and his classmates worked on research papers while members of the House K-12 Finance Division toured Grove City High School Oct. 15.

allow districts enough flexibility with the money they receive. Much of the money districts receive is earmarked for specific purposes such as transportation and cannot be shifted to cover shortfalls in other areas.

"I sometimes would like to say we're going to give you the money, and you can spend it any way you want," Wolf said.

ENVIRONMENT

Water, water all around . . .

Water — whether too much or too little of it — is a problem in Granite Falls and nearby western Minnesota communities.

This spring, the Minnesota River flowed over its banks and left behind damage in communities such as Granite Falls and Montevideo. Homes and businesses were damaged by high waters in the early days of a season that brought widespread flooding to many Minnesota cities.

While the surplus of water captured the attention of the state, another serious — although less apparent — water problem exists in parts of Minnesota. That problem is a shortage of clean, accessible water for municipal water systems.

An Oct. 16 joint hearing of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee and the House Capital Investment Committee focused on water and flood plain management concerns.

The meeting, conducted as part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session, allowed city offi-

cial, state experts, and others to voice concerns about the contamination of surface waters, the availability of clean water, the control of flood hazards, and other issues. The meeting was held at Minnesota West Community and Technical College in Granite Falls.

While repairs from the 1997 flood continue in some areas, officials are looking to the future and wondering what will be done to prevent a repeat of the 1997 flooding.

"We really need to study how fast that water rises, where it comes from, and what it does to communities along the river," said Granite Falls Mayor Dave Smiglewski. "We need to think about the long term. If we don't do that, we're going to be sitting where we were last spring again."

Larry Lewis, an enforcement biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Wetland Office in Morris, Minn., told lawmakers that restoring wetlands and taking other steps to slow water runoff is crucial to flood control efforts.

"I'm firmly convinced that wetland restorations do make sense for flood control," Lewis said. "The economic incentive to destroy wetlands will always be with us, but private gain at the expense of the public good will no longer be tolerated."

And, Lewis said, wetland restoration efforts should take a cooperative approach that considers fair compensation for landowners.

Wilfred Hansen, vice chair of the Upper Minnesota River Watershed District, said the benefits of wetland restoration are gaining new support for efforts to return some of the "potholes" that once dotted the landscape in rural Minnesota.

"People are beginning to care about the

lakes and the land and the water in a new way," Hansen said.

While Minnesota appears to be a water-rich state, the need for safe, clean water in some parts of the state, especially west central and southwestern areas, is a serious concern to local officials.

The mayor of Granite Falls told lawmakers that his city drew all of its water supply from the Minnesota River until the 1980s and some of it until more recently, when contamination made it impossible to use water from the river.

"Finding suitable drinking water has been a challenge," Smiglewski said. Granite Falls has had to tap underground aquifers, which has put the city into competition for water with rural residents and caused legal battles over well interference.

Dave Leuthe, a regional hydrologist for the Department of Natural Resources, urged lawmakers to pay more attention to long-term planning for water supply.

"Water that is of suitable quality for most uses is of limited supply out here, and that limits economic development," Leuthe said.

Rep. Willard Munger (DFL-Duluth), who chairs the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee, said state and federal resources must be devoted to the restoration of the Minnesota River.

"I think water quality is everybody's business, water quantity is everybody's business, and restoring wetlands is everybody's business," Munger said.

Touring Hutchinson's 3M plant

Hutchinson's 3M plant has found economic gold in environmentally friendly practices, said company officials who led members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee on a tour of the plant's operations Oct. 17 as part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session.

Company officials showed how 3M recovers and recycles chemicals and solid materials — environmental actions which have turned out to save the company money. While plant production has increased, the plant has reduced air emissions 88 percent from 1990 to 1996, said James Bauman, plant manager. Solid waste was reduced roughly 50 percent in the same period, he said.

Used by the U.S. government to make hemp rope for World War II, 3M began making cellophane tape at the plant in 1947. As one of 3M's largest physical plants in the world, the Hutchinson facility employs 1,650 workers and produces 20 product lines, most of them some kind of consumer, office, industrial, or electrical tape.

Some tapes produced at the plant require the use of solvents, which can be carcinogenic and cause other health problems, said Lisa Thorvig, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency deputy commissioner.

To nearly eliminate solvent releases to the air, the plant uses a two-step process. First, a recovery unit uses carbon to filter 99 percent of the solvents out of solvent-laden air pumped from the plant. Residue not recovered by the carbon goes into a unit, which burns it into water vapor and carbon dioxide by holding it at a certain temperature for a fraction of a second.

A windfall of the recovery process is that the plant uses the same solvent over and over, rarely having to buy more, said Dan Knuth, 3M manager of state government affairs in Minnesota.

The company has gone to solventless processes for some tapes and has a goal of making tape with 100 percent solvent-free processes, said Mike Bennett, 3M environmental specialist.

Thorvig said 3M efforts go well beyond state and federal compliance standards, and credited 3M's good corporate citizenship partly to the economic benefits that go with good environmental practices. She also credited the Federal Toxic Release Inventory, which requires companies to report their toxic releases, as a motivator.

Another part of 3M's solid waste reduction program, Knuth said, has been to hand materials over to other industries as raw materials. For example, adhesive-free insides of electrical tape rolls — useless as tape — are sent to a company that uses the material to line the insides of garden hoses, he said.



FAMILY

Conflict over child custody

A legislative proposal designed to reduce conflict over child custody was the focus of an Oct. 16 meeting of the Civil and Family Law Division of the House Judiciary Committee in Willmar, Minn.

The purpose of the hearing was to elicit feedback from concerned parents, attorneys, family law experts, and others about a bill (HF1323) sponsored by the committee's chair, Rep. Andy Dawkins (DFL-St. Paul).

"The broad goal [of the bill] is to change the family law system to avoid unnecessary fighting," Dawkins said. He would like to see the courts turn parents toward cooperative mediation and away from the current, more adversarial process.

Continued on page 12

Dinner conversations . . .

Residents meet lawmakers face-to-face

Political issues were the main course at an event that matched legislators with citizens for dinner and conversation.

The Oct. 15 One-to-One Dutch Treat Dinner allowed dozens of west central Minnesota residents an opportunity to meet face-to-face with lawmakers as part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session.

Patricia Dols, principal of Willmar's Roosevelt Middle School was one of the local residents who took part in the event. Dols shared dinner and discourse with two House members, Rep. Hilda Bettermann (R-Brandon) and Rep. Matt Entenza (DFL-St. Paul). The three left a House reception in the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Willmar to dine at the Blue Heron Restaurant in town.

Education, naturally, was a main topic of discussion during dinner, as was the impact of growth and development in rural communities. Willmar's population is growing in size and cultural diversity, and with the growth has come some issues the community has never dealt with before.

"Kids are very accepting of kids," said Bettermann. "But differences prevail outside of a school setting, and things in the community are not always so simple."

School district leaders in Willmar are providing tutoring for students whose parents do not speak English and providing more after-school activities to keep young people busy.

During dinner, the issue of crime in rural Minnesota also was discussed. Rural communities experiencing growth also experience many of society's ills.

Entenza said many young people, such as Roosevelt Middle School students, are at an important crossroads in life. "They can make either positive or negative choices," but many of the older teenagers are not making good choices, he said.

But Willmar officials and other community leaders such as Dols are providing programs such as mentoring for troubled kids and for kids who need a positive adult role model in their lives.

Dols told the lawmakers about the implementation of the "Successful Kids" program in Willmar for young people who need positive developmental assets in their lives. The program sets up adults to serve as liaisons, provide transportation, offer consolation during hard times, and give other assistance to young people in helping them keep connected and responsible.

Continued from page 11

Marilyn Tisserand, a licensed marriage and family therapist in the Alexandria area, told the committee that change is needed.

"Custody battles are not about the children," she said. "They are about power and control."

The proposal would make changes in the terminology of child custody proceedings. Terms such as "custodial parent" and "non-custodial parent" would be replaced with "parent." The terms "custody" and "visitation" would be removed from statutory language and, instead, the phrase "parenting plan" would be used.

Tisserand said that removing the labels would level the playing field, and that the Legislature is long overdue in changing the archaic terms.

Betty Gengrich Anderson from Douglas County, who has worked on child custody issues for 17 years, said she supports a change in the statutory language because the language sets the tone for the negotiations. Without the labels, she said, "the parents are coming to the table as equals."

Currently, the court begins with a presumption of joint legal custody and sole physical custody. That means that from the beginning of the proceedings, one parent is set to win custody and one will lose custody.

Dawkins' proposal would create the presumption that both parents would share decision making and responsibilities equally under a court approved parenting plan.

The bill would break down the mediation of the parenting plan into two parts in an attempt to keep the element of time with the child separate from financial issues. First, mediation would consider where is it best for the child to spend the most time. Second, how to pay for the child's upbringing, taking into consideration where the expenses are incurred and who has the ability to pay, would be considered.

Thomas Jones, an attorney from Willmar, said that "philosophically" he agrees with the proposal. He cautioned the committee, though, that mediated agreements are wonderful until they need to be enforced.

Under the proposal, if any aspect of the parenting plan was disputed, the court would appoint a "neutral mental health professional" rather than a court investigator to recommend a solution. Guidelines for modifying the parenting plan due to a long distance move or "a substantial change in circumstances that affects the child's physical or emotional health" are also included in the bill.

Fridley resident Jennifer Newstrom expressed her frustration with the present sys-



Shelly Holmgren, Cokato, testifies before the Civil and Family Law Division of the House Judiciary Committee about a child visitation reform bill the panel discussed during an Oct. 15 hearing in Willmar, Minn.

tem, having been on both the winning and losing sides of custody battles over her two children. Currently, she is the non-custodial parent.

Although Newstrom said she likes the idea of making the system less adversarial, she expressed reservations about the court system's ability to locate neutral mental health professionals. "How do you find a neutral person in such a small town?" she asked.



HEALTH

Rural health networks

With tears in her eyes, a woman approached Pam Orth, a certified nurse practitioner, in a grocery store and talked about how she regretted the change in her health care plan. She said she now would have to travel 20 miles rather than a couple of blocks to receive health care.

Orth's anecdote, related before members of the Health and Human Services Finance Division of the House Health and Human Services Committee in Olivia, Minn., distilled the health plan concerns of rural residents in west central Minnesota. The Oct. 16 hearing, part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session, focused on issues in the development of rural health networks.

Orth's employer, Prairie Family Health, was

not included among the woman's providers. So Orth, who had taken a personal interest in the woman's children, would no longer administer to their health care needs, Orth told the division.

Long drives to hospitals or clinics and adverse weather conditions magnified concern about rural managed care issues for many rural citizens. Although transportation to medical appointments is available to Medicaid enrollees, there is rarely public transportation available to other rural residents.

In addition, statistics show that in 1990, Minnesota's rural population included 14.3 percent who were 65 or older; in urban areas, 11.7 percent, according to the Minnesota Department of Health.

So rural health care providers want to circumvent larger entities, such as Blue Cross, and form their own networks.

Dr. Rick Horecka, of Benson, said that a joint venture with Blue Cross had 96 percent of the region's physicians in a 20-county service area. In two years, membership in the venture's health plan has risen from 235 members to 5,184.

"Some members are small, incorporated family farms," Horecka said. "Forty percent did not have healthcare plans before."

Dr. Mike Nagel, of Olivia's Family Eye Center, told the group that health maintenance organizations manage dollars, but not necessarily health care. He said this is why many rural health care providers favor county-based purchasing, whereby a county board or a single entity representing a group of counties selects licensed health plans.

"We expect to be held accountable for the care of our people," Nagel said. "We have to walk down the street and look them in the face."

Jack Keers, Pipestone County commissioner, said control over a provider network is unlikely under the state's Prepaid Medical Assistance Program (PMAP). Under PMAP, the Department of Human Services contracts with licensed health plan companies to provide health care to Medicaid clients in exchange for a fixed, prepaid monthly payment.

Olivia's Eric Snyder, project manager for a combined county-based purchasing program, said four counties — McCloud, Meeker, Pipestone, and Renville — have 5,200 people, 250 providers, and \$40,000 in seed money for their plan. "We're committed," he said.

He told the committee the perception at the state level seems to be that "this is a pilot project."

"This isn't just a dip-our-toe-in-the-water approach," Snyder said.

Under county-based purchasing, a county

board or groups of counties must successfully submit a final proposal for the costs of each enrollee's care.

Rep. Bill Haas (R-Champlin) wanted to know what happens if their county-based purchasing proposal failed. Snyder said they have until July 1, 1998, to develop the plan. If the county decides it cannot handle the chore, it defaults to PMAP.

Rep. Fran Bradley (R-Rochester) assured those who testified, and the 30 others present, that the Legislature is listening. "Don't be afraid to turn back to us," he said.



HIGHER EDUCATION

Living with the merger

Walking the orderly paths of Ridgewater College — A Community and Technical College, arrayed on the heights overlooking Foot Lake in Willmar, you wouldn't guess the college was merged from two bordering campuses of the former Willmar Technical College and Ridgewater Community College.

The merger, which also included Hutchinson Technical College to the southeast, was mandated by the state in 1991 and is now complete except for some program mergers.

Faculty and staff at Ridgewater are worn out from the merger, said College President Mary Retterer, and they are now beset by faculty retirements, pay issues, and technological change.

Retterer, faculty members, and students spoke before a hearing of the Higher Education Finance Division of the House Education Committee Oct. 15. The meeting was part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session sponsored by the Minnesota House of Representatives.

Effective July 1, 1995, the state merged Minnesota's community colleges, technical colleges, and universities under one governing body, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). It was hoped the merger would encourage cooperation between the three types of institutions, allow for easier transferral of class credits, and save money, according to Mary Stanton, MnSCU's assistant director of government relations.

Retterer said Ridgewater met the first two goals, but savings were limited to the elimination of one administrator. Ridgewater's merger cost \$323,000, with only \$88,000 coming from the state, Retterer said. "We still have the same 4,000 students with the same needs. To really get savings, services will need to be cut at some point," she said.

"I would like to tell some people in this room 'I told you so' — that there would be no savings in the merger," said Rep. Hilda Betermann (R-Brandon).

Most students at the hearing said the merger was positive, citing more general education options after the merger, and that previous problems with class credit transfers were corrected. One student disagreed, saying the merger diluted the technical side's focus.

Some west central Minnesota employers voiced the same concern about technical and

community college mergers at a separate hearing of the House Economic Development and International Trade Committee Oct. 16. (See related story, page 8.)

Many founding faculty members of the former community college are coming up for retirement, Retterer said, and the cost of retirements, formerly borne by MnSCU's predecessor, the Community College Board, has been given to the college by MnSCU. Retterer said retirements are eating into budget reserves and the college will have to make cuts soon if the state doesn't come up with extra retirement funding.

The state should also increase base funding for faculty pay, Retterer and faculty members said, partly because MnSCU doesn't have adequate funds to settle faculty contracts. The college also took seven months to find a Health Information Technology instructor because they must compete with high industry salaries for technical people, Retterer said.

Retterer also said students must learn on equipment which is up to industry standards.

Ridgewater student Steve Olson said even his automotive program is heavily dependent on rapidly changing computer technology, unlike in the past.

With current funding and student technology fees, the college can afford to replace computers only once every eight years, Retterer said. "We'd be out of business if we tried to teach on technology from eight years ago," she said.

In light of the college's funding challenges, Rep. Lyndon Carlson (DFL-Crystal) questioned a recent MnSCU directive that Ridgewater and other state colleges withhold 1 percent of their budgets, saying that money should go instead to campuses and student programs.

Judy Borgen, MnSCU's associate vice chancellor for finance, who was not at the hearing, said the 1 percent is being withheld in case MnSCU needs it to help with implementation of its strategic plan. If the state approves funding for the strategic plan next session, the 1 percent will be released back to the colleges, she said. The withholding equals about \$4.2 million across all college budgets, she said.

Emergency demo



Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee observed emergency medical professionals at work at an Oct. 15 mock accident in the parking lot of a Willmar, Minn., school. The exhibition portrayed an accident between a farm tractor and a car, causing injuries to three people. The mock accident allowed law enforcement, fire department, and other emergency response officials to demonstrate how they are equipped and trained to handle such incidents.



HOUSING

Housing for workers

West central Minnesota officials brought the area's housing problems to the attention of members of the Housing and Housing Finance Division of the House Economic Development and International Trade Committee Oct. 16.

The meeting, conducted as part of the

House's Harvest Moon Mini-Session, took place on the Granite Falls campus of the Minnesota West Community and Technical College.

Rick Goodemann, executive director of the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership, said the need for affordable homes and rental housing is an impediment to economic development in west central Minnesota.

"It's frustrating because we've got great economic growth, but we've used up all of the available housing, and there aren't any programs available to help the working poor," he said.

On average, the monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Willmar area is between \$475 and \$500, while hourly wages at Willmar's larger employers average between \$6 and \$9 per hour, Goodemann said. Generally speaking, rent should come to no more than 30 percent of the household income, according to the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency.

Rep. Steve Trimble (DFL-St. Paul) cautioned local government officials against accepting development for development's sake.

"Obviously, [businesses] which are only going to be paying six or seven bucks an hour require some kind of subsidy for any kind of housing," Trimble said. "In the long run, if you're bringing them in, it's not really economic development. It's a drain on you because the subsidies that you're giving are probably more than any economic benefit."

Goodemann told the committee that after the farm crisis, the Willmar area was guilty of taking any jobs they could get. The desperate times made the low-paying, hard-labor jobs in meat processing more attractive. He said that the area has been more selective since 1990, but that hasn't solved all of the problems.

"Even people getting \$10 an hour need some type of subsidy with the escalating cost of housing," he said.

Pat Beyers, economic development director for Granite Falls, told the panel about her city's experience with housing issues. "The city didn't want to get into the housing business," she said. However, interest and ability among private developers to build affordable rental housing has been virtually nonexistent.

Beyers explained that unless non-home-stead taxes are cut and the private sector is able to borrow money at the same rate as the government, unsubsidized new developments will end up renting for \$700-\$800 per month.

Several people addressed the need for employer incentives to stimulate private investment in affordable housing.

Goodemann said that employers, who traditionally have been leery of housing involvement, need to see the bottom line.

Businesses need to see it as an investment, not a contribution, he said.

A bill (HF1395/SF1442) that would grant participating employers a state business income tax credit equal to 50 percent of their cash contributions to employee housing has been referred to the House Taxes Committee for consideration during the 1998 Legislative Session. Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) and Sen. Tracy L. Beckman (DFL-Bricelyn) are sponsors of the proposal.

In addition to a housing shortage, housing discrimination is a concern for the growing minority population and migrant/seasonal workers in the Willmar area.

M. Vicki Olivo, a case investigator and Hispanic community liaison for the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, focused on rural housing discrimination. She has seen her caseload of housing discrimination claims in rural Minnesota double from 1995 to 1997. Of the 137 claims filed so far in 1997, 37 have been based on race, 31 due to public assistance status, and 20 because of familial status.

Olivo explained that because Hispanic family units often include extended family members, it is difficult for a large group to find multi-room housing at a reasonable price. The Hispanic community in the Willmar area now numbers over 2,000.

Don Clasemann, minister of Holy Redeemer Church in Renville, told the committee that the most common question he hears is: "Do you know of a place to rent?" The families who arrive on his doorstep are excited about a pay rate of \$7 an hour plus benefits because that is the best job they've ever had, he said.

"Migrant families live in the worst leftovers,"

Clasemann said, because the growers and companies who recruit these workers are not required to provide or subsidize housing.

Pete Padilla, project coordinator for the Goodwill Easter Seal Migrant Project, also addressed the lack of affordable housing for migrant and seasonal farm workers in the west central region. He said he finds it puzzling that although migrant workers have been coming to the area for over 70 years, their arrival at the beginning of each season is still a "surprise" to many.

"Until we appreciate the work they do, we can't appreciate the people," he said.



LABOR

Prevailing wage law

Armed with presentation-sized charts and graphs, George Hawkins told the House Labor-Management Relations Committee that the construction business is "complex and success depends on numerous factors." But, he said, the Davis-Bacon Act is not one of them.

Hawkins, who is the executive director of Associated Builders and Contractors, was participating in a roundtable discussion on the "Rural Labor Market" Oct. 15. The meeting, held at the Regional Treatment Center in Willmar, Minn., was part of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session sponsored by the Minnesota House of Representatives.

The 1931 federal Davis-Bacon Act, or prevailing wage law, was intended to prevent the undercutting of a region's wage standards.

Product on display



During an Oct. 15 tour, Jeff Guest, of Tyler Industries, shows the House Agriculture and Rural Development Subcommittee one of the finished sprayers that are manufactured at the company's Benson, Minn., plant.

Minnesota's version of that act was passed in 1973 (HF134) after an incident where out-of-state workers earning much less than the prevailing wage were allowed to work in Minnesota.

Hawkins said that competition among contractors is more likely to ensure quality work than a prevailing wage law; it also sets worker wages and benefits, he said.

Sherlan Baker, a Willmar electrical contractor, agreed. He said, "I submit that we have done quality work and paid our employees right, and I don't really see a need for it [a prevailing wage law]."

Competition from other contractors sets the wages and benefits for his employees, he said. Prevailing wage laws ultimately cost taxpayers by increasing bids.

Baker presented examples of bids for the same project that compared prevailing wage bids to bids not subjected to prevailing wage. In each case, the prevailing wage bid was 8 to 10 percent higher.

One of Baker's examples cited the cost of a small electrical project in 1994 for a Litchfield school. The prevailing wage bid was 8.5 percent more, or an extra \$70,464.

Baker said the additional money earned under a prevailing wage bid didn't typically mean a higher profit margin for him. On a prevailing wage job, he said he is forced, under the law, to direct more money to workers in the form of a better hourly wage and/or fringe benefits.

Tom Hesse, of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, asked that the committee reconsider the portion of the 1997 omnibus tax bill that amended a section of education law to provide that any construction project initiated by a school district be covered by the prevailing wage statute.

Hesse, like Baker, provided examples of numerous school construction projects that he said were significantly more expensive because of the law as applied to construction work for school districts.

"School buildings that were built without prevailing wages are not crumbling," he said, arguing that work done before the 1997 provision was quality construction work.

"In 1978, Florida repealed its state prevailing wage law as it applied to schools," Hesse added, "and it saved the taxpayers 17 percent" on subsequent school construction.

Hesse said that without the prevailing wage law the construction industry is better compensated than most hourly professions.

Rep. Bill Hilty (DFL-Finlayson) asked if the available figures to determine a prevailing wage might be misleading. He asked if poor compliance among contractors to provide the state with their prevailing wages didn't skew the available figures.

Erik Oelker, senior labor investigator for the Department of Labor and Industry, said that contractors, the names of whom are obtained through examining building permits, are not mandated to provide the wages paid for a project; submission is voluntary. Though they are sent surveys, they are not required to respond, he said.

Hilty suggested that if more contractors complied, the sampling might yield a more accurate, and perhaps lower, prevailing wage.

Rep. Richard Jefferson (DFL-Mpls), committee chair, asked how compliance might be increased, short of being mandated.

Hawkins said compliance is poor because "companies don't want the government to know what their prevailing wages are." He said contractors fear how their figures might be used and who might see them.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Development commissions

What does Milan, one of dozens of tiny towns that dot the west central Minnesota prairie, do when its only employee, besides the elected officials, is a part-time clerk?

With the number of mandates the state places on cities nowadays, that clerk could have a fairly formidable workload. That's why folks in places like Milan (pop. 353) and other hamlets in west central Minnesota rely on regional development commissions.

That was the upshot of a hearing of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee, which met during the House's Harvest Moon Mini-Session Oct. 15-17 of the Minnesota West Community and Technical College in Granite Falls. The purpose of the meeting was to hear how regional development commissions are serving the small towns that make up the bulk of their membership, said Rep. Ann H. Rest (DFL-New Hope), committee chair.

"The largest line item in my budget is the service we generate in contracts with local governments," said Randy Jorgenson, executive director of the Southwest Regional Development Commission.

Marlowe Nelson, chair of the same commission and a resident of Westbrook (pop. 853), agreed. "We can't afford to have somebody sitting in our offices to do some of these things we need done. We [who live in the tiny towns] contract with a regional development commission to do these things for us because there's no one else [with] their expertise to do them. It's worked very well," he said.

Welfare reform and health care reform are common areas of assistance from the development commissions, he said, as are matching

funds, business assistance, census assistance, economic development, conferences, training, and transportation.

Other services provided by the Southwest Regional (Region 8) Development Commission include disaster relief, solid waste disposal, housing, and a rural resource sharing partnership.

That's the same with the Region 6E (Mid-Minnesota) Development Commission, said Sherron Reilly, chair. "Mid-Minnesota is very important to our communities. We consider ourselves a source of resources," she said, from day care to services for senior citizens.

Gene Hippe, executive director of the same commission, agreed. "We've worked with townships, we've worked with cities, and we do things for them," he said.

For example, the city of New London (pop. 971) recently had a problem with contamination of its water supply, and the commission helped with that. "We don't have any consultants out in rural Minnesota. The small communities need assistance, and they can look to consulting firms, or they can look to us," he said.

However, officials didn't want to give legislators the notion that the commissions are a bottomless pit of services for the small communities. "We have gotten the point across that you can't do justice to every request that comes in. We do say, 'No'; we do say, 'Get in line.' They also have the prerogative of going out on their own," Hippe said.

The committee also heard from the mayors of two cities in the area, Robert Burns and Ronald Anderson, of Marshall and Milan, respectively.

Marshall (pop. 12,023), even though it's considered a regional center in southwestern Minnesota for business and employment, uses the regional development commissions. "We don't have a professional planner on city staff" to administer grants, Burns said.

Minority issues are becoming important in southwestern Minnesota with an increase in Hispanics working at the many food-processing operations in the region. City officials have taken cultural diversity training through the Southwest Regional Development Commission, Burns said.

Anderson said the Region 6E (Mid-Minnesota) Regional Development Commission helped them redo their zoning code. "If we'd have hired our city lawyer, [the cost] would have been astronomical. And they did a good job on it."

The regional development commissions get most of their money from a mix of local tax levies, local government aid, grants, and loans.

Rest said she was impressed by the work the

commissions do. "I'm really impressed with the way your cities work together with large regional entities." Her perception was that the cities want to keep things the way they are.

"The future is now," she said.



SPORTS

The stadium debate

The setting for the latest chapter in the stadium debate was different, but the action was familiar.

Arguments for and against state financing for a new stadium have echoed in Capitol corridors for months, but the Harvest Moon Mini-Session provided an opportunity for new voices to be heard.

"I'm ready to wave goodbye to the Twins. I'll even help them pack," said Alexia Person, a Willmar resident among the audience in a less-than-full auditorium. "I will smile as I say goodbye."

Person and other Greater Minnesota residents aired their opinions about the proposed Twins stadium deal during an Oct. 16 roundtable discussion of the issue conducted at Ridgewater Community and Technical College in Willmar.

Members of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee and House members who served on the Stadium Task Force crowded on to the auditorium stage to hear from the public.

What legislators heard in Willmar was, in most cases, similar to what they've heard in St. Paul. One woman said she feels no connection to millionaire athletes and billionaire team owners. One man said he can't see spending money on a stadium when funds are needed for basic services such as police protection and highway construction. Another man said the Twins are an asset to the entire state and ought to be protected.

Fourteen members of the public took turns at the microphone, each making his or her case for or against the stadium, while lawmakers did more listening than talking.

Stadium opponents outnumbered stadium proponents among those who spoke, but only by a slight margin.

"I don't see us building a stadium for the Twins. I see us building a stadium for Minnesota," said Ken Warner, a Sauk Rapids resident. "It's a state project. It's for all of us who live here, and we can use it for many different things."

Rep. Loren Jennings (DFL-Harris), who served as the co-chair of the Stadium Task Force, made the case in support of the stadium financing proposal approved by House and Senate members on the task force.

The plan calls for the state to provide \$250 million for construction of a new Twins stadium, with the money coming from slot machines at Canterbury Park horse racing track, a share of the state lottery proceeds, and user fees. The city of Minneapolis would be expected to kick in about \$50 million for site acquisition and construction of a parking facility. The rest of the projected \$411 million price tag for the Twins stadium would have to come from the team.

"The citizens of Minnesota have spoken loud and clear that we are not to use tax money," Jennings said. "If you don't want to pull on the arm on a slot machine at Canterbury or you don't want to play the lottery, your cost will be zero."

But those in opposition to state funding for a stadium were not swayed.

Spicer resident Marilee Dorn told lawmakers that she has never been to a Twins game and has no intention of going to one in the future. She said that she feels no connection to millionaire professional athletes, most of whom earn more in one year than the entire budget for parks and recreation in Willmar.

"Where are our priorities as a state and as a



Twins great Harmon Killebrew signed an autograph for a young fan during an Oct. 16 rally in Willmar, Minn., to show support for construction of a new baseball stadium. The rally was organized by Minnesota Wins, a pro-stadium lobbying group.

community?" Dorn said. "I hope that our governor hears that we are opposed to calling a special session to deal with this. Please do not spend any more time and money on this issue."

Willmar attorney George Hulstrand questioned whether the task force plan would provide enough revenue to prevent the state from dipping into tax funds to pay for the stadium. And Hulstrand raised concerns about the precedent that could be set by a state-funded stadium deal.

"What's going to stop every other group from holding you folks hostage? Hulstrand asked.

Willmar resident Rolf Peterson recalled the "euphoria" when the Twins won the World Series in 1987 and 1991, and he reminded lawmakers of what is at stake in the stadium debate.

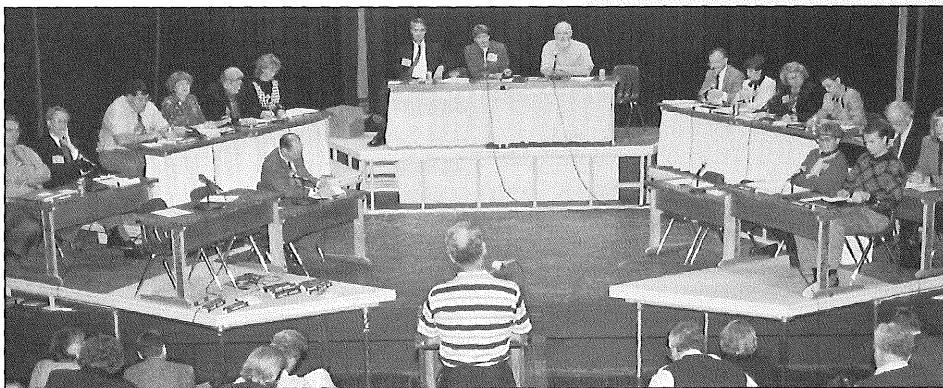
"You have 45 days to address this issue or the Twins will be gone after next season," Peterson said.

Twins owner Carl Pohlad has signed a letter of intent to sell the Twins to a North Carolina businessman if the Legislature does not take action by Nov. 30 to authorize funding for a new stadium.

Mike Tanner, who works for the Willmar radio station that carries Twins broadcasts, said the debate over the stadium has been colored by "personal resentment" toward billionaire Pohlad, and Tanner urged lawmakers to put aside such feelings.

"If the Twins leave, there will immediately be groups formed to get baseball back," Tanner said. "It's going to cost you a whole lot more to get a team back here than to keep the one you have right now."

Hours after conclusion of the roundtable discussion of the stadium issue, Minnesota Wins, a lobbying group in support of a stadium, sponsored a pro-stadium rally at Willmar High School. About 200 people attended the rally, where Twins greats Tony Oliva and Harmon Killebrew greeted the crowd and signed autographs.



Members of the House Local Government and Metropolitan Affairs Committee and House members who served on the Stadium Task Force listen to testimony from the public during an Oct. 16 hearing on the stadium issue. Citizens who spoke at the hearing were almost evenly split between stadium proponents and opponents.



TECHNOLOGY

Crime on the Internet

Lawmakers got an update on efforts to fight "hacking," "phreaking," and other high-tech crimes during an Oct. 16 meeting of the House Judiciary Committee at Minnesota West Community and Technical College in Granite Falls, Minn.

Eagan Police Department Detective Doug Matteson presented committee members with a reality check on computer and credit card security by demonstrating on-line the criminal capabilities of hackers.

Matteson said law enforcement lacks the trained specialists and high-tech equipment needed to properly recover and analyze evidence.

"Law enforcement is always behind the criminal," he said. "The Internet criminal is smarter than we are and that's real frustrating when we want to put a bad guy away and we can't do it."

Today's computer crimes of chief concern include hacking, which involves tampering with electronic data through unauthorized access to computer systems, and phreaking, which involves illegally capturing cellular telephone electronic serial numbers, mobile identification numbers, and telephone numbers.

Industry estimates show that cellular telephone service providers experience annual losses of about \$600 million as a result of phreaking. The crime is perpetrated through the use of scanners and computer software that allow criminals to intercept data from cellular phones and use the information on illegal clone units.

Thomas F. Pursell, senior counsel to the Minnesota attorney general, told committee members of the lack of security surrounding credit card transactions on the Internet.

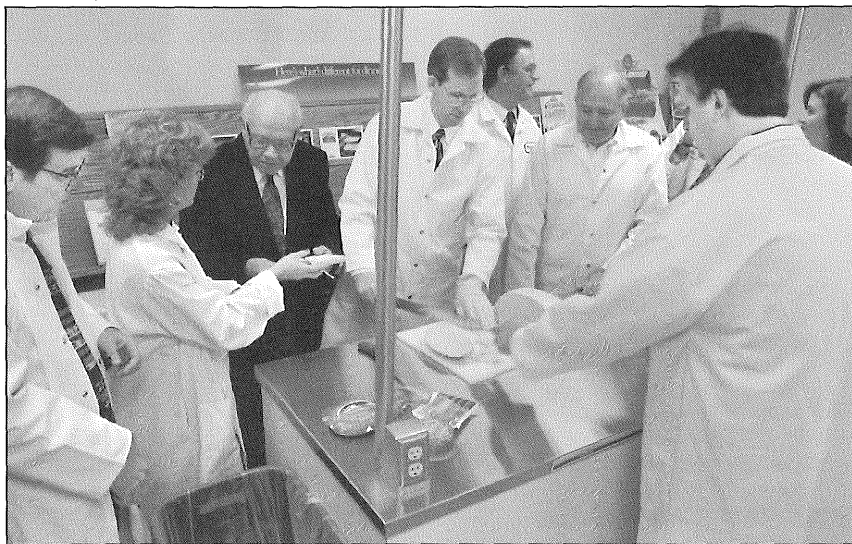
"One of the big issues in Internet commerce generally is the issue of payment systems," Pursell said. "[There is] no lack of ways that people are willing to accept money, but the question for consumers is the security of transmitting that kind of information back and forth on what are unsecured computer networks.

"When consumer confidence gets to the point where people accept the level of security that is out there, then the amount of Internet commerce, and really, the amount of Internet crime that we see, too, will very likely explode."

Pursell said the attorney general's office has demonstrated foresight in Internet consumer protection issues.

Attorney General Hubert H. "Skip" Humphrey III co-chaired an Internet working

Turkey tour



Members of the House Agriculture Committee donned white lab coats for an Oct. 16 tour of the Willmar, Minn., Jennie-O plant. Lawmakers met with officials from the company, which is Willmar's largest employer.

group of the National Association of Attorneys General, which last year produced a report on gambling on the Internet. The report clarifies the need for changes to federal law, specifically the Wire Communications Act.

The report states that Internet gambling "threatens to disrupt each state's careful balancing of its own public welfare and fiscal concerns by making gambling available across state and national boundaries with little or no regulatory control."

In a 1995 speech before the Federal Trade Commission in Washington, D.C., Humphrey identified several practical and legal challenges to Internet law enforcement, among them the jurisdictional questions stemming from the Internet's worldwide reach and the anonymity of network users.

"The difficulty of identifying and locating people is one of the two most serious obstacles we've encountered to prosecuting crime and fraud perpetrated over computer networks," Humphrey said.

The Legislature passed a law in 1997 designed to combat the ills that can accompany on-line anonymity. The law grants county attorneys administrative subpoena power to obtain "the names and addresses of subscribers of private computer networks including Internet service providers or computer bulletin board systems."

Humphrey tested the issue of jurisdictional boundaries in a recent case against Granite Gate Resorts, a sports betting firm based in Las Vegas and Belize. The Court of Appeals ruled in September that the state does have the right to sue because Granite Gates demonstrated clear intent to reach consumers in Minnesota.

Pursell read part of the court's decision to the committee: "We are mindful that the Internet is a communication medium that lacks historical parallel in the potential extent of its reach and that regulation across jurisdictions may implicate fundamental First Amendment concerns . . . it will undoubtedly take some time to determine the precise balance between the rights of those who use the Internet to disseminate information and the powers of the jurisdictions in which we see the computers are located. . . ."



TRANSPORTATION

Greater Minnesota by air

Brian Ryks, manager of the St. Cloud Regional Airport, reported a nearly 100 percent annual increase in passengers before members of a House panel focusing on local air service to Greater Minnesota Oct. 16.

The House Transportation and Transit Committee met in a hangar at the Willmar Airport during the Minnesota House of Representatives Harvest Moon Mini-Session Oct. 15-17.

In contrast to Ryks testimony, municipal airports in Fergus Falls, Mankato, and Worthington have lost scheduled air service to the Twin Cities in the past two years. Stressing the importance of this service to the local economy, Bruce Jaeger, Willmar Airport manager, told the committee that "there are two ways to reach Willmar: car and plane. There is no train anymore."

In view of this dilemma, the 1997 Legisla-



The House Transportation and Transit Committee hears testimony about commercial air service in Greater Minnesota during an Oct. 16 hearing in an airport hangar in Willmar, Minn.

ture approved a program designed to increase usage at rural airports that have scheduled air service or wish to establish such service.

Since July 1, the Department of Transportation's Office of Aeronautics has visited each of the cities for input into the grant process and development of marketing materials.

Ideally, the result for all struggling airports in Greater Minnesota would be similar to Ryks' story for St. Cloud.

Mesaba Aviation, operating as Northwest Airlink, began serving St. Cloud in the summer of 1993, with four daily arrivals and departures between St. Cloud and Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. In the first 18 months, St. Cloud averaged 749 passengers monthly.

In 1995, the second full year of operation, the monthly passenger total dropped to 679. Ryks cited poor airline performance as the cause. He told the committee there had been an average of 20 flight cancellations per month that year.

"This drop in passengers is evidence that travelers will not tolerate unreliable service and will drive to Minneapolis-St. Paul International rather than take a chance that their flight may be canceled," he said.

Ryks detailed an improvement in service in 1996, after a change in Mesaba management. Passenger traffic increased to 755 monthly.

"This year," Ryks said, "with the introduction of larger, more comfortable aircraft, and implementation of a 'Fly Local' promotional campaign in late March . . . enplanements have increased dramatically."

October enplanements indicated the airport might exceed 2,000 passengers for the first time in any month. The total for October 1996 was 933 passengers.

"This in itself is proof," Ryks said, "that affordable and reliable air service combined

with the use of larger aircraft will yield profitable results."

Ryks asked the committee to encourage Northwest Airlines to maintain the current airfare structure in St. Cloud.

Bob Anderson, president of the Local Air Service Action Committee (LASAC), had a different story to tell.

Before airline deregulation in 1978, he said, DC-9 planes flew into International Falls. Since deregulation, "large airlines moved to more lucrative locales."

Anderson cited the importance of air service to places such as International Falls. He said it currently costs \$478 to fly round-trip to Minneapolis on one of the seven daily summer flights to the Twin Cities.

"The public cannot do that," he said. "They cannot just pick up and fly to the Twin Cities . . . and we have no other type of public transportation. The buses do not run there anymore."

He said people who need to reach Twin Cities' medical facilities for health care are left in a difficult position.

Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar) asked what International Falls had done to recruit competition in International Falls. Anderson said competition was not the answer as it would probably ensure "neither of the airlines could make it" financially.

Lyle Mehrkens, of the MnDOT Aeronautics Division of the Department of Transportation, told the committee about the Minnesota Air Service Marketing Program that began July 1 in cooperation with the LASAC. The \$400,000 appropriated over the biennium is being used to promote local airports.

To date, a slogan has been selected. Television spots are soon to be filmed. And grants of \$56,600 have been approved for Bemidji, Brainerd, Fairmont, Grand Rapids, and Hibbing.

Mehrkens also said a tool developed by the Bloomington-based Kiehl Hendrickson Group will allow communities to track the annual enplanements needed to support 30-passenger aircraft.

In 1996, Northwest Airlink replaced its 19-seat planes with 30-seat planes, making it more difficult for smaller communities to fill flights.

On the road again

They need more roads and better roads in west central Minnesota, and if members of the House didn't believe it before, they saw and felt proof of it on Highway 12, a primarily two-lane highway, from just outside Wayzata all the way to Willmar.

Members of the finance division of the House Transportation and Transit Committee, along with Rep. Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston), chair, met during the first day of the Harvest Moon Mini-Session at the Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building in Willmar.

The mini-session began Oct. 15, and members who got there from the Twin Cities had to take Highway 12, noted for its curves and heavy traffic.

Some companies have left the area because of the lack of quality transportation, said Rick Maursetter of the Transportation Funding Coalition, a group of 24 organizations and associations interested in having a sound transportation system in Minnesota. "We've got seriously unmet needs," he said.

Maursetter said a primary goal for any transportation system should be "to keep business moving. I think the public needs to spend money on our transportation system," he said, referring to a gasoline tax.

"So this is one fair way to pay for public transportation through a user fee. I think a dedicated user fee is still the best way to fund our roads," Maursetter said.

He then summed up what he believes would be the result. "A strong, well-maintained transportation system that really serves Minnesota."

It's estimated that the area needs \$131 million in road improvements, said Dave Trooien, of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

Another two-lane highway leaving and entering Willmar is Highway 23. Bob Dols, a member of the Highway 23 Coalition, told the committee that west central Minnesota is the only direction in the state without a four-lane highway leaving the Twin Cities metropolitan area. "If we are to attract business and people to live here, we absolutely need a four-lane highway," Dols said.

He added that Willmar is the only city of its size without a four-lane highway. "Anything that you could do that will help Highway 23, we would appreciate," Dols said.

The committee also took the time to hear

about railroads from Redwood County Commissioner Gene Short. If you're having trouble moving your merchandise by truck, then the rails might help, he said. One railroad car equals 3.8 semi-trailers, and since it costs

\$3,025 per mile to maintain state roads every year, he said it might behoove the state to find money to increase MnDOT's railroad rehabilitation fund.

In its 119-year history, the town of Olivia was never less mellow than during Centennial Corn Days in 1978. "Grease" was the word as Olivia Newton-John starred in that Hollywood hit. She also was a publicity magnet as a Grammy-winning singer.

And thanks to a semi-facetious offer, the voice behind "Have You Ever Been Mellow" led this west central Minnesota town's Centennial parade, which splashed the community of 3,200 citizens onto the front pages of the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* and the *Minneapolis StarTribune*.

Dave Pedersen, editor of the *Olivia Times*, jokingly wanted to thank Newton-John for spreading the name of Olivia. So he mailed a Corn Days invitation to the Australian-born singer. Delighted to learn a town carried her name, she accepted.

Actually, the town was named for the daughter of the first railway depot agent in the region, but by 1978, it was better known as home to super-model Cheryl Tiegs' grandmother.

Just before Newton-John led the parade on the rainy afternoon of July 22, 1978, the sun broke through. Clad in a bright red Western shirt, blue jeans, and a 10-gallon hat, she rode a dark brown Arabian horse through town, then spoke to a crowd of thousands of admirers.

The publicity aftermath came cheaply. New-

ton-John paid for her jet flight from Los Angeles to Willmar. Her only demand: two dozen ears of homegrown corn and a loaf of homemade bread.

During the Oct. 14 appearance of Thomas Jefferson impersonator Clay Jenkinson in the House chamber, several House members welcomed him, including House Minority Leader Steve Sviggum (R-Kenyon), who tried to emphasize to students from Northeast Middle School in Minneapolis that anyone could make it in America.

"You can have red hair — or no hair," Sviggum said, pointing to his balding colleague, House Majority Leader Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda). Winter laughed and looked behind him, wondering who Sviggum could be referring to.

On the far western edge of the Twin Cities metropolitan area lies the growing hamlet of Hutchinson, site of a hearing and a tour at the recent Harvest Moon Mini-Session held in Willmar and surrounding areas.

Almost 50 miles from Willmar, Hutchinson is in McLeod County and home to a 3M plant, which was toured by members of the House

Environment and Natural Resources Committee. (See related story, page 11.)

Folks in Hutchinson think of their town as a "charming, 1950s kind of town," according to its web site, with a Main Street full of family businesses, "mom and pop diners," and lots of single-family homes with swings, slides, and sandboxes.

The largest employers in this town of 12,927 are Hutchinson Technology, 3M, Hutchinson Community Hospital, Hudson Manufacturing and Sales, and the Hutchinson Medical Center.

Unemployment is 2.9 percent.

Kandiyohi County's history includes the political equivalent of a divorce and reconciliation.

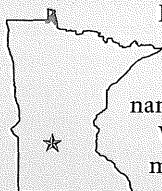
Around the time Minnesota became a state in 1858, the residents of what was known as Davis County petitioned to have two new counties created in its place. The state obliged. Monongalia County in the north and Kandiyohi County in the south were born.

But it wasn't long before residents of both new counties realized that two units of government were not needed to manage an area with a total population of less than 5,000.

Residents voted overwhelmingly to merge the counties, and in 1870, the current Kandiyohi County was established.



NOTES



Leon Willmar may never have seen the Minnesota town that bears his name.

Willmar was a Belgian man who worked as an agent for European bondholders of the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company. It was another railroad official, George Becker, who chose Willmar's name for the new town.

The railroad played the lead role in the development in the town of Willmar.

Willmar Township was platted in 1869, but at that time, the area's sparse business activity served only the crews

Do you know?

working on the first railroad line in that part of the state.

On New Year's Eve of the same year, the first train arrived in the fledgling town, setting off a spurt of development beginning the next year. By 1874, Willmar village was incorporated.

The railroad continued to fuel the growth of the town in the decades ahead. Willmar became a hub for the Great Northern Railway, making the town the commercial center for the area.

Early historical accounts of the area agree that Leon Willmar never visited the town

named for him. However, photographs culled from railroad company archives show the man among a group of railroad company employees in Breckenridge, Minn., making it clear he had at least passed through west central Minnesota.

It was Leon Willmar's son, Paul, who had a connection — albeit a short-lived one — to the town. During the 1870s, Paul Willmar ran the so-called Willmar Farm on the current site of the Willmar Regional Treatment Center, just north of downtown.

In 1881, however, Paul Willmar sold out and returned to his native Belgium.

House suffers loss ...

Otremba remained dedicated despite personal battle

Rep. Ken Otremba (DFL-Long Prairie) died Sept. 4, after a battle with liver cancer that sapped his strength but couldn't keep him from his work. He was 48.

The second-term lawmaker stayed on the job this year despite his struggles with the final stages of the disease. During the 1997 Legislative Session, Otremba received treatment to fight the cancer and continued to carry a full legislative workload.

After the session adjourned, he was hospitalized in early June and lapsed into a coma for several days. Still, he recovered enough strength to attend both special sessions held this summer.

"It's good to be back," Otremba said during the 1997 First Special Session, held June 26. "I lost a couple of weeks. I have no idea what happened to them."

House members responded with a loud and lengthy standing ovation. "He was loved and respected by everyone in the Legislature," said House Speaker Phil Carruthers (DFL-Brooklyn Center). "His passing is a real loss for the people of his district and the entire state. He was a hardworking, dedicated, and courageous legislator."

Otremba's battle with cancer stretches back more than three and a half years, to the days before he decided to seek a seat in the House. In fact, Otremba was recovering from cancer surgery months before the 1994 election when he received a call from former Rep. Rick Krueger. Krueger had decided not to seek a seventh term, and he suggested that Otremba run for the position.

A dairy farmer, former township supervisor, and six-year Todd County commissioner, Otremba carefully considered the idea before jumping into a tough race.

"I didn't know if I was going to run," Otremba said after his 1994 election victory. "I went to church on Sunday, and, sure enough, the sermon was about service to people. So I decided to run."

Otremba concentrated on agricultural issues and health care concerns during his time in the



Rep. Ken Otremba, center, received an ovation from his fellow House members when he attended the June 26, 1997, special session.

Legislature. This year, he also worked to make sure compassion for the poor and unfortunate was not lost in the welfare reform debate.

"He was truly one of the most decent and honest people that I have ever had the privilege of serving with in the Minnesota House of Representatives," said Rep. Steven Wenzel (DFL-Little Falls). "He was an individual with great personal integrity, and he cared deeply about the people he represented."

Wenzel, who chairs the House Agriculture Committee, worked with Otremba on many agricultural issues and appointed him to serve as chair of the Subcommittee on Dairy and Livestock.

Otremba focused on making policy decisions that would help family farmers and rural communities, Wenzel said.

"He was quiet and low-key, but beneath his quiet demeanor was a firm resolve and a deep commitment to people and their problems," Wenzel said.

This year, Otremba took early morning can-

cer treatments, so he could arrive on time for 8 a.m. legislative committee meetings.

"He didn't miss any votes that I'm aware of," Wenzel said. "He was resolved in reporting for work each and every day."

Otremba was a Navy radar technician, and he served two tours of duty in Vietnam. He was a dairy farmer for 20 years, and he got his start in politics by serving as a Reynolds Township supervisor.

In the House, he represented District 11B, which includes Todd County and parts of Douglas, Otter Tail, Stearns, and Wadena counties.

"He will be remembered for his impressive work ethic and dedication to public service, especially in the face of personal adversity," Gov. Arne Carlson said.

Otremba is survived by his wife, Mary Ellen, and their four children. Other survivors include his mother, nine brothers, two sisters, and his first cousin, Rep. Steve Dehler (R-St. Joseph).

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Members, fairgoers get together at House exhibit

The Minnesota State Fair is like no other event. Where else can a person count vegetable oil as an essential nutrient, wear a pair of pink paper pig ears, and discuss political hot potatoes with members of the Legislature?

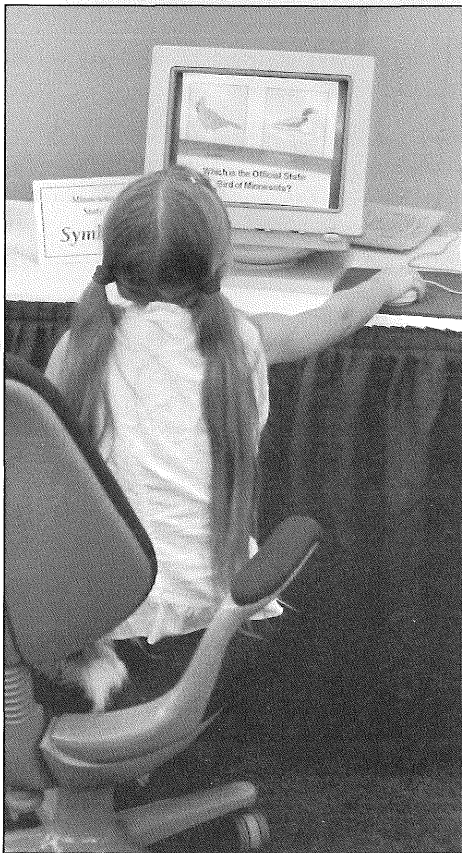
Nearly 50 members of the House shook hands and talked about important issues with the people they serve at the House of Representatives' 1997 Minnesota State Fair exhibit.

"It was a tremendous opportunity to hear firsthand from the citizens of the state," said Rep. Ruth Johnson (DFL-St. Peter), who is serving her first term in the House. "I even ran into a few of my constituents, even though it's a good distance from home and there were thousands of people at the fair."

Johnson spent a couple of hours talking with people from across the state, as did the other House members who appeared at the House booth during the 12-day run of the state fair from Aug. 21 to Sept. 1. Speaker of the House Phil Carruthers (DFL-Brooklyn



Rep. Peggy Leppik, left, was among the many House members who spent time discussing the issues with fairgoers at the House exhibit.



The Minnesota State Symbols Game displayed sets of pictures for each of the 12 state symbols, and children were asked to choose the correct one. This girl ponders the question, "Which is the Official State Bird of Minnesota?"

Center) and House Majority Leader Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda) were among those who worked at the exhibit.

Lawmakers heard from citizens concerned about a number of issues such as education spending, highway speed limits, and drunk driving laws. But much of the conversation focused on a debate that has been in the headlines all year.

"The one issue that was most talked about was the stadium," said Rep. Elaine Harder (R-Jackson), who is a second-term lawmaker from the southwestern part of the state.

People weighed in with all kinds of opinions about proposals to finance construction of a new baseball stadium for the Minnesota Twins.

"The fair provides a chance to view a cross section of the population," Harder said. "It was interesting that [they were] giving me the same message on the stadium as I'm hearing at home: They don't want to put up the money."

Johnson heard similar sentiments during her visit to the fair.

"What people wanted to talk about was the stadium, and the overwhelming opinion was that no state tax dollars should be spent [on a stadium]," Johnson said.

When not busy talking to the lawmakers on hand, House exhibit visitors could fill out a 12-question survey that gathered opinions on issues including professional sports and stadiums, the use of lottery funds, and a proposal to lower the state's blood-alcohol limit for oper-

ating a motor vehicle. (See poll results on the next page)

Also, fairgoers could test their knowledge of Minnesota laws and history on computerized quizzes provided to educate and entertain.

The House of Representatives exhibit, as usual, was next to the Minnesota Senate exhibit in the Education Building.

When lawmakers weren't discussing politics at the House exhibit, they joined the record crowds enjoying all the state fair has to offer.

Harder, who visited the fair over the Labor Day weekend, and her husband, Ronald, are active supporters of 4-H, and he was an auctioneer at the 4-H livestock auction at this year's fair.

"The main reason we go is the people," Harder said. "And we always check out the 4-H exhibit."

County fairs and community festivals are part of the life of any elected official, but for most state officeholders there is something different about the state fair.

"I do go to a lot of fairs," Johnson said. "The thing I like about the state fair is the diversity of people and the variety of exhibits. The state fair is well-named: The Great Minnesota Get-Together." 🐷



1997 state fair poll results . . .

More than 8,100 fairgoers register their o

1997 House members who worked at the fair

Bruce Anderson (R-Buffalo Township)
 Lynda Boudreau (R-Faribault)
 Fran Bradley (R-Rochester)
 Phil Carruthers (DFL-Brooklyn Center)
 Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley)
 Andy Dawkins (DFL-St. Paul)
 Jerry Dempsey (R-Hastings)
 John Dorn (DFL-Mankato)
 Geri Evans (DFL-New Brighton)
 Matt Entenza (DFL-St. Paul)
 Betty Folliard (DFL-Hopkins)
 Edwina Garcia (DFL-Richfield)
 Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville)
 Bill Haas (R-Champlin)
 Elaine Harder (R-Jackson)
 Kris Hasskamp (DFL-Crosby-Ironton)
 Mike Jaros (DFL-Duluth)
 Alice Johnson (DFL-Spring Lake Park)
 Ruth Johnson (DFL-St. Peter)
 Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar)
 Phyllis Kahn (DFL-Mpls)
 Henry Kalis (DFL-Walters)
 Luanne Koskinen (DFL-Coon Rapids)
 Peg Larsen (R-Lakeland)
 Peggy Leppik (R-Golden Valley)
 Arlon Lindner (R-Corcoran)
 Mark Mahon (DFL-Bloomington)
 Betty McCollum (DFL-North St. Paul)
 Mary Jo McGuire (DFL-Falcon Heights)
 Carol Molnau (R-Chaska)
 Joe Mullery (DFL-Mpls)
 Bud Nornes (R-Fergus Falls)
 Mark Olson (R-Big Lake)
 Dennis Ozment (R-Rosemount)
 Erik Paulsen (R-Eden Prairie)
 Gene Pelowski Jr. (DFL-Winona)
 Thomas Pugh (DFL-South St. Paul)
 Ann H. Rest (DFL-New Hope)
 Jim Rhodes (R-St. Louis Park)
 Marty Seifert (R-Marshall)
 Kathleen Sekhon (DFL-Burns Township)
 Nora Slawik (DFL-Maplewood)
 Loren Solberg (DFL-Bovey)
 Doug Swenson (R-Forest Lake)
 Howard Swenson (R-Nicollet)
 Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior)
 Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover)
 Jim Tunheim (DFL-Kennedy)
 Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda)

Minnesotans want to crack down on drunk drivers, toughen up regulations for personal watercraft use, and keep public dollars out of the pro sports picture, according to the Legislature's unofficial opinion poll conducted during the 12 days of the 1997 Minnesota State Fair.

More than 8,100 people stopped by the House and Senate booths at the state fair and completed the 12-question poll. The poll gave the public a chance to sound off about issues of concern to the 1997-98 Legislature.

Results of the poll were tallied after the state fair concluded Sept. 1, 1997.

Here's a look at the poll questions and the responses from fairgoers.

1. Would you support a reduction in the definition of legal drunkenness for driving while intoxicated, from 0.10 percent to 0.08 percent blood-alcohol content?

Yes	58.1%	....	4,588
No	36.6%	....	2,890
Undecided	5.3%	.....	416

2. Currently, the state funds about two-thirds of K-12 education costs, with local property taxes picking up most of the remaining expenses. In order to cover a larger portion of K-12 education costs and lower reliance on local property taxes for schools, should the

Legislature raise statewide taxes (such as income and sales taxes)?

Yes	37.4%	....	2,937
No	51.1%	....	4,016
Undecided	11.5%	.....	905

3. The state recently adopted a law requiring statewide testing for K-12 students. Should schools that achieve better results on statewide tests receive additional funding as a reward for better performance?

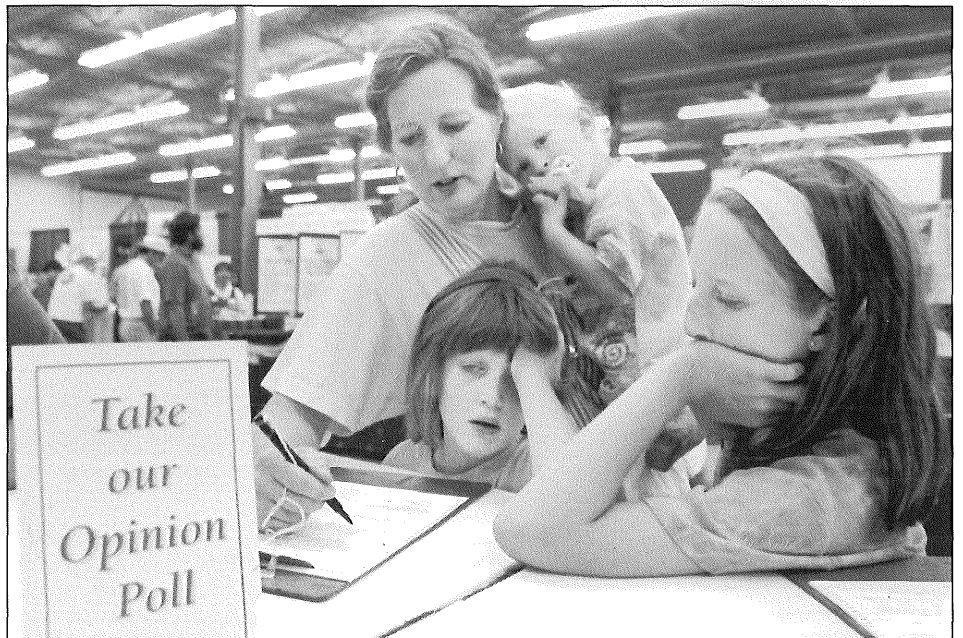
Yes	31.3%	....	2,455
No	59.2%	....	4,653
Undecided	9.5%	.....	749

4. Should the Legislature further regulate the use of personal watercraft on Minnesota lakes and rivers?

Yes, numerous changes	58.2%	....	4,591
Yes, minor changes	19.5%	....	1,537
No	13.4%	....	1,057
Undecided	8.9%	.....	699

5. Would you support an increase in the current state gasoline tax?

Yes, but only for highway construction	21.9%	1,714
Yes, but only for public transit	27.7%	2,160
No	46.3%	3,609
Undecided	4.1%	323



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 Public Information Office at
 (612) 296-2146

No matter how weary fairgoers might have been, those who wanted to register their opinions on issues that may come before the Legislature during the next session usually found the energy to do so.

Opinions at House and Senate booths

6. Would you be willing to pay for an increase in your monthly utility bill in order to implement a "green electricity" program that would help to increase the use of renewable energy sources (such as wind power or biomass)?

Yes, if the increase is minimal (less than 10%) 36.0% 2,824
 Yes, if the increase is moderate (10% to 20%) 11.5% 903
 Yes, even if there is a significant increase (greater than 20%) 5.2% 413
 No 41.5% 3,266
 Undecided 5.8% 452

7. Should a private corporation operate one or more of our state correctional facilities, if private management would lower the cost of running our correctional system?

Yes, private sector should run all correctional facilities 26.0% 2,031
 Yes, but there should be a mixed public and privately run correctional system 34.6% 2,713
 No 27.4% 2,149
 Undecided 12.0% 945

8. Should the state take an active role in preventing professional athletic teams from leaving Minnesota?

Yes, if cost to taxpayers is minimal 19.3% 1,529
 Yes, if cost to taxpayers is moderate 5.7% 455
 Yes, even if cost to taxpayers is significant 3.0% 241
 No 70.0% 5,522
 Undecided 2.0% 148

9. If there is a surplus in the state's budget, the money should be used primarily to:

Decrease income taxes 18.5% 1,358
 Decrease sales taxes 2.8% 204
 Decrease property taxes 15.1% 1,107
 Increase funding for education 27.6% 2,021
 Increase funding for health and social programs 7.1% 524
 Increase funding for transportation 2.3% 170
 Pay off long-term debt ahead of schedule 12.8% 939
 Provide a one-time tax rebate 13.8% 1,010

10. Should a portion of lottery proceeds continue to be dedicated to the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund for wildlife, water, and other conservation projects throughout Minnesota? If yes, for how long? (Currently, 40 percent goes toward the trust fund.)

Yes, permanently 58.0% 4,423
 Yes, for 50 years 4.9% 373
 Yes, for 20 years 12.8% 978
 No, the proceeds should be used for other purposes 14.5% 1,110
 Undecided 9.8% 752

11. Should some juvenile court proceedings be open to the public? (Under current law, most of these proceedings and the records they generate are closed to the public.)

Yes, in cases of child abuse and neglect 12.0% 909
 Yes, in cases involving juvenile offenders 14.4% 1,086
 Yes, for both of the above 31.8% 2,409
 No 29.9% 2,266
 Undecided 11.9% 903

12. Would you support allowing agricultural production of industrial hemp in Minnesota? (Industrial hemp could be used for such purposes as clothing, rope, or paper production.)

Yes 62.9% 4,815
 No 20.6% 1,575
 Undecided 16.5% 1,266

Note: The Legislature's survey is informal and unscientific. It is simply a measurement of the opinions expressed by those who took the time to fill out a questionnaire while visiting the House and Senate booths in the Education Building.

The main purpose in conducting this opinion poll was to familiarize fairgoers with some of the issues that recently have been discussed by the Legislature and may be debated during the upcoming Legislative Session.

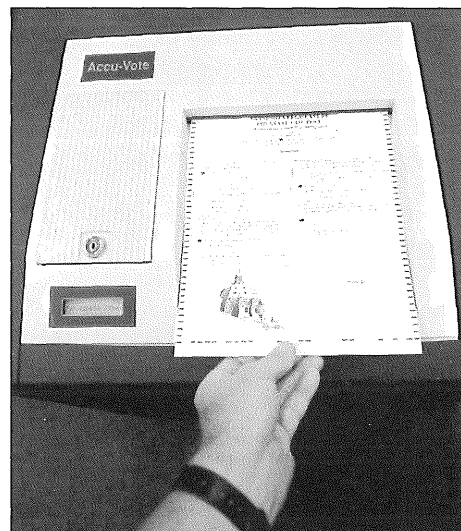
1997 Senate 'Interactive' Stadium Questionnaire Results

A computer poll devoted to the Twins stadium issue was conducted to gather the opinions of Minnesotans who visited the Senate booth at the Minnesota State Fair. More than 3,500 people completed the survey. Here are the results.

Percentage of respondents who:

- support installation of slot machines at Canterbury Park to pay for a new stadium 11.5% 411
- support an increase in cigarette taxes to pay for a stadium 12.0% 426
- support creation of a state run casino to finance a stadium 14.1% 502
- do not support any state financing of a stadium project 62.4% 2,217

Note: The Senate's computer poll was unscientific. It was simply a measurement of the opinions expressed by those who took the time to complete the questionnaire while visiting the Senate booth in the Education Building.



After fairgoers marked their answers on the 12-question opinion poll, they slipped them into an optic scanner to be tabulated.

Where to find information

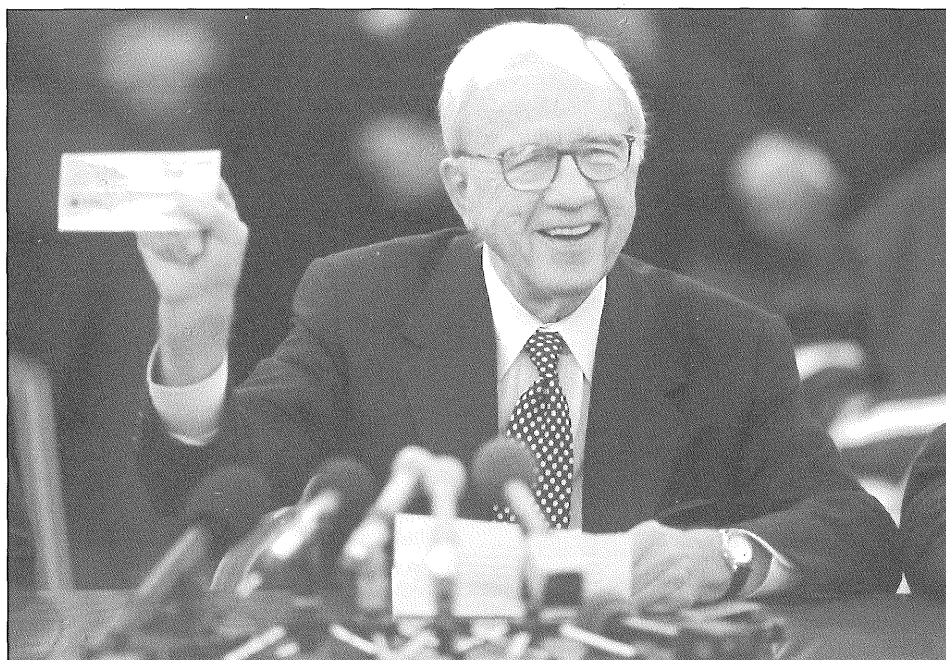
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This nonpartisan office provides: committee meeting schedules; legislator information; and publications, including the *Session Weekly* newsmagazine, educational brochures for all ages, and member directories. All information is available at no charge.

Most of what this office publishes can be viewed on the Legislature's World Wide Web page. To connect, point your web browser at: <http://www.leg.state.mn.us>

No consensus sends stadium debate into extra innings



Minnesota Twins owner Carl Pohlad holds up a mock check for \$100 million sent to him in a letter from a young Twins fan who wished for the money to help build a new outdoor ballpark for his team. Pohlad, who testified during an Oct. 24 hearing of a joint legislative panel, said he would contribute \$111 million to the construction of a new stadium with a retractable roof for his ball club.

House members rejected a variety of proposals to fund construction of a new stadium for the Minnesota Twins during a lengthy Oct. 28 floor session, which came six days after lawmakers arrived at the Capitol for the 1997 Third Special Session.

However, the issue may not be completely dead yet. The House agreed to reconvene Nov. 13, when a final decision on the matter may be made.

Vote after vote during hours of debate demonstrated a significant lack of consensus in support of any of the proposals — including public ownership, the use of lottery proceeds, and user fees generated at the facility — to help finance a stadium deal.

“This is an issue that all of us have struggled with for a very long time,” Rep. Dee Long (DFL-Mpls) said during the debate on House floor. Most people would like to keep the Twins in the state, Long said, but many also believe “the price is in excess of the benefit to the state.”

The only stadium bill to survive the day in the Legislature came from the Senate. Members of the Senate approved an amendment offered by Sen. Roy Terwilliger (R-Edina) calling for the state to buy the Twins and sell public shares in the team. The amendment was attached to a bill (SF2) after stadium financing provisions were deleted from the measure. Once the Terwilliger amendment

was attached, the bill passed on a 35-30 vote.

A similar effort to pass a measure calling for public ownership of the ball club ran into opposition in the House. Majority Leader Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda) offered an amendment calling for not-for-profit community ownership, with stock in the team being held by members of the public.

“I think community ownership puts the fan and the team back together in the only way that makes sense,” Winter said.

But House critics of the public ownership proposal said it would not address the underlying economic problems of professional baseball in Minnesota and elsewhere.

“Let’s not count on government to solve the sickness that is baseball today,” said Rep. Charlie Weaver (R-Anoka).

Winter’s amendment eventually was defeated on a 100-29 vote.

Among the other proposals rejected by House members was a bill (HF2) calling for user fees to fund a portion of the stadium’s price tag and for a referendum to be held in 1998 to determine if lottery proceeds should go toward the project. That bill failed 104-25.

House members’ rejection of stadium funding proposals came just days after Twins owner Carl Pohlad appeared at joint meeting of the House Rules Committee and the Senate Taxes Committee and vowed that the team would contribute \$111 million to the stadium deal,

with some of the money coming from the sale of naming rights for the new stadium and other sources generated by the facility.

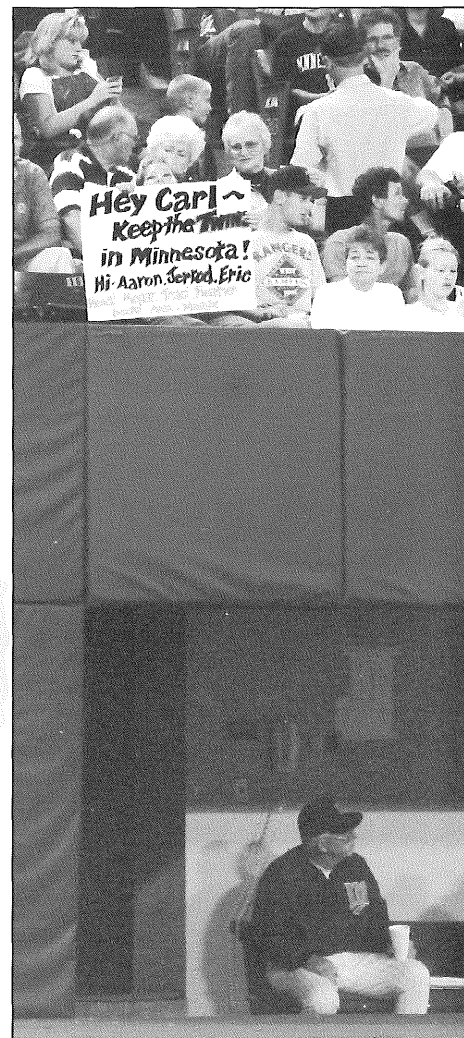
“I remember the joy we all felt in winning the World Series,” Pohlad said during the meeting. “It’s baseball that brought us all together.”

But lawmakers now see a public unified behind an altogether different idea, that the state should not pay for a new stadium for the Twins.

“In this case, the public sentiment is very clear,” said Rep. Doug Reuter (R-Owatonna). “The public sentiment is that they do not want us spending one red cent of their money to bail out baseball.”

Rep. Lee Greenfield (DFL-Mpls) said people do not want to see public funds being spent on a sport that many consider to be in serious economic trouble.

“The public, in this case, is right,” Greenfield said. “It is not a lack of leadership in this Legislature. There are more important priorities than baseball.”



A Twins fan sends a message to team owner Carl Pohlad during a 1997 game at the Metrodome.

Special sessions convene in June, August, October

June 26, 1997

First Special Session

Lawmakers passed four major bills during the First Special Session. A new education law provides \$6.7 billion in state aid for education, lengthens the school year for all public schools, and provides parents with increased tax deductions for education expenses. In an effort to reduce drunken driving, legislators approved a bill that makes operators of boats, snowmobiles, and other off-road vehicles subject to the same DWI laws that apply to automobile drivers. They also passed an omnibus data practices law that primarily affects access to and dissemination of records by law enforcement agencies, and the treatment of student records. Another law ensures that Minnesota peace officers who have become disabled by duty-related injuries will have continued health coverage.

Education and tax credits

A new education law provides \$6.7 billion in state aid for education, lengthens the school year for all public schools, and provides parents with increased tax deductions for education expenses.

The new law, which increases Minnesota's spending on education by nearly 15 percent during the next two years, is the main product of the First Special Session held June 26, 1997.

Gov. Arne Carlson vetoed the K-12 spending bill approved by legislators during the regular 1997 session because it did not include increased tax deductions and tax credits for education expenses such as tutoring, computer hardware or software purchases, or private school tuition.

The new education law, which was approved after a month-long stalemate, is a compromise worked out between the governor and legislative leaders in the waning hours before the First Special Session was set to begin.

The measure was sponsored by Rep. Becky Kelso (DFL-Shakopee) and Sen. Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Mpls).

Here are some highlights of the new law.

Tax deductions, credits

The compromise agreement on tax credits and deductions for education contains three significant changes. First, the new law will more than double the state's existing tax deduction for education expenses. It will increase from \$650 to \$1,625 for students in kindergarten through sixth grade and from \$1,000 to \$2,500 for students in grades seven

through 12. The deduction can be taken for costs including private school tuition, tutoring, and transportation expenses. The new law also adds education summer camps and computer hardware or software purchases to the list of deductible expenses. (The deduction is capped at \$200 per family for computer hardware and software expenses.)

Secondly, the new law will allow families with an annual household income of less than \$33,500 to take advantage of a new tax credit of \$1,000 per child or a maximum of \$2,000 per family. The tax credit allows qualifying families to be repaid for qualifying education expenses. The credit can be used for all the items that qualify for the education tax deduction except for private school tuition.

Finally, the new law will expand the state's working-family tax credit for families with children up to age 24 who are enrolled in school. Under current law, the maximum credit for a family with two or more children is \$548. The new law hikes the maximum for such families to \$914. The credit for families with one child will increase from \$332 to \$553.

The changes in tax deductions and new tax credits are effective beginning in 1998, as long as the state's November 1997 economic forecast shows enough surplus revenue will be available in state coffers. (Art. 13, Secs. 1-3)

Formula increases

Effective July 1, 1997, a total of \$5.2 billion is devoted to general education funding for school districts during the two-year budget cycle.

The law provides increases in the per-pupil funding districts receive for each year of the biennium. In fiscal year 1997, school districts received \$3,505 per pupil. The new law adds \$76 in 1998, bringing the sum to \$3,581. (Per-pupil funds are distributed according to "weighted" attendance counts, which provide more revenue for secondary students than for elementary students.)

In 1999, another \$79 will be added, and other changes will impact the general education funding formula during that year. Funds for teacher training that are now included in the formula will be placed into a separate account. The result is that the per-pupil amount will dip to \$3,530 in 1999, but districts will show a net gain in the dollars they receive. (Art. 1, Sec. 37)

Hardware, hard cash

Effective July 1, 1997, \$89.5 million is devoted to improving technology in schools and public libraries statewide.

That includes \$25 million for one-time payments to help school districts pursue improvements in technology. The \$25 million is to be distributed to districts on a per-pupil basis.

Another \$23 million for telecommunications access grants is available to help school districts and regional public libraries connect to the Internet.

Also, the law includes \$14 million for a competitive grant program to spur site-based efforts to enhance teaching and student achievement through the use of technology. Districts will have to provide matching funds



A new state K-12 education funding law requires three more days of instruction in all public schools during the current school year.

to receive a share of the grant dollars. (Art. 9, Secs. 4, 12)

More time in school

During the 1998-1999 school year, all public school students in Minnesota will spend three additional days in the classroom. State law sets no minimum for the number of days in a school year, but most districts schedule about 175 days of instruction.

The law requires each district to add three days to the total number of instruction days the district formally adopted for its school calendar at the beginning of the 1996-1997 school year. No additional funding will be provided to districts for the three extra days of classes. (Art. 6, Sec. 3)

Help for at-risk kids

The new law targets new levels of aid for at-risk students. The law includes a \$100 million increase in compensatory revenue, which is distributed to schools according to the number of low-income students they serve. Effective July 1, 1997, a two-year total of \$360 million in compensatory revenue goes to school sites based on a formula that considers the number of students at the school who receive free or reduced-price lunches.

The increase in compensatory revenue was touted as a way to assist students who have failed or are likely to fail the state's basic skills tests required for high school graduation.

The law stipulates that the funds can be used for additional hours in the classroom — whether through a longer school day, week, or year — for at-risk students. The list of other activities for which the increased compensatory revenue can be used includes remedial instruction, tutoring, teacher training, and materials and technology needed to meet the needs of individual students. (Art. 1, Secs. 12, 51, 52)

School choices

School choices available to students and parents will be expanded by a variety of changes included in the law, including provisions that will increase the number of charter schools in the state and allow for new laboratory schools.

Effective July 1, 1997, a provision in state law capping the number of charter schools allowed in Minnesota at 40 was repealed, and private colleges were added to the list of institutions — including school districts and public universities — that can sponsor a charter school.

The law provides \$2.6 million in building lease aid for charter schools and \$1.5 million for start-up grants to be used to create new charter schools or to convert existing schools to charter-school status.

The law also provides \$2.5 million for the establishment of laboratory schools, which will operate under the auspices of postsecondary institutions and aim to foster innovative teaching techniques. (Art. 5, Secs. 5, 13, 23, 28)

Statewide testing

Effective July 1, 1997, \$5 million is devoted to implementing a statewide testing system designed to measure educational outcomes and foster accountability in public education.

Separate laws passed by the 1997 Legislature require a system of uniform, statewide testing (HF1*/SF3/CH1) and set the framework for such testing to begin during the 1997-1998 school year (HF2179*/SF1934/CH138).

Statewide testing has been touted by supporters as a way to increase accountability in public schools by providing a reliable measure of student and school performance that can be compared to results from other districts and states.

The omnibus K-12 funding law simply provides the funds to implement the testing mandated in separate measures. (Art. 5, Sec. 28)

Dropping out

The law includes a provision that alters the state's compulsory attendance law.

The state has long required anyone from age 7 to age 16 to be enrolled in school, but existing state law includes a change set to take effect for the 2000-2001 school year that would expand compulsory attendance to include everyone from age 7 to age 18.

The new law eliminates the planned increase in the compulsory instruction age to 18.

Effective July 1, 1997, a provision in the new law establishes a process that allows students ages 17 and older to withdraw from school as long as they follow procedures designed to inform them of other available educational opportunities. The student and his or her parent or guardian are required to meet with school personnel to discuss options such as alternative secondary programs, charter schools, and schools in other districts.

If the student does not elect to continue in an alternative setting, the student and his or her parent or guardian are required to sign a statement confirming the student's decision to drop out. (Art. 6, Secs. 1, 2, 7)

First Special Session: HF1*/SF8/CH4

DWI laws stiffened

Operators of boats, snowmobiles, and other off-road vehicles will be subject to the same DWI laws that apply to automobile drivers

under a new state law that includes many changes to crack down on drunken drivers.

Gov. Arne Carlson vetoed a similar bill in early June because he objected to a provision that would have reduced the blood-alcohol limit for drivers under age 19 to 0.04 percent, instead of the 0.10 limit that applies to other drivers.

When lawmakers returned for the First Special Session June 26, they passed a DWI measure without the 0.04 percent provision for young drivers. The governor signed the proposal.

The new law includes tougher penalties for drunken drivers, especially repeat offenders and those caught with a blood-alcohol level of twice the legal limit. The law also includes tough new mandatory jail terms for multiple offenders.

In 1996, law enforcement officers in Minnesota made 38,900 DWI arrests, up from 33,355 the year before, according to the Department of Public Safety. Alcohol-related crashes claimed the lives of 201 people in Minnesota last year, down from 246 the previous year.

Last winter, 32 people were killed in snowmobile accidents — many of them alcohol related — across the state. The rash of deaths prompted legislative efforts to clamp down on the drunken operation of snowmobiles and other recreational vehicles.

The new law offers stiffer penalties for DWI offenses in an effort to deter people from operating any motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol. All of the provisions detailed below are effective Jan. 1, 1998.

Drivers of snowmobiles, motor boats, and other off-road recreational vehicles such as all-terrain vehicles will be subject to DWI laws that apply to automobile drivers. Most sanctions, including the loss of a driver's license, will apply only to repeat offenders.

All offenders will continue to be subject to a misdemeanor penalty and loss of operating privileges pertaining to that recreational vehicle after a first offense, in accordance with current law.

Penalties for drunken-driving of a snowmobile, boat, or automobile will be cumulative. That means a person who has been caught for the first time operating a snowmobile while drunk would have it count as a second offense if he or she has an earlier conviction of driving an automobile while intoxicated. (Secs. 1-6, 28)

The new measure was sponsored by Rep. Matt Entenza (DFL-St. Paul) and Sen. Leo Foley (DFL-Anoka)

Here are other highlights of the new law.

Plate impoundment, vehicle forfeiture

The application of plate impoundment and vehicle forfeiture penalties will be advanced by one offense. Currently, a third DWI offense results in license plate impoundment and a fourth brings vehicle forfeiture. The new law will bring license-plate impoundment after a second offense and vehicle forfeiture after a third. However, a driver caught with a blood-alcohol content of 0.20 percent (twice the legal limit) or higher will face license-plate impoundment on a first offense and vehicle forfeiture on a second.

Current plate impoundment law permits the issuance of a special license plate for a vehicle if there is another person in the household who is licensed to drive. The new law authorizes peace officers to stop any vehicle bearing the special plates to determine whether the driver is, in fact, a licensed driver. The new law also creates a \$25 fee to get regular plates reissued following the impoundment period.

Under current law, vehicle forfeiture occurs in a judicial process following conviction for the qualifying DWI offense. The new law creates a streamlined administrative process for forfeiture and permits it to be triggered earlier, by the arrest for the offense, unless the person requests within 30 days a judicial review. (Secs. 14-20, 43)

The law also directs the commissioner of public safety to undertake a public awareness campaign to educate the public on the license plate impoundment and vehicle forfeiture laws. (Sec. 66)

Blood-alcohol level

Other provisions provide further penalties for those caught driving with a blood-alcohol level at least twice the legal limit. A first offense for a driver caught with a blood-alcohol level of 0.20 percent or more will be a gross misdemeanor, subject to a minimum sentence of 30 days incarceration (with work release); 48 hours consecutive incarceration; or 80 hours of community service. (Currently, a first DWI offense is a misdemeanor; the second offense is a gross misdemeanor.) The period of driver's license revocation will double for those caught at or above 0.20 percent. And such violators could face a penalty assessment of up to \$1,000, in addition to the criminal fine of up to \$3,000 for the offense. (Secs. 30, 36, 37)

Penalties for multiple offenders

Mandatory criminal penalties will be increased for multiple offenders. A third DWI offense will result in a minimum 90-day jail sentence, with at least 30 days served. A fourth will mean a minimum 180-day sentence with at least 30 days served. A fifth or greater offense will mean a one-year sentence with at

least 60 days served. In all three cases, the remainder of any sentence not served in jail will have to be finished on home detention using electronic monitoring or under an intensive probation program, during which no alcohol consumption is permitted. The law provides for a greatly increased use of the high-tech monitoring, which enables law enforcers to obtain breath test results through the telephone. (Sec. 34)

Enhanced gross misdemeanor

Repeat DWI offenders could face a new level of DWI crime called an enhanced gross misdemeanor. The new classification would be imposed for a third offense within 10 years, or a second offense if it involves a blood-alcohol level of 0.20 percent or more. The enhanced gross misdemeanor would carry a maximum penalty of two years in jail and a \$3,000 fine. (Sec. 30)

'Not a drop' standard

The new law also will apply a "not a drop" standard to school bus drivers. That means a bus driver or Head Start driver could lose his or her license if caught with any alcohol in his or her system while driving a bus. Currently, bus drivers are subject to a 0.04 percent blood-alcohol level. (Sec. 40)

First Special Session; HFnone/SF1*/CH2

Omnibus data practices act

A new omnibus data practices law primarily affects access to and dissemination of records by law enforcement agencies, and the treatment of student records.

A provision to classify legislative budget proposals and those of the attorney general's office as private data was deleted from the data practices proposal, because that provision prompted Gov. Arne Carlson's veto of the data practices bill passed during the 1997 session. Such data from the Office of the Governor is classified as private, the result of a 1994 law.

The measure was sponsored by Rep. Mary Jo McGuire (DFL-Falcon Heights) and Sen. Don Betzold (DFL-Fridley).

Here are some highlights of the new law.

Access by law enforcement

The law makes it easier for law enforcement agencies to collect data on fugitives from the law if a fugitive happens to be collecting welfare benefits.

The law says that the address, social security number, and photo of food stamp recipients may be disclosed to law enforcement officers, effective Aug. 1, 1997, if the individual is fleeing

to avoid prosecution or custody, or is violating a condition of probation or parole. (Sec. 5)

The law also requires that the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA), in conjunction with a criminal and juvenile justice information policy group, report to the Legislature with a plan to make conviction records available at locations outside the BCA's central office. The report is due in January 1998. (The original House bill would have required the BCA to put certain criminal history data on the Internet, including a convicted criminal's identity and offense record, which already are considered public.) The BCA is currently required to provide that information at no charge through a computer monitor at its central office in St. Paul. (Sec. 46)

Student records

Juvenile justice officers, effective Aug. 1, 1997, can obtain information about students from schools. That information could include the student's name, address, telephone number, birth date, school schedule, attendance record, photographs, and parents' names, addresses, and telephone numbers. (Sec. 3)

Previous law required elementary and secondary schools to maintain student health records — mostly immunizations — forever. The new law, effective Aug. 1, 1997, requires schools to keep those records until a student turns 23. (Sec. 21)

The law also loosens provisions regarding required tetanus and diphtheria (DPT) immunizations. Effective Aug. 1, 1997, a student who has received three doses, with the last received between the ages of 6 and 11, is not required to have additional immunizations for another 10 years. The law previously required that students in older grades must have had an immunization at 11 years of age or older. (Sec. 22)

Another provision regarding student records, effective Aug. 1, 1997, makes it clear that school districts or school boards have the authority to enforce immunization requirements. Current law specifies that students must submit those records within 30 days after enrolling in a new school, but does not say who has enforcement authority. The law also exempts crisis nurseries from the immunization requirements for up to five consecutive days of attendance. (Sec. 20)

Other provisions

The law also allows some health care professionals, effective Aug. 1, 1997, to use addresses other than their home address for public purposes. Advocates for the provision say it is necessary for security reasons. (Sec. 4)

Homeowners in Washington and Ramsey counties, effective Aug. 1, 1997, must be asked

before a governmental agency could sell their names to commercial interests. Property owners could request that their names and addresses be excluded. (Sec. 27)

Other provisions address tax law. For instance, effective July 1, 1997, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) can disclose to the state lottery the amount of a winner's delinquent state taxes if the individual wins \$600 or more. Currently, the IRS is not notified unless someone wins at least \$1,000. (Sec. 38)

After July 1, 1997, the penalty for tax evasion or aiding in evasion or attempted evasion is increased from a misdemeanor to a gross misdemeanor. (Sec. 43)

Finally, effective Aug. 1, 1997, the law requires that the public defender's office be provided with electronic access to public criminal and juvenile justice data. (Sec. 45)

First Special Session: HFnone/SF7*/CH3

August 19, 1997

Second Special Session

Lawmakers passed three major bills during the Second Special Session: a flood relief package that includes \$55.3 million in new bond funds; a new law that increases Minnesota's minimum wage; and a measure that provides pay increases for state agency heads, the governor, legislators, and judges.

Flood relief package

When the Minnesota Legislature convened Aug. 19 for the 1997 Second Special Session, lawmakers moved quickly to pass the centerpiece legislation of the session, a flood relief package that includes \$55.3 million in new bond funds.

The new law will allow the state to borrow \$55.3 million to fund a variety of projects aimed at rebuilding flood-damaged communities throughout the state. The law also dictates how another roughly \$20 million in flood aid will be spent.

Lawmakers and the governor touted the flood relief measure as the center of the state's most generous disaster relief effort ever. A flood relief task force appointed by Gov. Arne Carlson recommended a total of \$125 million in state aid for flood relief. The new law spends a good share of that amount.

A separate law passed earlier this year devoted \$21 million to flood relief. The new law rededicating much of the money — \$20.3 million — included in that earlier law.

The task force's recommendations for a \$125 million state commitment to flood relief included the \$55.3 million in new state borrowing, \$20.3 million in general-fund appropriations rededicated from the earlier law, and



A flood relief package that includes \$55.3 million in new bond funds will aid Minnesota communities affected by record floods during the spring of 1997.

\$24.5 million already committed to flood relief from state agency budgets. (Another \$1 million comes from the state's petroleum tank release cleanup fund.)

The task force also called for \$24 million to be included in 1998 bonding legislation for flood-control projects in five Minnesota cities. Lawmakers will consider that portion of the task force's recommendations next year.

The law produced during the 1997 Second Special Session dictates how the \$20.3 million in direct appropriations and \$55.3 million in new bonding revenue will be spent.

The law includes \$30 million to provide the required state and local matching funds for federal disaster relief, including the state's \$9 million share of \$50 million needed to buy out the estimated 1,000 damaged homes in flood plains.

The law also sends \$13.9 million to the Department of Natural Resources to be devoted to flood mitigation and protection projects. Specifically, \$5 million is earmarked for grants to help local projects to prevent or alleviate flood damages, another \$5 million is to help flood-proof publicly owned buildings, and \$3 million is for flood protection measures such as levee repair.

The flood relief law was sponsored by Rep. Jim Tunheim (DFL-Kennedy) and Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Thief River Falls).

Here's a look at other highlights of the flood relief law.

Housing projects

Housing projects receive \$8.5 million, including \$4.5 million for a community housing rehabilitation program and \$2 million for a program that provides loans and rent subsidies for low-income families.

Infrastructure needs

Infrastructure needs are supported with \$9 million earmarked for sewer and water system repair and construction of new systems for new housing construction. Some of the money also is available for road and bridge work.

Help for businesses

A total of \$8.2 million is devoted to efforts to assist businesses affected by flooding. That sum includes \$1.2 million to help retain businesses in border communities where the risk of losing businesses and jobs to neighboring North Dakota or South Dakota cities is high.

Repair work

A total of \$1.3 million is for the repair of farm buildings, driveways, and other facilities.

Second Special Session: HF1*/SF4/CH2

Minimum wage increased

A new state law increases Minnesota's minimum wage.

Under the measure, the minimum wage for employees of large businesses (those with annual gross sales in excess of \$500,000) was set at \$5.15 per hour beginning Sept. 1, 1997. Workers at smaller companies must be paid at least \$4.90 per hour, effective Jan. 1, 1998.

Gov. Arne Carlson vetoed similar minimum wage hike proposals in 1994 and 1996, and again after the regular 1997 Legislative Session. However, the governor signed a bill passed by lawmakers during the Second Special Session held Aug. 19, 1997.

The new law includes one significant provision the governor had sought in earlier

proposals. The new provision allows employers to pay what is called an opportunity wage.

The opportunity wage allows employers to pay a worker who is under 20 years old \$4.25 an hour during the first 90 days on the job. The new law also includes a provision prohibiting companies from displacing any employee — including a reduction in hours or wages — to hire another person at the lower wage.

Before the new law, there were three separate minimum wage levels in Minnesota. Businesses with more than \$362,500 in annual sales had to pay their workers at least \$4.25 an hour, while companies with lesser sales had to a minimum of \$4 per hour. A federally mandated \$4.75 per hour minimum wage affected only those businesses with annual gross sales in excess of \$500,000. The federal level increased to \$5.15 on Sept. 1, 1997.

Another provision the governor had sought — a so-called tip credit — is not included in the new law. A tip credit would allow employers to pay tipped workers less than the minimum wage on the logic that tips more than make up for the difference. Federal law allows states to enact the tip credit and many states, including those neighboring Minnesota, do. But Minnesota does not.

The new law was sponsored by Sen. Randy Kelly (DFL-St. Paul) and Rep. Jim Farrell (DFL-St. Paul).

Second Special Session: HF2/SF1*/CH1

Pay increases for agency heads

A new law provides pay increases for state agency heads, the governor, legislators, and judges.

The measure passed with the support of Gov. Arne Carlson, who argued that increases in pay were necessary to attract and retain top candidates to lead state departments. It is the first pay increase for most department heads in 11 years.

Under the new law, the governor's salary increases by 2.5 percent effective July 1, 1997, and by another 2.5 percent effective Jan. 1, 1998. The end result is that the governor's pay will move from \$114,506 to \$120,303.

Other constitutional officers, such as the lieutenant governor and the attorney general, also receive matching 2.5 percent pay increases in July 1997 and January 1998.

Salaries for state department heads are capped at either 75 percent or 85 percent of the governor's salary, under the new law. That means the top agency-head pay allowed will reach \$102,258 in January 1998.

Under previous law, salaries for most department heads were capped at \$67,505 or \$78,500, depending on the agency.

Individual department heads do not automatically receive raises. Pay increases within the new salary ranges must be recommended by the governor and approved by the Legislature.

The new law also calls for a 5 percent increase in the salary legislators receive, effective Jan. 4, 1999. The state constitution requires an election — in this case, the 1998 House election — to fall between the time a salary increase for legislators is approved and the time it takes effect.

Legislators now receive an annual salary of \$29,657. The new law will bump legislators' pay to \$31,140.

The new law also increases salaries of Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, and District Court judges by 4 percent on July 1, 1997, and again by 5 percent on Jan. 1, 1998.

(That means the pay for District Court judges is capped at \$86,834 after July 1, 1997, and at \$91,175 after Jan. 1, 1998.)

Judges will see further pay raises in January 1999 and January 2000 that will match the average salary adjustment for state employees during the previous year.

The new law was sponsored by Rep. Loren Solberg (DFL-Bovey) and Sen. Roy Terwilliger (R-Edina).

Second Special Session: HF3/SF2*/CH3

Oct. 23, 1997 -

Third Special Session

Lawmakers have passed three major bills during the Third Special Session: a resolution calling on the federal government to prevent professional sports teams from being lured away from cities and states; a bill to temporarily restore food stamps for legal immigrants with children to the level they received before the welfare system was revamped; and a bill to help cover the costs of dealing with a health threat that forced the closing of Crooked Lake Elementary School in Andover, Minn. The Third Special Session had yet to adjourn when this publication went to press.

Professional sports teams

State lawmakers approved a resolution Oct. 28 calling on the federal government to take action to prevent professional sports teams from being lured away from cities and states.

The resolution states that professional sports are valuable assets for communities and that the use of public resources to attract or retain sports franchises has created "counterproductive economic competition" that is to the detriment of everyone except team owners.

The resolution calls on Congress to consider action to discourage the movement of

sports teams and to prohibit the use of public resources to encourage franchise owners to move. The resolution also suggests that sports leagues be prohibited from blocking community ownership of sports teams. And the resolution asks that Major League Baseball's exemption from antitrust laws be repealed.

House members approved the measure on a 121-3 vote. The Senate vote was 63-0. Copies of the resolution will be sent to members of Congress and officials in all 50 states.

Rep. Phyllis Kahn (DFL-Mpls) and Sen. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul) sponsored the resolution.

Third Special Session: SF22*/HF9

Food stamps restored

The Legislature approved a bill Oct. 28 to temporarily restore food stamps for legal immigrants with children to the level they received before the overhaul of the welfare system.

Federal welfare reform measures that took effect this year cut food stamps for legal immigrants, but the state enacted welfare reform legislation earlier this year that restored food stamps for legal non-citizen families at 60 percent of the former level.

(Another law passed earlier this year provides supplements to help legal immigrants without children to purchase Minnesota-grown food products.)

The bill approved by the Legislature during the 1997 Third Special Session calls for legal immigrant families to receive food stamps at the full level they received before welfare reform. Without it, such legal immigrants with children could receive only \$38 a month for food. The bill makes them eligible for about \$63 a month.

Only those legal non-citizens who resided in the state on July 1, 1997, will be eligible for the higher amount in food stamps. That change will effect about 10,000 people. The House passed the measure on a 129-0 vote. The Senate passed it 61-0.

The bill calls for the change to be in effect until June 30, 1998, or until the Minnesota Family Investment Program-Statewide (MFIP-S) is operative in the recipient's home county. After MFIP-S is implemented, the legal immigrants will be eligible for food subsidies under that program.

MFIP-S is a welfare-to-work program that allows welfare recipients to accept entry-level jobs and continue to receive some public assistance. The program also provides some job training for those who need it. The idea behind the program is that it will help to support people as they gain work experience and even-

Oct. 12, 1925 - Oct. 15, 1996

A tribute to Rep. James Isaac Rice

tually move off the welfare rolls and into better-compensated jobs. The program is to be implemented in all counties across the state between Jan. 1, 1998, and March 31, 1998.

The bill calls for slightly more than \$2 million to be spent to provide the higher amount in food stamps, but the measure will not require new spending. Money approved for other uses in earlier welfare reform legislation will be reallocated to support the food stamp changes.

Rep. Linda Wejcman (DFL-Mpls) and Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Mpls) sponsored the bill. 1997 Third Special Session: HF18/SF21*

Health threat funding

A bill approved by the Legislature will provide funds to help cover costs necessary to deal with a potential health threat that forced the shutdown of Crooked Lake Elementary School in Andover, Minn.

Anoka-Hennepin School District officials moved quickly to close the school and make arrangements to continue classes elsewhere after significant mold infestation was discovered in the ceilings of classrooms.

The mold problem, believed to be the result of storm damage earlier this year, has created a headache for the district, which could face a total of \$2.5 million in repair and moving costs by the time the problem is completely resolved.

The bill will provide \$500,000 to help the district deal with some immediate concerns. A total of \$250,000 is for costs of leasing space to temporarily serve as classrooms for the school's pupils and transporting the children to the temporary facilities. Another \$250,000 will pay for repairs related to the indoor air problems created by the mold.

House members approved the bill 125-1. The Senate vote was 56-6.

Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) and Sen. Leo Foley (DFL-Anoka) sponsored the bill.

Third Special Session: HF20/SF8*

The Mini-Session Report and other House Public Information publications are available in Portable Document Format (PDF) on the House web site at:
<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hinfo/hinfo.ssi>

Family and friends gathered Oct. 18, 1997, to celebrate the life and times of the Minnesota Legislature's "Orator Extraordinaire," Jim Rice. Literary genius, champion of justice and the arts for many, distinct sense of humor for some, gruff to a few, soft to his grandchildren; he was respected by all.

Three months before he was to retire for health reasons after spending 26 years in office, Rep. Rice died at about 9:30 p.m. Oct. 15, 1996, at his State Office Building desk at a time when no one else was around, doing what he loved — being a legislator.

Members and staff had just celebrated his 71st birthday that afternoon, and he had entertained them with his quips and quotes.

Rice was an elder statesman of the Minnesota House of Representatives and the long-time chair of the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Regulation Finance Committee. In that capacity, he was a major exponent of state funding to the arts community and for a new Minnesota History Center.

A month before he died, Rice was honored by the Minnesota Orchestra for his outstanding contributions to the arts. According to the January 1994 issue of *Showcase*, an orchestra publication, Rice, who was rarely one to accept accolades, said "... his involvement in the arts stemmed from the everyday people who produce it."

"He spoke for thousands who found themselves voiceless," said

Eamon Rice, one his eight children. He marched with Martin Luther King, fought for the poor, and fought for his working class neighborhood in north Minneapolis and those in other parts of the state. He spoke often and told many stories about his friends — "Smiling Mike," "Cheat the Gas Company Vic," "Andy the Polish Adonis," and "Gunnysack Olson" — all of whom received "no respect."

Labor members knew him well, for he made the rights of labor workers one of his major causes — and he never had a union card! The long-time public servant was noted for his oratory on the floor of the House. He is well-remembered for chastising colleagues who voted in support of a bill to cut back on workers' compensation. Rice rose to speak, scanned the chamber until he knew most of

the members were listening, then slowly said, "Gloat and laugh over the triumph of injured people. Enjoy your hour in the sun, but time will befall you. Mark my words!" Then he slammed down the microphone, sat down, leaned back, and closed his eyes as if oblivious to anything going on.

On a less serious note, he would sit at his desk in the chamber and often would appear to be asleep or at least nodding. On one occasion, after a very long debate on a not so exciting bill, the vote was taken. The Speaker then said, "There being 59 ayes and 73 nays, the bill did not pass." Rice sat up suddenly and

said to his deskmate, "What the hell did we just vote on? Did we kill it?"

A staff member once told the story of Rice entertaining guests at a party with some lengthy quote by Plato. He paused in mid-sentence, closed his eyes, and began to snore.

Twenty minutes later,

he awoke, continued expounding where he stopped, never missing a word!

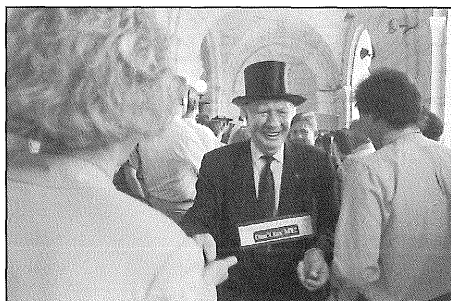
For many years, Rice's end seat in the House chamber was three rows back from the main desk, just left of the main aisle. That spot on the floor is distinctive because of the nature of the acoustics in the chamber. A whisper from that seat can be heard by only one person.

Often, that one person heard one-liners like, "Sounds good to me!" or "Sit down you nitwit!" And once, during a long and boring explanation of a bill by a member, Rice turned to a colleague and whispered, "Never murder a man who is committing suicide!"

Shortly before he died, Rice's tender side was exemplified in a letter he wrote to his grandson, John Conor, upon hearing that John had learned to read. John read the letter at his grandfather's funeral. An excerpt states: "... how wonderful that news was to me. ... Your ability to read is better than any toy in the world: it will never break. ... It will be your best friend. It will help you to love other people and they will love you. ... It will teach you about the world and all the people in the world. ... We are all very proud of you and thank you for your hard work."

Thank you, Representative Rice, for all your hard work.

—LeClair G. Lambert



The late Rep. Jim Rice imitated J.D. Rockefeller passing out dimes to the poor during a 1991 rally to protest proposed tax cuts for the wealthy.

It's a fact!

Resting on the banks of the Minnesota River with a population of just more than 3,000 lies the predominantly Scandinavian city of Granite Falls, the seat of Yellow Medicine County.

Located about 40 miles southwest of Willmar, the site of the 1997 Harvest Moon Mini-Session Oct. 15-17, Granite Falls hosted several Minnesota House committee hearings that week.

The area was first settled by the Sioux, and later by settlers from the Eastern United States and Scandinavia.

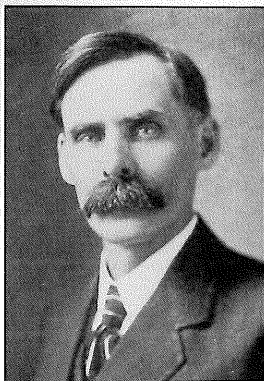
Perhaps the town's greatest claim to fame is that it was the hometown of U.S. Rep. Andrew J. Volstead. The congressman's former home now houses business offices and a museum devoted to his life and work.

In 1920, Volstead chaired the House Judiciary Committee, which is why the law that enacted Prohibition became known as the Volstead Act.

His involvement with the effort to outlaw alcohol in the U.S. largely accounts for Volstead's name recognition, but the Republican wanted to be known more for his work on behalf of farmers during his 20 years in Congress.

One of Volstead's most notable agricultural initiatives allowed farmers to form cooperatives to negotiate for better prices for their goods. Before 1922, farmers had no effective way of bargaining with flour millers and other trusts for fair prices.

Volstead considered the problem and helped write the Capper-Volstead Act, which permitted farmers to join together to negotiate a better price.



Andrew J. Volstead

Photo from *Men of Minnesota*, published by R. L. Polk and Co., 1915

Liberty! The American Revolution

The most important part of living in a democracy is to participate in it, and the best way to do that is to make the most of your education.

And if some of the students from Northeast Middle School in Minneapolis didn't believe that when they heard legislators say it, they could talk to one of our Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, who backed them up emphatically.

Well, it wasn't actually Thomas Jefferson. It was Clay Jenkinson, a Jefferson impersonator. Jenkinson, 42, a history professor at the University of Nevada-Reno, is giving his Jefferson impersonation around the country in preparation for "Liberty! The American Revolution," a six-part PBS documentary on the people, ideas, and events that led to July 4, 1776. It will be shown throughout the country Nov. 23-25.

Jenkinson was speaking to students in the House chamber Oct. 14. Norwest Bank, which is sponsoring the documentary, has donated a teaching video edition and curriculum for the documentary to schools in communities where the banks are located. Northeast Middle School won a drawing to come to the Capitol and hear Jenkinson speak. He then answered questions from the middle school students, who were sitting in the very chairs in which their representatives make laws.

Jenkinson, wearing a red wig, knee breeches, and white stockings, spoke as though he actually was our third president. During his time, he said, "the only people who were educated were wealthy. The average citizen lived in a house with no books, except the Bible and Shakespeare," he said.

To improve on that, education was expanded eventually to become free and compulsory for everyone, which he called very important for a democracy.

"The individuals have been emancipated from the constraints that have existed," he said, "so they're free to educate and govern themselves."

"This can only work if we are well-educated. We must have all of our citizens generally well-educated if we want to improve ourselves. Without it, I do not think we can have liberty," he said.

Jenkinson/Jefferson then opened it up for questions, and there were many. Several asked personal questions, like the number of children he had (six, four of whom died in childhood), how old was he when he became president (57), and who was his greatest influence (his father, Peter Jefferson, who died when Jefferson was 14). One asked what he meant when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "All men are created equal."

An excellent question, he said, and he took the opportunity to talk about slavery, and his ownership of slaves.

"It's a bad thing, I thought it would ruin the United States. In my time, I was the foremost American advocate for freeing slaves," he said, adding that he sponsored futile legislation to do that while in Virginia's colonial legislature.

"I owned slaves, I had 200 slaves. I tried to treat my slaves as well as I could," he said.

However, he felt it would be problematic to release slaves in one fell swoop into a land where they were not welcome as equals, he said. That explanation was good enough for Kyle Brown, an African-American seventh-grader.

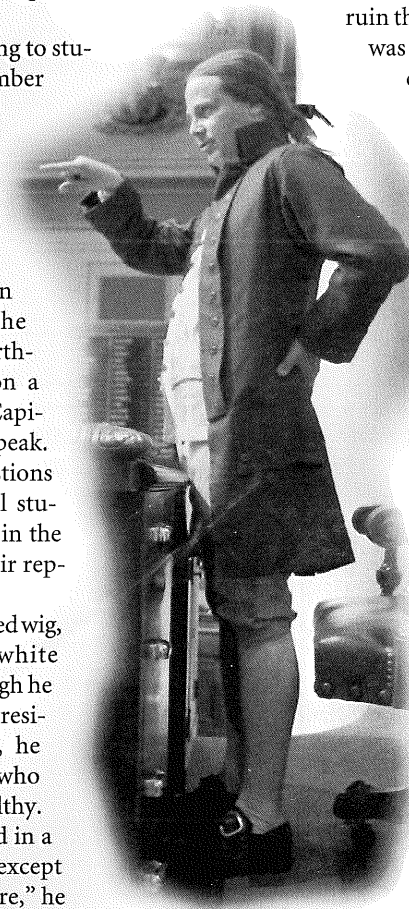
"It was very interesting and I'm glad to see he wasn't a racist," he said.

The students from Minneapolis and their parents are represented in the House by Rep. Len Biernat (DFL-Mpls), who was pleased

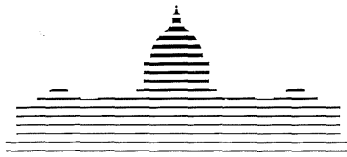
they were able to come to the Capitol.

"It's a pretty good program. We're doing things to interest the youngsters," he said.

And it was interesting to Kyle. "I liked it very much. It was very interesting and educational," he said.



Clay Jenkinson portrays Thomas Jefferson



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MINNESOTA I N D E X

Willmar, Minnesota

Mean daily minimum temperature in January, in degrees Fahrenheit	2
Mean daily maximum temperature in July, in degrees Fahrenheit	85
Average annual precipitation, in inches	25.2
Elevation of Willmar, in feet above sea level	1,131
Area of Willmar, in square miles	13.08
Population of Willmar, 1950	9,410
in 1970	12,869
in 1990	17,531
in 1996	18,959
Year Willmar was established as the Kandiyohi County seat	1871
Population of Kandiyohi County, 1950	28,644
in 1970	30,548
in 1990	38,761
in 1996	41,040
Number of households in Willmar	6,980
in Kandiyohi County	14,480
Employees of Jennie-O Foods, Inc., Willmar's largest employer	1,700
Number of turkey recipes at "Gobble Talk USA," Jennie-O's web site	57
Employees of Willmar Poultry Co., Willmar's second-largest employer	1,000
Places of worship in Willmar	27
Protestant churches	25
Acres of park land in Willmar	300
Number of lakes in Kandiyohi County	361
Number of seats in Willmar Civic Center	4,000
Hotels and motels in Willmar	10
Number of rooms	498
Retail sales in Willmar, 1985	\$155,399,952
in 1995	\$317,965,364
Number of Willmar Senior High School graduates who became astronauts	1
Number of space shuttle missions flown by Willmar's George "Pinky" Nelson	3

Sources: Willmar Convention & Visitors Bureau; Willmar Area Chamber of Commerce; Minnesota Department of Trade & Economic Development; Minnesota State Lottery; www.jennieo.com; Kandiyohi County Historical Society.

For more information



For general information, call:
House Information Office
 (612) 296-2146 or
 1-800-657-3550

To obtain a copy of a bill, call:
Chief Clerk's Office
 (612) 296-2314

To find out about bill introductions or
 the status of a specific bill, call:
House Index Office
 (612) 296-6646

For up-to-date recorded message
 giving committee meeting times and
 agendas, call:
Committee Hotline
 (612) 296-9283



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Teletypewriter for the hearing impaired.
 To ask questions or leave messages,
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Check your local listings to watch House
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