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# SESSION Weekly

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INSIDE: EXPLORING TOURISM, MEMBERS STEPPING DOWN, CARS FOR THE FUTURE, MORE

This Week's Bill Introductions HF4191-HF4199

# Session Weekly

*Session Weekly* is a nonpartisan publication of the Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services office. During the 2005-2006 Legislative Session, each issue reports daily House action between Thursdays of each week, lists bill introductions, and provides other information. No fee.

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**On the cover: A young visitor to the Rotunda is reflected in a glass case holding flags from the Civil and Dakota wars. This flag, showing an eagle, is from the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry regiment, who took part in the assault on Gettysburg, Va., in June 1864 and in the surrender of Appomattox, Va., in April 1865.**

— Photo by: Sarah Stacke

# Money well spent?

## Local governments use public funds to hire lobbyists

By Nick Busse

The old adage goes that if you want to make an omelet, you've got to break a few eggs.

Many local governments follow a similar rule: if you want taxpayer money, you have to spend taxpayer money.

On April 18, the [Office of the State Auditor](#) released its [annual report](#) on lobbying expenditures by local governments. It concluded that local governments are spending more money than ever to send lobbyists to the Capitol on their behalf — to the tune of nearly \$7.8 million in 2005, a 24.4 percent increase over 2004.

In addition, the report states that local government associations are using more of their members' dues for lobbying expenditures (\$4.1 million in 2005, a 24.2 percent increase over the previous year). The combined result is a trend State Auditor Patricia Anderson calls "troubling."

"Taxpayers should be concerned about the enormous amount of public dollars being spent by local governments on lobbying costs," Anderson said. "Expenditures skyrocketing 25 percent in one year is especially alarming."

While spending taxpayer dollars in the hopes of securing more taxpayer dollars might sound counterintuitive, and even a bit disingenuous, many local government officials say it's the best way to ensure good public policy.

### Teaming up

"Municipalities like Minneapolis, we're creatures of the state," said Pierre Willette, one of three lobbyists directly employed by the city. "Everything we do is tied to things here at the Legislature."

Willette said he and other lobbyists serve

as "subject-matter experts" on issues ranging from transportation to public safety to pensions. Whereas elected officials have to spread their time and energy on a variety of issues, meetings and tasks, Willette said lobbyists are able to keep tabs on proposed legislation and promote the interests of local governments full-time.

Lobbyists do a lot more than just wrangle taxpayer dollars from state coffers, Willette said.

"A lot of times, you're lobbying on specific issues for the city. But a lot of times, you're here just to make sure bad stuff doesn't happen, or that somebody else's idea doesn't affect what you're doing in your city," Willette said.

### Reaping financial benefits

Lobbying legislators can reap financial benefits, however.

Granite Falls, a city of approximately 3,000 in southwestern Minnesota, has been repeatedly hit hard by flooding from the Minnesota River. City Manager William P. Lavin said he and other city officials have been lobbying at both the state and federal level for funds to help shield the city from future floods, but because of time and distance constraints, they often "team" with a contract lobbyist to get their message across.

"We've been very effective at securing funds without a lot of activity on the part of a lobbyist," Lavin said. "But [hiring a lobbyist] helps, because

we can't be there at a moment's notice when a hearing is coming up, or every other day of the week or whatever. It's not practical."

Granite Falls' partnership with a professional lobbyist has paid off: for the \$29,991 the city reported spending on lobbying activities in 2005, it was able to secure an additional \$2.6 million from the Legislature for flood mitigation projects. Lavin said that without having someone on site to talk with legislators, that level of support would be difficult to garner.

"It's good to have someone there," he said.

### Increasing reliance

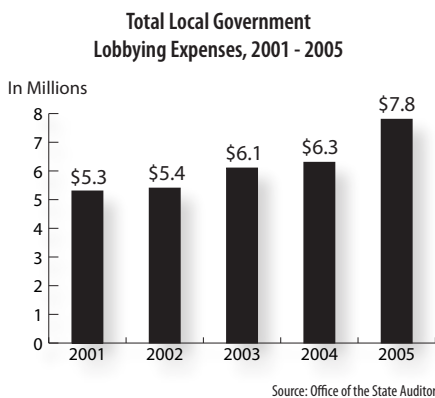
Obviously, local governments feel that they're getting their money's worth from lobbyists; otherwise, they wouldn't continue to pay for their services. But why are lobbying expenditures by local governments increasing at such a rapid rate?

The state auditor has several theories. First, she notes that because of the budget impasse and the resulting special session, the 2005 legislative session was an especially long one, requiring more work by lobbyists. Secondly, it's possible that more governments are now choosing to comply with state law and report their expenditures. Finally, she said local governments are becoming more reliant on paid lobbyists to accomplish their goals at the Capitol.

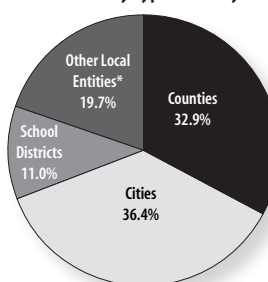
But Lavin suggested there might be another reason: cuts in state aid to local governments.

"We've been hit hard with local government aid cuts," Lavin said, adding that Granite Falls receives approximately \$210,000 less in state aid than it did in 2002. "When you talk about local government aid, there's no question in my mind why more funds are being expended."

Lavin added that his city has seen an increase in unfunded mandates — state laws that require cities to expend their own money, for example, to meet new wastewater treatment standards.



**Total Lobbying Expenses by Local Governments with Staff and/or Contract Lobbyists in 2005 - by Type of Entity**



\*Includes metropolitan agencies and other special service districts

Source: Office of the State Auditor

First Reading continued on page 4



**Big Spenders:  
Local governments that spent  
the most on lobbying in 2005:**

City of Minneapolis	\$424,689
Hennepin County	\$306,369
City of St. Paul	\$154,350
Metropolitan Airports Commission	\$151,765
Anoka County	\$143,596
Anoka County Housing and Redevelopment Authority	\$139,649
Ramsey County Board	\$121,137
Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board	\$113,113
Dakota County	\$104,767

But whatever their reasons, the state auditor doesn't like the idea of local governments spending their constituents' money on lobbyists.

"My concern with an increased reliance on paid lobbyists is that they need to justify their existence to keep clients on board, or to keep the dues coming in," Anderson said.

Moreover, Anderson believes that many local governments and local government associations may be underreporting their true lobbying expenses. In an [April 18 press release](#), the state auditor's office reported that an examination of contracts and billing records



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

**Minneapolis Government Relations Representative Pierre Willette, right, talks with Bill Barnhart, a lobbyist for of the North Metro Mayors Association, in the Rotunda May 9.**

for several associations "found that many activities classified as 'non-lobbying' were in fact part of the lobbying effort." It also listed numerous other areas of concern, including a lack of requests for competitive proposals from lobbying firms, "minimal internal controls," and using highly paid lobbying

firms to perform "basic administrative functions."

"Local government officials need to hold their lobbyists and associations accountable to make sure they are accomplishing the goals for which they were hired or dues being paid," Anderson said. 🗽

## HELPING HAND



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

**Majority Whip Marty Seifert rests his hand on the corner of Speaker Steve Sviggum's desk as they talked during the House floor session April 25.**

**Dear Readers,**

While some still cling to hope that House Speaker Steve Sviggum's (R-Kenyon) prediction that this year's session will end "Syttende Mai," May 17, it appears more likely that the adjournment will come closer to the May 22 constitutional deadline. This uncertainty, however, requires some pre-planning on our part.

Traditionally the last issue of *Session Weekly* contains coverage on the last minute flood of bills signed into law, a look back at session highlights and photos of members who have announced they will not seek re-election. As always, our goal is to give you the most complete coverage right up to the end. If adjournment *sine die* occurs on either May 17 or May 22, it will affect when you receive this session's last *Session Weekly*.

If adjournment *sine die* should happen on or before either of these dates, we will do our best to have the final *Session Weekly* available no later than May 25. If members bump up against the constitutional deadline, *Session Weekly* will be produced May 19, and the wrap-up issue will appear the following week, by May 25 ... that is, unless there is a special session.

— *Session Weekly staff*

**★ CHILDREN****Birth certificate**

A "clean" birth certificate should be given to parents no matter how long their child lives, according to one bill.

[HF3171](#), sponsored by [Rep. Karen Klinzing](#) (R-Woodbury), would give parents the right to a birth certificate without the word "deceased" stamped on it even if their newborn dies. Currently, some parents will receive a certificate with "deceased" stamped onto it when their newborn dies for whatever reason.

The bill would allow only one birth certificate to be issued to the mother or father of the deceased child up to six years after the birth date. For protection against identity theft, the bill would only be retroactive until 2002 because the [Department of Health](#) can only electronically track birth certificates back that far.

Passed by the House 130-0 May 8, it awaits action in the Senate Health and Family Security Committee. [Sen. Betsy Wergin](#) (R-Princeton) is the sponsor.

When parents receive the deceased-stamped certificate, it is like receiving another death certificate, and it does not recognize a child's life, no matter how short, Klinzing said. She added that parents of deceased children still

consider them part of the family.

[Rep. Kurt Zellers](#) (R-Maple Grove), who has lost one child, said when the state denies parents a clean birth certificate, it is "in essence saying your child wasn't alive."

Although the bill easily passed, [Rep. Tina Liebling](#) (DFL-Rochester) wanted to ensure that identity theft would not be an issue once a clean copy is issued. [Rep. Ron Erhardt](#) (R-Edina) wanted to know if other practices of maintaining records would be kept the same.

To both, Klinzing said, "The only difference is the word deceased is removed from one birth certificate."

**Child care licensing provisions**

A bill proposing modifications to licensing requirements aims to improve the overall access to quality child care.

[HF2977/SF2883](#)\*, sponsored by [Rep. Jeanne Poppe](#) (DFL-Austin) and [Sen. Dan Sparks](#) (DFL-Austin), would make a number of changes for nonresidential child care providers or "special family day care homes." One change: a not-for-profit agency with at least two contracts with community employers or organizations that provides child care services would be classified as a special family day care home. There is also a capacity revision that allows a program to exceed the capacity maximum of 14 children in transition periods if certain standards are met, from square footage requirements to staff-to-child ratio to fire code compliance.

The House passed the bill 133-0 on May 9 and it now awaits action by the governor. The Senate passed the bill 62-0 April 27.

Poppe called the bill a source of "basic policy improvement" that will "help communities provide better child care without harming a child's safety."

**★ CONSUMERS****Home construction regulation**

Legislators hope to protect homeowners from faulty construction work.

[HF1375/SF1287](#)\*, sponsored by [Rep. Dan Severson](#) (R-Sauk Rapids) and [Sen. Linda Scheid](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Park), would require homeowners claiming home construction defects to give a contractor a chance to fix the problem before legal action is sought. The contractor would have 30 days to respond.

Severson said the bill, "a 30-day sanctuary

period" for resolution, offers a middle ground compromise for consumers and contractors.

On May 4, the House passed the amended bill 129-1. The Senate passed the amended version 65-0 May 8. It now goes to the governor.

One amendment made to the bill aims to establish standards for construction code inspectors.

However, an amendment offered and then withdrawn by [Rep. Barb Goodwin](#) (DFL-Columbia Heights) received heated debate. It sought to protect homeowners by holding contractors liable for construction defects even after a business dissolves. Currently, said Goodwin, in cases where builders dissolve and reopen under a different name when a claim is made against them, it is difficult or nearly impossible for consumers to receive compensation.

"This House must protect consumers," said Goodwin. "No one will do it."

**★ CRIME****Funeral protest regulations**

**Signed  
by  
the  
governor  
★ ★ ★**

Those who protest at funerals could be charged with a misdemeanor.

Signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty May 9, and effective one day later, a new law prohibits the intentional disruption of a funeral, burial or memorial service for any deceased person.

Sponsored by [Rep. Steve Smith](#) (R-Mound) and [Sen. Don Betzold](#) (DFL-Fridley), the law requires that protesters or picketers stay at least 500 feet away from a burial site or entrance to a facility where the service is occurring.

Furthermore, a crime will be committed if a person intentionally disrupts a funeral procession, including impeding or attempting to impede a vehicle in the procession; or intentionally blocking or attempting to block access to a ceremony or service. Knowingly engaging in picketing at the residence of any member of the deceased person's family or household the day of the service will also result in a misdemeanor.

By definition, "family or household" includes spouses, former spouses, parents, children, people related by blood, people residing together or who have resided together in the past, individuals who have or will have a child together, and people involved in a significant romantic or sexual relationship.

Members of the deceased person's family now also have the right to seek action for damages, injunctive relief and other appropriate relief or remedial compensation, including attorney fees.

[HF2985\\*/SF2614/CH195](#)

## ELECTIONS



### Proof of citizenship to vote

Voters may be required to present some form of photo identification at the polling place if a bill sponsored by [Rep. Tom Emmer](#) (R-Delano) makes it into law.

Emmer called the provisions a way to keep the integrity of the voting booth and prevent voter fraud. The bill ([HF1443](#)) passed the House 71-62 May 9. Received from the House one day later, it awaits action by the Senate Elections Committee. [Sen. Michele Bachmann](#) (R-Stillwater) is the Senate sponsor.

Besides the photo identification requirement, the bill gives polling judges discretion to ask voters to confirm their name, address and date of birth.

The bill does make provisions for voters who can't produce photo identification. Their ballots would be marked "unverified" by an election judge and kept separate. If the number of unverified ballots equals 3 percent or more of the ballots cast in the precinct, — amended from 10 percent by [Rep. Mark Olson](#) (R-Big Lake) — they would not be counted until the eligibility of the voter can be determined.

Under the bill, free state photo identification cards would be issued to people who cannot afford to pay for the card.

Concerns that the provisions could present a hardship to some elderly voters, especially those in nursing homes, were addressed by placing an exemption from the documentation requirement for voters living in a residential facility. Those who have a religious objection to being photographed are exempt as well.

Provisions were amended out from earlier versions of the bill that would have required voter applications be accompanied by proof of citizenship in the form of a passport, birth certificate or naturalization document, as well as picture identification.

[Rep. Mark Buesgens](#) (R-Jordan) was unsuccessful in his attempt to amend the bill to require anyone filing for any elected office to provide proof of citizenship and residency in the locale they hope to represent.

An amendment offered by [Rep. Dennis Ozment](#) (R-Rosemount) was added applying this stipulation to just those running for state constitutional office or the Legislature. "It is

## CAPITOL VIEW



PHOTO BY ANDREW VONBANK

**A lobbyist gazes through one of the large French doors on the second floor of the State Capitol.**



truly a Trojan horse that we are letting happen. We need to make sure that those running are citizens,” he said.

[Rep. Carlos Mariani](#) (DFL-St. Paul) was among those opposed to the amendment. Citizenship is already a requirement to run for office, and a candidate swears to the fact on an affidavit. Mariani said those who don’t hold a birth certificate in their possession may not be able to get one during the filing timeframe. “The issue isn’t that we disagree, the problem is the manner that we are prescribing. We have it in law that you have to be a citizen to run for these offices.”

[Rep. Phil Krinkie](#) (R-Lino Lakes) responded, “If you can’t present your birth certificate, then don’t run for office.”

## ★ EMPLOYMENT

### Jobs omnibus bill

After addressing a number of amendments, most of which were technical in nature, the House Ways and Means Committee voted 27-2 on May 10 to approve the omnibus jobs and economic opportunity finance bill, [HF4183](#), sponsored by [Rep. Bob Gunther](#) (R-Fairmont). The bill next goes to the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee. It has no Senate companion.

Most of the debate centered on a Gunther amendment, which passed, to appropriate funds for establishing the Office of Entrepreneurship in the [Department of Employment and Economic Development](#).

Gunther said the bill addresses a variety of housekeeping and technical changes affecting the department. It also deals with human services programs such as early childhood development training and a Ramsey County child care pilot project.

“We’re doing the best with what we’ve been given,” said Gunther, about the \$750,000 in supplemental funding his committee was appropriated.

[Rep. Karen Clark](#) (DFL-Mpls) unsuccessfully offered an amendment to fund a pilot project that aims to increase licensure of foreign-trained health care professionals. Some members questioned if the aid would help keep the professionals in Minnesota. Clark said these foreign-trained people likely would stay in the state and that with the shortage of health care professionals, the amendment could help improve access.

One of the most notable and supported initiatives of the bill is to help develop biotechnology throughout the state. Legislators hope such funding will stimulate job growth and lure the number of rapidly growing biotech companies to Minnesota.

## ★ ENVIRONMENT

### Clean Water Legacy Act

A bill that would create a Clean Water Legacy Act was approved May 10 by the House Ways and Means Committee and now goes to the House floor.

[HF826/SF762](#)\* was passed by the Senate during the 2005 session. This session, [Rep. Dennis Ozment](#) (R-Rosemount), who sponsors the bill with Sen. Dennis Fredrickson (R-New Ulm), has accompanied it through House committees on Taxes; Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources (twice); Rules and Legislative Administration; and Ways and Means (twice).

The bill would facilitate the state’s implementation of the [federal Clean Water Act](#) and clarify the procedures by which the [Minnesota Pollution Control Agency](#) (MPCA) restores impaired waters. It creates a Minnesota Clean Water Legacy Act and a Clean Water Council, an advisory-only body to assist in implementing the policies of the Clean Water Legacy Act, and to report biennially to the Legislature regarding progress toward clean water goals.

The bill includes no appropriations. Two other bills currently carry funding for clean water efforts: \$20 million is specified in the House bonding bill, and \$10 million is included in the supplementary budget bill. Clean water appropriations are also included in [SF2734](#)\*/[HF1909](#), the dedicated environmental funding bill now in conference committee.

An amendment moved by [Committee Chair Rep. Jim Knoblach](#) (R-St. Cloud), would have specified that the MPCA has authority to use a concept called “offsetting” to permit wastewater treatment discharges into already impaired waters prior to the completion of the federally mandated total maximum daily load (TMDL) of nutrients for that body of water.

Knoblach said the amendment would end the “moratorium” on economic development in numerous small cities across the state. The latest report from the MPCA is that there are 64 applications awaiting permits to discharge wastewater. The MPCA has not permitted any discharges into impaired waters pending the outcome of an appeal to the state Supreme Court to reverse a lower court ruling that the MPCA violated the federal Clean Water Act in granting such a permit to the cities of Maple Lake and Annandale in 2004.

“There is language that is offset language in other states to try to deal with this situation in other states, and while I certainly don’t want to encourage pollution, I think we need to recognize that there are thousands of TMDLs

out there that potentially need to be done, and I think where we’ve got a situation where an offset can take place we don’t want to freeze economic development — we want to have some flexibility,” Knoblach said.

After an amendment to the Knoblach amendment authorizing only that the MPCA conduct a study of offsetting procedures was approved by the committee, Knoblach withdrew his amendment.

### E-waste disposal

A bill that would establish a statewide recycling program for households to dispose of cathode ray tubes (CRTs — computer monitors and televisions) was approved by the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee May 8.

[HF1391/SF1298](#)\* sponsored by [Rep. Ray Cox](#) (R-Northfield) and [Sen. Linda Higgins](#) (DFL-Mpls), now awaits action by the House Ways and Means Committee. The Senate approved the bill 44-22 last year.

A state law banning CRTs from landfills takes effect July 1, Cox said, and the bill provides for the collection and disposal of CRTs, which contain leaded glass.

The bill allows for a plan put forth by manufacturers of CRTs that are sold in Minnesota to register and work with the [Pollution Control Agency](#) (PCA) to annually collect and recycle 2.25 pounds per capita of these products. If the manufacturers fail to do so by 2009, as determined by the PCA, the manufacturers’ plan is repealed and a second plan, set forth by a solid waste task force, would take effect.

The task force plan requires manufacturers to collect and dispose of not only CRTs, but all electronic waste such as computer peripherals, printers and fax machines.

“If everything works right, there won’t be a cost (to local or state government),” Cox said.

Cox said the bill is a “strange marriage between the manufacturers’ plan that is essentially saying, ‘We’ll do the best job we can, and we’ll try to collect up all the waste we can, and we don’t want to have to be overburdened,’ and the task force plan, which is very prescriptive and sets out all sorts of measurements and devices in the plan about how all this would be done.”

Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt testified in opposition to the manufacturers’ plan. She said there likely would be costs to local governments if the manufacturers’ plan was not carried out properly. Among other objections she voiced were limiting the manufacturers’ responsibility to CRTs only, giving them one

full year to begin collections and including no inflation factor for the amount of waste they are required to collect as time proceeds.

"In February of '09 when digital TVs come in, that's going to have a huge impact on the amount of waste that's going to end up coming into the system," she said.

## FAMILY



### Child care assistance

**Signed  
by  
the  
governor**  
★ ★ ★

Under a new law signed May 5 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, families having a third party help pay for child care costs will no longer be penalized.

Previously, if a family received financial help to pay for child care services, it could count as part of their income. As child care costs continue to rise, [Rep. Nora Slawik](#) (DFL-Maplewood) said families should not have to pay the price for receiving help.

When the [Department of Human Services](#) counted the assistance money as family income, it could result in the family being ineligible for certain services.

[Sen. John Hottinger](#) (DFL-St. Peter) also sponsors the law, which is effective May 6, 2006.

[HF3944/SF3615](#)\*/CH191

## GAMBLING



### Card club expansion nixed

An amendment to add 40 tables at the Canterbury Park Card Club and another seven days for poker tournaments at the club was not included in a bill that makes minor modifications to the state's gambling laws.

[Rep. Andy Westerberg](#) (R-Blaine), who sponsored [HF3194/SF2953](#)\* with [Sen. Ann Rest](#) (DFL-New Hope), termed the bill as "technical" with "no expansion of gambling." Passed by the House 115-13, it is now on its way to the governor. The Senate passed the bill 63-0 April 25.

No matter how non-controversial a gambling bill is labeled by its sponsor, on the House floor it can quickly turn suspect to those against any expansion of gambling.

[Rep. Mark Buesgens](#) (R-Jordan), who unsuccessfully offered the card club expansion amendment, said that adding tables is important to meet the growing popularity of card clubs. "People have to wait hours at a time to get a seat at the table. And if they have to sit and wait, they leave because there are other options." He said adding tables is not an expansion of gambling, but a redistribution

of dollars that are being spent elsewhere, such as playing poker over the Internet.

"I don't know if I would call this only a redistribution," said [Rep. Tony Sertich](#) (DFL-Chisholm). He said Canterbury Park had a high turnout for its opening weekend, May 6-7, and if there were more tables, there would be more people gambling. "How can we not see the expanded number of people there, and this amendment not be an expansion of gambling?"

Members also questioned whether language in the bill allowing for the sale of buttons in a raffle for a value of less than \$5 is an expansion of gambling.

While most of the bill deals with modifications to the law as it relates to bingo, the bill adds breeders of Arabian horses to those available for proceeds from the Minnesota Breeders' Fund. Supported by a specific tax paid by Canterbury Park, the fund is used as an incentive to encourage horseracing and breeding of certain horses used for racing at licensed Minnesota racetracks.

## HEALTH



### Interstate compact

**Signed  
by  
the  
governor**  
★ ★ ★

Chemical health treatment facilities will be able to treat out-of-state patients, under a new law signed May 10 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

The law was created so people in neighboring states could receive chemical health treatment in Minnesota and vice versa. Similar laws exist for mental health services so people do not have to travel far distances to seek such services.

Sponsored by [Rep. Matt Dean](#) (R-Dellwood) and [Sen. Julie Rosen](#) (R-Fairmont), the law takes effect Aug. 1, 2006.

[HF3111/SF2881](#)/CH193

### Medical license provision

**Signed  
by  
the  
governor**  
★ ★ ★

A new law, signed May 5 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, will modify provisions for medical licenses in Minnesota of United States and Canadian medical school graduates.

Effective Aug. 1, 2006, it requires medical license applicants who passed a certified exam more than 10 years ago to meet additional criteria. Furthermore, the [Board of Medical Practices](#) would approve which endorsed organizations could administer the exams.

[Rep. Jim Abeler](#) (R-Anoka), who sponsored the law with [Sen. Steve Kelley](#) (DFL-Hopkins),

## GOPHER RALLY



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

**Tony Dungy, former Gopher football great and current head coach of the Indianapolis Colts, speaks at a May 11 rally in front of the Capitol for a new on-campus outdoor football stadium. University of Minnesota mascot "Goldy Gopher" listens in the background.**

said it will help streamline the medical licensure process.

[HF2745/SF2721](#)/CH188

### Extending a sunset date

**Signed  
by  
the  
governor**  
★ ★ ★

Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed a new law on May 4 that will extend the sunset provision on radiation therapy facilities construction from Aug. 1, 2008, to Aug. 1, 2013.

Currently, all radiation therapy facilities must be constructed only by an entity owned, operated or controlled by a hospital. Once the law, sponsored by [Rep. Duke Powell](#) (R-Burnsville) and [Sen. Linda Berglin](#) (DFL-Mpls), takes effect Aug. 1, 2006, the sunset will be extended.

Powell originally wanted the current law to be permanent because he believes hospitals can provide the best services for consumers, but the sunset extension was a compromise he would accept. Opponents of the law have said they favor a law that enables more competition in a free market.

[HF2810/SF2532](#)\*/CH190



## Medical license exam

Signed  
by  
the  
governor  
★ ★ ★

Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed legislation into law May 10 establishing an examination extension for medical licensure candidates who serve in the military.

Sponsored by [Rep. Fran Bradley](#) (R-Rochester) and [Sen. Becky Lourey](#) (DFL-Kerrick), an applicant mobilized into active military service would have 10 years to pass all three steps of the United States medical licensure exam. Currently, those active in the military, who must show proof of their service, may be gone for extended periods of time. However, they have seven years to take the exam, which is administered by the [Board of Medical Practice](#).

The law is effective retroactively from Dec. 1, 2005.

[HF3771](#)\*/[SF3457](#)/CH199

## ★ HOUSING

### Home park closure notice

Signed  
by  
the  
governor  
★ ★ ★

By law, residents in manufactured home parks and the local government planning agency are given at least nine months' notice if there is to be a conversion of all or a portion of the park to another use, or if it is to close.

A new law, signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty May 10, amends the current statute to include the commissioner of health and the [Housing Finance Agency](#) to that notification list.

The new law also spells out stipulations that apply if the manufactured home park is being converted into a common interest community. According to the new law, the cooperative will need to be incorporated; at least 90 percent of the cooperative's members will need to be residents of the park at the time of the conversion; and the residents will not be required, at the time of the conversion, to become members of the cooperative.

Sponsored by [Rep. Karen Clark](#) (DFL-Mpls) and [Sen. D. Scott Dibble](#) (DFL-Mpls) the law takes effect Aug. 1, 2006.

[HF3449](#)\*/[SF2887](#)/CH200

## ★ LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Grand Rapids bonds OK'd

The House passed a bill May 8 that would allow the city of Grand Rapids to refinance bonds that it had issued for public utilities projects.

[HF3383](#), sponsored by [Rep. Loren Solberg](#)

## HISTORICAL DELEGATE



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Michael Salzberg, a state Capitol site guide, takes a break on the west steps of the Capitol while he portrays Dr. John Murphy, a delegate to the Minnesota Constitutional Convention in 1857, for school groups during their May 8 building tours. The portrayals are done annually as part of Statehood Week. Minnesota became the 32nd state on May 11, 1858.

(DFL-Grand Rapids), was passed 128-0. Received from the House May 9, it awaits action by the Senate Rules and Administration Committee. [Sen. Tom Saxhaug](#) (DFL-Grand Rapids) is the Senate sponsor.

Solberg said city officials approached him about the idea of issuing general obligation bonds to refund outstanding revenue bonds in the hopes of saving money on interest rates.

"It will give them an opportunity to save

some interest rates on their revenue bonds that they have with the public utilities commission,” he said.

### Drainage system fee authorized

Signed  
by  
the  
governor  
★ ★ ★

A new law permits Red Lake and Pennington counties to set up a joint board to establish a fee for use of a Red Lake drainage ditch originating in Pennington County.

Signed May 5 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, the law allows the two counties to work out an agreement to assess a fee to help pay for cleaning and improving the ditch. Sponsored by [Rep. Bernie Lieder](#) (DFL-Crookston) and [Sen. LeRoy Stumpf](#) (DFL-Plummer), it is effective May 6, 2006.

“What happens, because of this established drainage ditch, and it’s in two counties, they want to have a ditch clean-out or improvement and they can’t do that. They can’t assess the ditch cost back in the other county unless they get a joint agreement. This allows them to assess those costs back onto the ditch system,” Lieder said.

Lieder said the counties approached him together about passing the legislation.

[HF1480](#)\*/[SF1364](#)/CH186

## RECREATION

★

### Park name change confirmed

Signed  
by  
the  
governor  
★ ★ ★

When the Hennepin County Park Reserve District had its name changed in state statute last year to the “Three Rivers Park District,” the Legislature forgot to change it in another part of state statute.

A new law signed May 5 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty fixes that.

Effective Aug. 1, 2006, the law, sponsored by [Rep. Joe Hoppe](#) (R-Chaska) and [Sen. Ann Rest](#) (DFL-New Hope), finalizes the park district’s name change as far as state law is concerned.

“This is an addendum to the bill that we passed last year changing the name ‘Hennepin Parks’ to ‘Three Rivers Parks’ in statute,” Hoppe said. “The bill passed unanimously last year; this was just overlooked. All we’re doing is changing this one last place in statute.”

[HF3142](#)\*/[SF2754](#)/CH187

If you have Internet access, visit the  
Legislature’s Web page at:  
<http://www.leg.mn>

## TRANSPORTATION

★

### River commission extended

A bill that would extend the [Mississippi River Parkway Commission](#) until June 30, 2012, was approved 125-6 by the House May 4.

Sponsored by [Rep. Jerry Dempsey](#) (R-Red Wing), [HF3991](#) was received May 8 by the Senate and awaits action by the Senate State and Local Government Operations Committee. Sen. David Senjem (R-Rochester) is the Senate sponsor.

Dempsey said the commission, that promotes tourism and preservation of the Mississippi River, is currently set to expire June 30, 2007.

Legislatively recognized in Minnesota in 1963, the commission is comprised of 15 appointed members, including four legislators.

According to its Web site, the mission of the commission is, “To preserve, promote and enhance the scenic, historic and recreational resources of the Mississippi River, to foster economic growth in the corridor and to develop the national, scenic and historic byway known as the Great River Road.”

Senjem said the river, “in and of itself is a great natural resource, not only for Minnesota but for this entire country.” The National Scenic Byway in Minnesota is the second longest in the country extending 575 miles.

Because of the byway’s designation as a Minnesota Great River Road, communities along the road are eligible for federal grant dollars to enhance projects, Senjem said. From Fiscal Year 2001 to Fiscal Year 2005, \$596,953 has been awarded to communities.

### Transportation future

The House Ways and Means Committee approved an omnibus transportation finance bill May 10 without an earlier amendment that would have increased the gasoline excise tax.

Sponsored by [Rep. Mary Liz Holberg](#) (R-Lakeville), [HF3761](#), in part, appropriates \$88.8 million in Trunk Highway Fund monies and another \$43.4 million in bonds, both for fiscal year 2007.

The bill now goes to the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee.

[Rep. Tom Rukavina](#) (DFL-Virginia) successfully offered an amendment May 5 at the House Taxes Committee hearing that would have increased the gasoline excise tax by 3 cents per gallon for sales made after June 30, 2006, and an additional 3 cents per gallon one year later. Holberg reminded the committee that the governor was firm about vetoing a bill that contains a gas tax.

The bill would allocate funds for construction, reconstruction, and improvement of trunk highways. It would also change the language for the Minnesota constitutional amendment to be put before voters in November regarding the motor vehicle sales tax revenues so that all revenues from the existing tax on the sale of new and used motor vehicles to be dedicated to highways and public transit after June 30, 2011. The bill also requires an evaluation of the current and long-range needs of the state’s transportation system, and an investigation of strategies to meet those needs. It would also allow for motor vehicles owners with impounded vehicles to retrieve goods from inside the vehicle without having first to pay impounding fees.

Of the \$83 million in the trunk highway fund money dedicated to highway construction and improvement, \$50 million is to be used for projects identified in the federal [High Priority Projects program](#) for projects of regional significance.

More than \$18 million of bond dollars are targeted for a new regional headquarters building in Mankato; \$15 million would be for design and engineering of trunk highway projects; and \$10 million for the exterior renovation of the Department of Transportation building in St. Paul.

The bill also contains the nearly \$2.5 billion governor’s transportation package, which includes nearly \$2.49 billion in bonds for trunk highway projects, and allocates new revenue resulting from the proposed constitutional dedication of all motor vehicle sales tax revenue to transportation.

An unsuccessful amendment offered by [Rep. Ron Erhardt](#) (R-Edina) would have removed the bonding dollars. Proponents of the removal said the bill focuses too much on debt service and funding is contingent upon the passage of the constitutional amendment.

A companion bill ([SF3764](#)), sponsored by [Sen. Steve Murphy](#) (DFL-Red Wing), awaits action by the full Senate.

### Commuter rail liability

With an expectation that commuter rail lines would be using already-existing privately owned freight railroad lines, private companies performing public services would receive the same kind of liability protection as governmental entities, under a bill approved 94-38 by the House May 9.

[HF3656/SF3246](#)\*, sponsored by [Rep. Kathy Tingelstad](#) (R-Andover) and [Sen. Don Betzold](#) (DFL-Fridley), would allow the transportation commissioner, or a public entity contracting with the commissioner, to contract with a railroad for use of the track.

Additionally, the bill applies governmental

## DRUMMING UP SUPPORT



PHOTO BY SARAH STACKE

**DeMarjion Murry, a fourth-grader at WISE Charter School in Minneapolis, performs on the Capitol steps May 5 as part of program celebrating Minnesota charter schools.**

tort liability law to a private railroad acting under state contract providing commuter rail service, and allows for the purchasing of insurance for all types of claims or damages.

“We look to the other states with the liability issues they have in place and this legislation mimics that,” said Tingelstad, calling it the framework for punitive damages and liability issues.

According to the nonpartisan House Research Department the result is twofold: it would apply a \$300,000 per person and \$1 million per incident damage cap to the railroad operation; and it would exempt a railroad from liability for punitive damages.

“Government entities are not obligated to pay for punitive damages,” Clifford Greene, an attorney working with the Department of Transportation and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, previously told a House committee.

“This is a way for them to withstand a rational basis challenge when inevitably somebody’s going to be injured on these commuter rail tracks,” said [Rep. Chris DeLaForest](#) (R-Andover). He unsuccessfully offered an amendment that would have

removed language defining the commuter rail as serving a public purpose and necessity. The Minnesota Constitution gives people a right to address grievances, he said.

Passed 57-5 by the Senate April 12, the bill now goes awaits gubernatorial action.

## VETERANS



### Meeting protocol

**Signed  
by  
the  
governor  
★ ★ ★**

Under a new law, the [Minnesota Veterans Homes Board](#) is permitted to conduct meetings by telephone or other electronic means.

Signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty on May 10, and effective the following day, the law stipulates that at least one board member, the executive director or an attorney for the agency would have to present at the regular meeting location during a teleconference meeting, for example, so the public can attend.

While the law makes it easier for the veteran’s board to conduct meetings, it is not intended

to limit public access. A similar law was passed in 2004 giving the same authority to the Minnesota State Council on Disability.

[Rep. Denny McNamara](#) (R-Hastings) and [Sen. Paul Koering](#) (R-Fort Ripley) sponsor the law.

[HF3665](#)\*/[SF3096](#)/CH198

### Web Sites To Note

**House of Representatives:** [www.house.mn](http://www.house.mn)

**Senate:** [www.senate.mn](http://www.senate.mn)

**Legislative home page:** [www.leg.mn](http://www.leg.mn)

**Governor’s office:** [www.governor.state.mn.us](http://www.governor.state.mn.us)

**State Government:** [www.state.mn.us](http://www.state.mn.us)

**Find out who represents you:**

[www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/Districtfinder.asp](http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/Districtfinder.asp)

**Legislative meeting schedule:**

[www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hinfo/hinfosched.asp](http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hinfo/hinfosched.asp)

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Call House Public Information  
Services at (651) 296-2146  
or 1-800-657-3550



# Paying a fair share

Outcome of school bond requests sometimes rests on vote of local farmers

By IRENE VOTH

**F**armers watch the weather because it has the power to make or break them. This year, Minnesota farmers are watching the Legislature for the same reason.

"There's a perfect storm arising," said Ken Kuttner, a McLeod County farmer and one of several farmers who have testified before various House committees this session.

The storm Kuttner speaks of is caused by agricultural land values being pushed dramatically upward, resulting in the likelihood of what Kuttner describes as "grossly unfair" property tax burdens and of small communities being torn apart.

The taxes Kuttner currently pays to his local jurisdictions have increased dramatically in the last 10 years. In McLeod County, the assessors' estimated average value per acre of farmland in 1995 was \$921. In 2005, it was \$2,603, an increase of more than 280 percent, according to the University of Minnesota's Minnesota Land Economics calculations. The rising values, many economists say, have little to do with agricultural productivity or commodity prices. Instead, they are the result of the action of a catalyst often called the 1031 exchange. (See sidebar.)

But these increases, which pay for roads and other infrastructure, are not the taxes Kuttner finds most objectionable.

Far more objectionable is the possibility that if a proposed bond levy is approved by voters in his school district later this year, his property tax liability will increase again — by 40 percent.

## Ugly local battles

Under current law, the tax amount needed to repay the bonds used to finance school capital improvements is levied on the net tax capacity of the property within the district. The capacity is determined by assigned class rates: 1 percent for homes; 1.5 percent or 2 percent for businesses; and 0.55 percent on the first \$600,000 of value for agricultural lands and 1 percent on values above \$600,000.

The inflated agricultural land values have wreaked havoc with the formula, which was put in place when there were many small farms, and land values had something to do with agricultural productivity.

Tom Hueser, another McLeod County farmer, told members of the Property and Local Tax Division of the House Taxes Committee April 6 that a \$10-per-acre bond will cost him half a million dollars

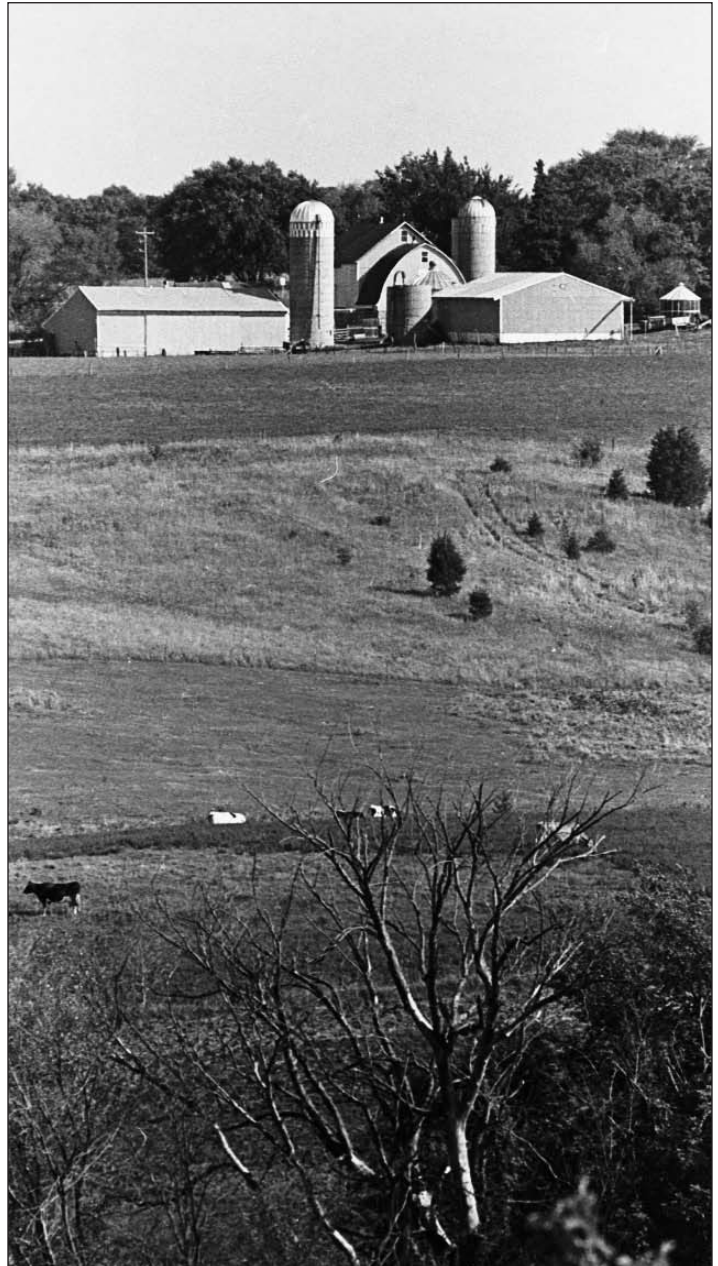
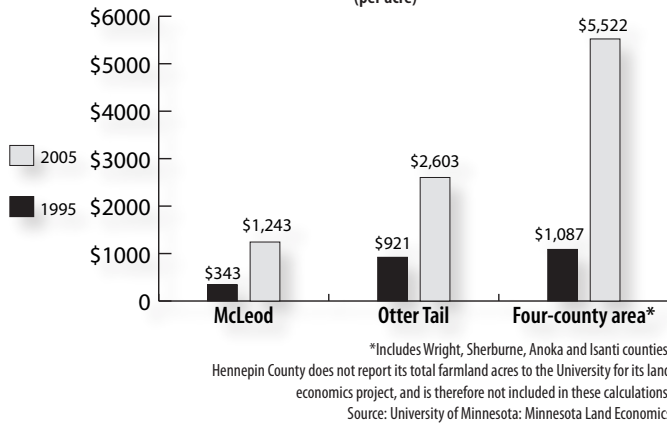


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

**Farm owners sometimes vote against school bond levies because their property's tax liability will increase at a higher rate than other properties in the district.**

**Farmland Assessors' Estimated Values**  
(per acre)



## The 1031 Exchange

The 1031 exchange is a section of the [Internal Revenue Code](#) that allows a taxpayer to dispose of valuable property and not pay capital gains taxes on the sale proceeds. The 1031 exchange renders the sale of the property a non-taxable event if a "like property" is purchased with the proceeds within a specific time frame.

Although it has been around for more than 80 years, the 1031 exchange was, for most of that time, complicated and never undertaken without the assistance of a lawyer. But as it evolved, it became less complicated, and beginning with the Omnibus Budget Act of 1990, financial advisors were followed by real estate agents in becoming the primary advocates of the much simpler exchange procedures.

Farmers whose agricultural lands are purchased by developers can use the exchange to relocate their operations away from the urban sprawl. Retiring farmers can use the exchange to pass their assets on to their heirs. The number of farmers choosing to do so and the purchasing power they've gained from being paid development prices for their land has played a major role, many economists say, in stimulating the market for agricultural land.

Other factors, such as low interest rates, record farm profits in 2004 and 2005 and the preference by investors since the Sept. 11 attacks to invest in real property rather than the stock market have also played roles in inflating agricultural land prices.

(I. Voth)

over 20 years, even though he owns only a small percentage of the 2,000 acres he farms.

Kuttner estimates that he will be paying \$17,000 to \$20,000 per year, or 20 percent of his annual farm income, for the school bond levy, while the tax liability of district residents who do not own agricultural lands has been estimated at less than \$400 per year, based on an average residence value of \$100,000. That is less than 1 percent of an annual household income of \$45,000.

The disparity has left farmers with little choice but to oppose school building referendums. And this, Kuttner says, can lead to "ugly local battles," with farmers being labeled as "anti-education."

[Rep. Randy Demmer](#) (R-Hayfield) and [Rep. Laura Brod](#) (R-New Prague) have sponsored legislation that attempts to resolve the situation.

"It's not that farmers don't want to pay taxes; they want to pay their fair share," Demmer said, adding he has heard from farmers all over the state and has learned that the tax liability on some districts' agricultural lands accounts for 60 percent to 80 percent of the total amounts levied, while commercial, industrial and residential properties combined account for only 20 percent to 40 percent.

Of three bills that would have made the situation fairer to farmers, according to Demmer, only [HF1412](#) was included in the House omnibus tax bill, and that was defeated in the House Taxes Committee May 4.

Demmer said he is still hopeful there will be opportunities this session to move the legislation by some means, but added that to be successful, it would have to involve no additional state funding for school districts.

### Fairness to farmers

Because the omnibus tax bill was defeated, [HF3994](#) is also not moving forward. Sponsored by [Rep. Bud Nornes](#) (R-Fergus Falls), the bill would permit the Fergus Falls' school district to impose a local option sales tax to finance its proposed capital improvement plan, which includes a new high school.

In testifying for the bill March 30 before the Property and Local Tax Division of the House Taxes Committee, Darrel Tungseth, a Fergus Falls-area farmer and member of Independent School District 544's facilities task force, said a local option sales tax was fairer to farmers than a property tax levy "where you're taxing a small number of people very heavily."

Mark Masten, the district's business manager, said the town residents "are sympathetic to farmers" and unwilling to place such a disproportionate financial burden on them, as evidenced by the defeat

of two previous bond referendums.

Fergus Falls is the first district in the state to attempt to finance capital improvements through a local option sales tax, although it has been done in Jamestown, N.D. Masten said the fact that all legislation addressing agricultural land values and the school bonding situation is currently stalled suggests the Legislature "cares more about stadiums than schools." He said the school buildings that need to be replaced or updated in Fergus Falls were deemed to be "in poor shape" two years ago.

### Property value disparity

A third school district in which the school bond levy situation was discussed in House committees this session is Elk River. A bill that would have allowed residents to elect

whether to divide the district in two was defeated March 21 by the House Education Policy and Reform Committee. The bill may be resurrected this year or re-introduced next year, as the population of the counties involved continues to grow.

Jim Berg, Elk River's interim superintendent, said if the district does split at any time in the future, the taxable property on which bond costs have already been levied for existing facilities would continue forward until the bonds are paid off.

Berg said he had not heard agricultural landowners weigh in on the situation, although there may have been considerably more input if the bill to allow the referendum had passed.

"What has come up is that there might be property-rich and property-poor parts of a district," he said.

Of the five counties that have acreage in the Elk River district, Hennepin County does not report its total number of farmland acres to Minnesota Land Economics. Each of the other counties do, but the agricultural acreage of each that is included in the district varies.



# Mercury here to stay

Despite new legislation, mercury pollution is a stubborn pest

By Nick Busse

The [Mercury Emissions Reduction Act of 2006](#), signed into law May 11 by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, will put Minnesota far beyond the mandated federal standards to implement what many regard as the strongest mercury reduction initiative in the United States.

Sponsored by [Rep. Tom Hackbarth](#) (R-Cedar) and [Sen. D. Scott Dibble](#) (DFL-Mpls), the legislation was passed unanimously by the House May 1 and by the Senate May 4. It will reduce the state's overall mercury emissions by about one-third by requiring our largest coal-burning power plants to cut their emissions by 90 percent by 2015.

"This bill may be known as the best mercury reduction bill in the country," said [Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher](#) (DFL-Mpls). And by all indications, she is probably right.

But don't go grabbing for your rod and reel just yet. Minnesota's fish, lakes and other natural resources will need a lot more than just some progressive legislation before they're free of mercury pollution.

## A long-term problem

"This piece of legislation is probably not going to show dramatic decreases in the amount of mercury deposited in Minnesota, and is probably not going to show dramatic decreases in the amount of mercury that we find in the fish in our lakes," said Xcel Energy Director of Government Relations Rick Evans.

Evans isn't alone in saying so. According to the [Minnesota Pollution Control Agency](#) (MPCA), only 10 percent of all the mercury present in Minnesota's environment is actually emitted by sources within the state; the rest comes from regional emissions (30 percent), global emissions (30 percent) and natural emissions (30 percent). Of the mercury produced within the state, 58 percent comes from energy production (mostly coal-burning), 22 percent from product disposal and 20 percent from taconite processing.



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

The Allen S. King coal burning power plant emits an average of 102 pounds of mercury each year (Environmental Protection Agency 2001) and ranks third among the 10 major coal plants in the state for total mercury emissions.

MPCA Assistant Commissioner David Thornton said that is because of the type of coal used by Minnesota's power plants, the mercury produced often stays in the atmosphere for long periods of time, which means that much of it will get deposited far outside of our borders. Similarly, mercury produced on the other side of the globe can easily be carried all the way to Minnesota, making it difficult to fight mercury pollution on our own.

"We're not going to be able to clean up our fish by ourselves. We need a lot of help from other people, and we certainly can't expect them to do it without us being willing to do it as well," Thornton said.

Although Minnesota has been and will continue to be a national leader in reducing mercury emissions, until other states and countries like China start taking strides toward reducing their emissions, mercury will

likely remain a familiar foe in Minnesota's environment.

## A good start

Despite the fact that the bill will only reduce the state's overall mercury depositions by 3 percent or 4 percent, legislators, energy companies and environmentalists

alike agree that the bill is at least a good start.

"I think there's some merit to the argument that we've got to start somewhere, and

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***"We're not going to be able to clean up our fish by ourselves. We need a lot of help from other people, and we certainly can't expect them to do it without us being willing to do it as well."***

**-- David Thornton, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency assistant commissioner**

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Mercury continued on page 23



## Hybrid alternatives

### Unique Mankato program retrofits vehicles for the future

By PATTY JANOVEC

A hybrid vehicle, in simple terms, is a vehicle mainly powered by gas with an electric assist, while a plug-in hybrid vehicle is mainly electric with a gas-assist function.

The Legislature would strongly encourage the Minnesota Center for Automotive Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato to retrofit two flexible fuel vehicles to operate as plug-in hybrid electric vehicles under [HF3718](#).

[Rep. Frank Hornstein](#) (DFL-Mpls), who sponsors the proposal, said the retrofit would “reconfigure the battery in such a way that it could be plugged in overnight and the first 30 miles are on electricity alone, and thereafter you’re capable of getting over 100 miles per gallon.”

The bill would also give the school the ability to accept donations and work with nonprofit agencies, higher education institutions and others to collect the funds for the costs of retrofitting the hybrid vehicles.

“When you start out on things, you can’t

look for cost savings right off the bat. You’ve got to prove the technology. You need to get them in the real world so people can use them and they can make improvement,” said Bruce Jones, a center professor.

“This is not some pie-in-the-sky futuristic vision. The technology and the components of this technology are here now,” Hornstein said.

One could consider this program as setting the technological bar for legislating the retrofit project. Jones has been receiving calls from places as far away as California on the

possibilities of legislating similar programs. The Mankato automotive engineering program is the only four-year program like it in the nation, he said.

Undergraduate students in the program would do the retrofitting. “What better way to work on a project like this than undergraduate students that are going to be going out working for these companies making these decisions.

“I think we need to start looking at these options and alternatives, and the more of them that are out there, the scale of economies work in their favor that costs are gonna come down,” Jones said.

HF3718 would also:

- require the state to purchase plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEV) for its vehicle fleet;
- require all solicitation documents for the purchase of passenger automobiles to



Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Center for Automotive Research

**Students from the Minnesota Center for Automotive Research designed this Formula SAE car that competed at the Pontiac Silverdome in the Society of Automotive Engineers Formula SAE Competition.**

include the statement, “It is the intention of the state of Minnesota to begin purchasing PHEVs and neighborhood electric vehicles as soon as they become commercially available, meet the state’s performance specification, and are priced no more than ten percent above the price for comparable gasoline-powered vehicles”; and

- establish a PHEV task force to identify barriers to the adoption of such vehicles by state agencies, small and large private fleets, and Minnesota drivers at large, and

develop strategies to be implemented over one-, three- and five-year time frames to overcome those barriers.

The task force analysis is also to include “possible financial incentives to encourage Ford Motor Company to produce plug-in hybrid and flexible fuel vehicles at its St. Paul plant.”

“There needs to be statements from state and local governments across the country to the manufacturers that we are ready, that we are ready as a state to lead by example, and we are serious, not just rhetorical, about lessening our dependence on foreign oil,” Hornstein said.

Although plug-in hybrid electric vehicles aren’t necessarily for those who commute longer distances, the vehicles can potentially be powered at least 20 miles by electricity. Jones said that is the distance the majority of Minnesota commuters travel to work nearly everyday.

Hornstein’s bill awaits action by the full House. A companion ([SF3440](#)), sponsored by [Sen. D. Scott Dibble](#) (DFL-Mpls), awaits action by the full Senate.

#### The smart car

Another alternative for consumers that has already hit the commercial vehicle market are so-called “smart cars.” Sponsored by [Rep. Greg Blaine](#) (R-Little Falls) and [Sen. Paul Koering](#) (R-Fort Ripley), HF1838\*/SF1811/CH189 defines the “smart car” as a “neighborhood electric vehicle” and sets the restrictions for its operation. It was signed into law May 4.

Defined as an “electrically powered motor vehicle that has four wheels, and has a speed attainable in one mile of at least 20 miles per hour but not more than 25 miles per hour on a paved level surface,” the cars are restricted from going on roads with speed limits of more than 35 miles per hour, “except to make a direct crossing” of a street or highway with a higher speed limit, under the proposal.

“It’s moving us into that electric car future. We join 35 to 40 other states that have already made these road legal,” said [Rep. Al Juhnke](#) (DFL-Willmar), who sponsors a similar bill ([HF2734](#)), which he voluntarily laid over.

The vehicles would be subject to all the same requirements as other cars such as turn signals, license plates, windshields and seat belts, said Juhnke. 🐼

## Exploring Minnesota

New caucus aims to promote state tourism

By IRENE VOTH

State legislators who seek common ground with members of the opposite political party might do well to look beneath their feet. There it is. Minnesota — the land of 10,000 lakes and who knows how many festivals, celebrations and tourist sites. That's right. Who knows?

Some legislators are making it a point to know, and to help make sure others know. Assisted by a corps of hospitality and tourism organizations, these legislators have formed the bipartisan Hospitality and Tourism Legislative Caucus. Chairing the caucus are [Sen. Carrie Ruud](#) (R-Breezy Point), [Sen. Rod Skoe](#) (DFL-Clearbrook), [Rep. Tony Sertich](#)

(DFL-Chisholm) and [Rep. Dean Simpson](#) (R-New York Mills). Membership in the caucus currently includes five senators and 21 representatives.

"Our communities all need to promote themselves," said [Rep. Judy Soderstrom](#) (R-Mora), one of 15 legislators who attended the first caucus in mid-March, where she participated in a sharing of information and ideas to promote the state's attractions both locally and globally.

Soderstrom spoke of her own community and its Vasaloppet cross-country ski race as an example. Mora's Vasaloppet is the American sister race to the Vasaloppet held annually in Mora, Sweden, since 1922. The Mora event takes place the third Sunday of February and is the city's largest annual event.

[Rep. Maxine Penas](#) (R-Badger) said finding how to promote the family resorts "which are going down in number every year" are among her reasons for membership in the caucus. The resorts of primary concern to her are located near Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods, but she said she would also like to have additional ideas to promote birding, ATV usage and hiking on trails in the counties of her district in northwest Minnesota.

Hosted by the Minnesota Hospitality & Tourism Government Affairs Round Table and facilitated by Tom Day, government liaison for the Minnesota Restaurant Association, the Minnesota Hotel & Lodging Association and the Minnesota Resort &

### National Tourism Week

May 13-21 is See America Week/National Tourism Week, a great opportunity for all in the tourism industry to focus on the importance tourism plays in your business or community. A great deal of information on tourism sales, taxes and employment down to the county level, is available at <http://www.industry.exploreminnesota.com> under Research.

Campground Association, the meeting gave legislators a chance to explore what the mission of the caucus would be.

"The caucus is to be the legislators' caucus. We're there to support them and supply what they need," Day said. He added that legislators said they would appreciate more opportunities to discuss tourism issues, including exploring sources of funding for [Explore Minnesota Tourism](#), the state's tourism office, and how they can help raise awareness about the industry and its contributions to the state.

"They wanted to know how they can get more of this information into the hands of more people," Day said.

Information provided at the meeting included the following:

- The number of people traveling annually in the state is nearly five times the state's population;
- In some Minnesota counties, leisure and hospitality generate a large share of the tax revenue;
- Tourism across the state produces a gross domestic product (GDP) equal to the state's agricultural GDP; and
- Minnesota's hospitality and tourism industry employs more than 230,000 people and contributes more than \$600 million annually in sales tax revenues.

Day said the caucus will likely meet during the summer, and he said legislators expressed an interest in group "legislator tours" of some of Minnesota's attractions.

Jon Edman, director of Explore Minnesota Tourism, believes legislators are taking more interest in hospitality and tourism. This may be due, he said, to the fact that four legislators were appointed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty to the Explore Minnesota Tourism Council after the office separated from the [Department of Employment and Economic Development](#) last year.

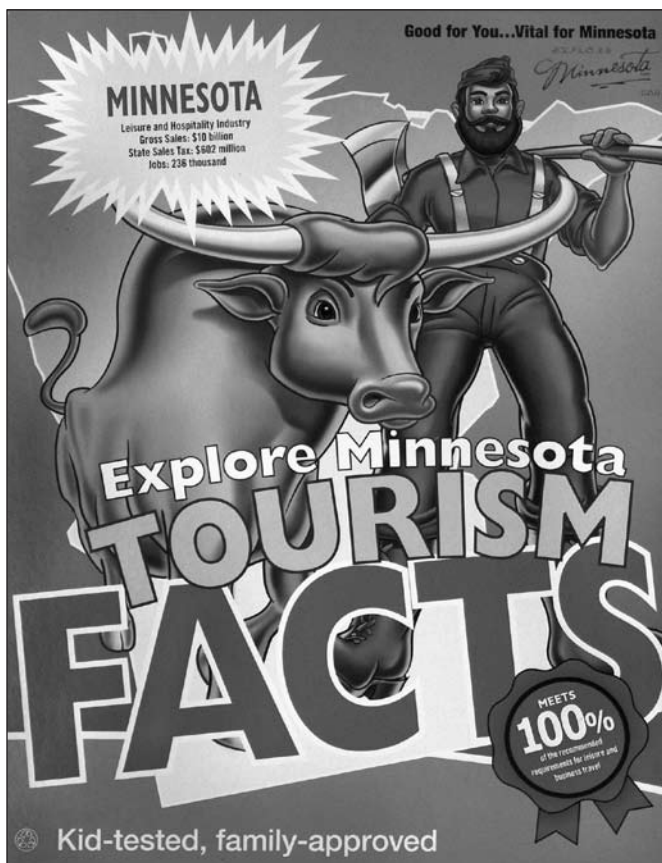


Image courtesy of Explore Minnesota Tourism

The cereal box, created by Explore Minnesota Tourism, is being used to draw attention to the impact of tourism on the state.

# Looking for another House

Ellison hopes to bring his experience to Washington, D. C.

**Editor's Note:** As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By **BAO ONG**

**R**ep. Keith Ellison (DFL-Mpls) is more than just a nice guy. "I'm compelled to speak up for the people," said Ellison. "Legislators must uphold values of their people."

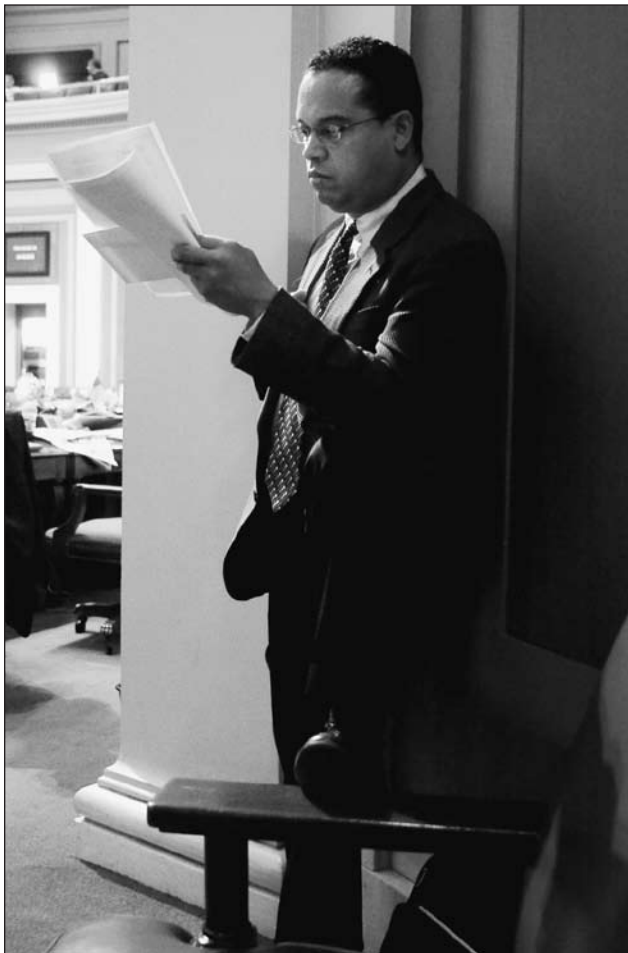


PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

After four years, Rep. Keith Ellison looks to move from the Minnesota House to the U. S. House in Washington, D. C.

Ellison, 42, was endorsed May 6 by his party to replace longtime [U.S. Rep. Martin Sabo](#), who is retiring. His approachability, ability to connect with people and oratorical skills are all reasons why many say he won the endorsement.

But behind the public persona of a legislator, lawyer, father, husband and community advocate, is a man driven by his desire to ensure civil and human rights exist for all people.

"It's not about being on a soap box. I want to engage people," said Ellison. "Giving people a sense that government can help them, that they could be better off, is something I've always tried to do."

Although in the minority party during his two terms in the House, Ellison said he continually pushed for legislation to protect all Minnesotans. He said conservatives used immigration and gay marriage as wedge issues to gain support. "I've always tried to speak for people who aren't treated right," Ellison said.

Fighting for people's rights is nothing new for Ellison. He was the executive director for the Legal Rights Center, and helped spearhead the Minneapolis Civilian Police Review Authority, which investigates and makes recommendations regarding complaints brought against any Minneapolis police officer.

Even as a relative newcomer to the House, Ellison said, from the start, he was never intimidated to get work done. As a congressional candidate,

Ellison said that he is a hybrid of the late-U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone's idealism and Sabo's practicality.

While working on myriad bills, Ellison said he always tried to work with those he shared differences with from the start. "I'm a practical idealist," Ellison said.

Ellison's success is no surprise to [Rep. Frank Hornstein](#) (DFL-Mpls), who sits next to him on the House floor.

"He's full of passion and energy and commitment to justice," said Hornstein, who was elected at the same time as Ellison. "I'll remember his continual camaraderie. He's been a friend you can turn to on the House floor."

Hornstein said Ellison's passion should serve him well. Having worked on Wellstone's campaign in the early-1990s, Hornstein said he has not seen a candidate with as much ability to bring the DFL party together since Wellstone. "The number of Republicans coming up to congratulate him the past days shows he can work well with all people," Hornstein said.

Although Ellison grew up in Detroit, he moved to Minnesota in 1987 when he enrolled at the University of Minnesota Law School, where he earned his law degree in 1990. His wife, Kim, is a high school math teacher. They have four children, ages 9 to 17.

Once the House finishes its work, Ellison will have more work to do before he can hit the campaign trail full-time. Ellison, who has his own law practice in north Minneapolis, has some trial work to finish. Most of his work deals with criminal, civil rights and family law cases.

However, if Ellison does win the November election, he plans on keeping his ties to the House. "Hopefully I'll get back here a lot so that Minnesota is well represented in Washington." 🐾

## STEPPING DOWN

**Rep. Keith Ellison**

**DFL**

**District 58B — Minneapolis**

**Terms: Two (elected 2002)**

**Advice to successor: "Listen more than you talk. Treat everybody right. Never make personal attacks."**



# Back to basics

Samuelson steps down to focus on career, family

**Editor's Note: As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.**

By Nick Busse

By the time she was first elected in 2002, Rep. Char Samuelson (R-New Brighton) had built a successful career for herself as a health care consultant. Now, after serving two terms in the House, Samuelson said she'd like to go back to work.

"My background is long-term health care, and I work for a consulting company, and I just really have a desire to get back into the health care field," she said, adding that she would also like the opportunity to spend more time with her family, especially her grandchildren.

Samuelson, a registered nurse and licensed nursing home administrator, said she has spent much of her time at the Legislature trying to address health care-related issues, especially in relation to senior citizens and children. She has worked extensively on nursing home-related issues and early family childhood education programs.

Among her biggest accomplishments, Samuelson was successful getting legislation passed in 2005 that requires all children under the age of 10 to wear life jackets aboard boats and other personal watercraft.

The law, known as the Grant Allen Law, was named after a 5-year-old boy who drowned after falling off of a boat into a Chisago County lake in 2003. She said that the boy's grandfather lived in her district.

Samuelson has served on the House Health Policy and Finance Committee and its Health Care Cost Containment Division, the House Local Government Committee and the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee, of which she is currently vice-chair.

Prior to being elected state representative, she served on the New Brighton City Council for nine years. Her time serving in a state office has held many surprises, Samuelson said. She was struck first and foremost by the degree to which paid lobbyists and lobbying firms are involved in the legislative process.

"I don't know if that's a good thing or not.

But I do know that the lobbyists are very knowledgeable of their clients' wishes or desires, and so it seems from that standpoint to be a good education piece on various bills," she said.

Also, she hadn't expected how accessible the governor is to legislators. "I think that's really important when you have things you need to discuss with him," she said.

In addition, Samuelson said she has enjoyed learning about the issues that come up in committee meetings and in debates on legislation — even small things, such as what a "feedlot" is.

"Chicken-houses," she explained. "I thought it was some kind of brand of food for animals."

Samuelson said she is leaving a Legislature that is more evenly divided than when she took office, and that makes it more difficult to pass legislation.

"The first two years, if you had a difference of opinion in the caucus, you might have been able to get by," she said. "The last two years, it's just been real tight. There's been a lot more discussion and a lot more reviewing things, so that people understand what they need to, to get those passed."

Samuelson said she has always tried to represent the people of her district as best she could, even when it meant taking an unpopular stance on a particular bill or issue.

"It's been a really good, really rewarding experience, and I hope that I have done something good to impact the state of Minnesota for the future."



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

Rep. Char Samuelson is leaving the House after two terms to get back into the health care field.

## STEPPING DOWN

Rep. Char Samuelson

Republican

District 50B — New Brighton

Terms: Two (elected 2002)

**Advice to successor:** "I think continuing to keep up community contact and remembering that we're here to serve the people from our district is probably the biggest thing. Because those are the people that send us down here, those are the people that we have to be accountable to."

# Goodbye 'My Fair Lady'

Sykora's 12 years of service marked with fairness, inclusion

**Editor's Note:** As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By **BAO ONG**

**R**ep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior) said deciding not to run for re-election was more difficult than when she chose to first run 12 years ago.

"I've tried to work my hardest serving the people," said Sykora, who announced her retirement last month. "It's kind of like feeling that you're letting people down."

Education Commissioner Alice Seagren might attribute that onerous decision to

One time Seagren did not support a bill Sykora sponsored allowing grocery stores to sell wine. "Barb simply said, 'Alice, I don't understand why you don't support this bill,'" recalls Seagren. "But she didn't let that get in the way of a friendship or lively discussion."

"I'm sorry to see her going. She's been a very moderate, strong voice for her community, district and the state of Minnesota," said Seagren. "She will be missed."

Sykora attributes much of her work ethic and morals to her father, John Zwach, who served in both the House and Senate. She said he instilled in her that a "strong democracy needs high standards, ethics and tolerance of other views. You cannot do what's just good for you." Sykora also said, "I'm a give-it-my-all type of person."

In raising her four children, Sykora has tried to do the same. Her family is the main reason she decided to retire from the House after being involved for more than half her life. With her husband now retired and three children living outside Minnesota, Sykora wants to devote more time to them.

While she also wants to spend more time on her golf game, traveling and gardening, Sykora plans to stay involved with her local Rotary Club, bank board and a few chamber groups.

But deciding to step down was still a difficult decision. Sykora said that since the

Republicans became the majority, the biggest change she has seen is that it became easier to accomplish certain goals.

One accomplishment happened last year when the Legislature passed a bill establishing performance pay for teachers. A former school teacher, Sykora hopes it will increase student performance while also rewarding and providing training opportunities for teachers.

Sykora said establishing laws to entice more businesses to operate in Minnesota, worker's compensation reform and health care access have also been important issues throughout her tenure in the House.

She does not view issues as partisan but more in the vein of fairness and big-picture issues, such as "small town versus large cities," she said.

The first bill Sykora introduced that became law was a perfect example.

As a freshman legislator, Sykora saw a flaw in the foster care system. Her bill required interviews of the child and foster care family to be recorded if an issue such as child abuse came up. It was a way to keep potentially biased counselors out of such a situation, she said.

Even with the strong presence of lobbyists, Sykora said they only have so much influence on her decision making. "There are good lobbyists out there and they can provide you good information. But I always try to look at what's good 20 years from now and not just what one person or party says."

Sykora also serves on the House Education Policy and Reform, and Ways and Means committees.


"I have no regrets from the last 12 years," said Sykora. "Often when you close one door, other unexpected ones can open." 



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHIED

**Rep. Barb Sykora attributes her work ethic to her father, John Zwach, who served in the Minnesota House and Senate. He also served as a congressman representing the former Sixth District.**

Sykora's commitment to fairness. As chair of the House Education Finance Committee, Sykora has always tried to be fair in holding hearings and promoting healthy debate, said Seagren, a former representative from Bloomington.

## STEPPING DOWN

**Rep. Barb Sykora**  
**Republican**

**District 33B — Excelsior**  
**Terms: Six (elected 1994)**

**Advice to successor: "Have an open door. Be willing to listen to all sides."**

# Meeting his own term limit

Westerberg leaving House, but maybe not politics

**Editor's Note:** As the 2006 session winds down, several members have announced their intentions to leave the Minnesota House of Representatives for new adventures. They leave a legacy of service that will remain part of legislative history.

By Mike Cook

It may be a stretch to equate four legislative terms to quarters in a football game, but if it can be done, [Rep. Andy Westerberg](#) (R-Blaine) has reached the 2-minute warning of his House career.

Westerberg has announced that he will not seek re-election this year.

However, before his career is over, he wants to score one final touchdown with a bill that would create many new jobs and have a significant economic impact in his area.

Westerberg sponsors [HF2294](#), which would provide financing for an Anoka County football stadium that would be home to the Minnesota Vikings. That bill awaits action by the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee. "It would be really important for me to be able to get that get done for my community and our district because it's a phenomenal project," he said. "I hope we get it done."

That would not be his only potential knockout this session, as Westerberg also sponsors [HF3484](#), which would reestablish the state boxing commission that was eliminated during the 2001 budget cuts.

Westerberg said he wouldn't mind remaining a member of the House, but it would violate something he told constituents.

"I campaigned for term limits. I like the idea of having new blood and new ideas in here,"

he said. "It appears to be the right time for me to look at doing something else."

However, Westerberg may not be stepping away from politics — he is considering a run for the Anoka County Board of Commissioners. "If you see some other areas that you might be able to be helpful in, I think it makes sense to possibly move on to different challenges," he said.

Being a commissioner might also work better with his professional life.

Self-employed in the insurance industry for more than 25 years, Westerberg admits that it can be hard to keep a career going while at the Capitol because members must often spend much of their waking hours in St. Paul for weeks at a time. "A county commissioner position certainly would still be a lot of work, maybe even more, but it would be such that the schedule would be more workable for my business."

Westerberg said three bills are atop, or near the top, of his list of accomplishments: each in a different area.

He will not see the result of one of those until next year when dirt is moved for a new interchange that will take Highway 242 over Highway 65. The intersection in Anoka County was once ranked the most dangerous in the state.

"This project was not in [the Department of Transportation] 20-year plan, so getting this done took a team effort of the city, county, federal government, everybody getting on board to get this intersection taken care of," he said. "When I found out it was the most dangerous intersection, I created a fund called Money for Safety Improvements on State Trunk Highways with Dangerous Intersections

knowing this was going to be the number one intersection that had to be taken care of, so we funded that account. Thinking outside the box allowed that to occur."

A [2004 equity stripping law](#) that helps people keep from losing their homes is one that Westerberg was "thrilled" to see enacted.

In part, the law could result in a \$10,000 fine or prison time for any foreclosure consultant or foreclosure purchaser who engages in a fraudulent or deceitful practice. "It was getting at people who say they were there to help people who are vulnerable, when they were actually there to steal their equity in the home." Westerberg smiled when noting that the law was used as a model for legislation in Connecticut and some other states.

Earlier in his legislative career, Westerberg is proud of a school safety bill that allowed teachers and counselors to talk about a new student, without violating state law.

"We had students that would transfer into school districts and you couldn't talk about them and their past behaviors or whatever they'd done, so you didn't know who was walking the halls of your school," he said. "That is one of the first pieces I was very, very happy about."

Westerberg will leave with some regrets of legislation that did not become law.


"When we're talking job growth I think corporate income taxes are a killer. We're working real hard this session to try to come up with a single sales factor tax, and it's been passed already. It's not going to be implemented until at a point in the future which puts us behind all other states. We should advance that until 2008 and that's one of the things we are working on. It might be in the omnibus tax bill." 



PHOTO BY TOM OLMSCHEID

**Rep. Andy Westerberg would like to see an Anoka County football stadium approved before he leaves the House.**

## STEPPING DOWN

**Rep. Andy Westerberg**  
**Republican**  
**District 51A — Blaine**  
**Terms: four (elected 1998)**

**Advice to successor: "Having a good attitude is really important because you can't control what people are going to do, think or say. If you have a good attitude, you have an ability to listen to what people are saying and analyze it, separate the good from the bad, and come up with informed decisions."**



## Tracking new laws, vetoes

Once a bill passes the House and Senate in identical form, it is sent to the governor for consideration. The governor has several options when considering a bill:

- sign the bill and it will become law;
- veto the bill;
- line-item veto individual items within an appropriations bill; or
- do nothing, which can have two different effects. The timing of these actions is as important as the actions themselves.

In the second year of the biennium, (even-numbered years) a bill passed by the Legislature and presented to the governor before the final three days of the session will become law unless the governor vetoes it by returning it to the Legislature within three days. (Sundays are not counted in the three-day time limit, but holidays are.)

The governor normally signs the bills and

files them with the secretary of state, but his signature is not required. If a bill is passed during the last three days of session, the governor has a longer time to act. He or she must sign and deposit it with the secretary of state within 14 days after the Legislature adjourns "sine die." If the governor does not sign a bill within this time frame, it will not become law — an action known as a "pocket veto." The governor is not required to provide a reason for the veto.

Only on appropriations bills can the governor exercise the line-item veto authority. This allows the governor to eliminate the appropriation items to which he or she objects. With the exception of pocket vetoes, the governor must include a statement listing the reasons for the veto with the returned bill. Here, too, the timetable is three days after the governor

receives the bill.

Policy items contained in appropriation bills may not be line-item vetoed. In order to veto such an item, the governor is required to veto the entire bill.

A two-thirds vote of the members in each house is needed to override a veto. But because only the governor can call a special session of the Legislature, anything vetoed after the Legislature adjourns is history — at least until the next year.

The governor's veto authority is outlined in the [Minnesota Constitution](#) (Article IV, Section 23).

More information is available on the governor's Web site ([www.governor.state.mn.us](http://www.governor.state.mn.us)). Select the "Legislation" link.

### Key:

CH=Chapter; HF=House File; SF=Senate File

CH	HF	SF	Description	Signed	Vetoed
170	3015	2653*	Pharmacy and related costs money appropriated.	3/8/2006	
171	2623*	2466	Previous redevelopment account appropriation modified relating to the city of Mounds View, and Ramsey and Anoka counties.	3/14/2006	
172	1915*	1840	Maple Grove hospital construction moratorium exemption provided.	3/22/2006	
173	3263	1878*	Carver and Renville county recorder, auditor, and treasurer appointment provided, and referendum option established.	3/31/2006	
174	2709*	2523	Shamrock Township detached banking facility authorized.	4/5/2006	
175	3039*	2632	Timber permit extension in event of adverse surface conditions provided.	4/5/2006	
176	3876	2749*	County expenditure limit removed for soldiers' rest cemeteries.	4/7/2006	
177	2731	2621*	EMT training programs required to meet an average yearly pass rate.	4/20/2006	
178	3780	3465*	Workers' compensation appeal procedures and coverage provisions modified.	4/20/2006	
179	2788	2832*	Emergency personnel recruitment and retention task force formed and study required.	4/20/2006	
180	2994*	2736	Watercraft storage structure repair authorized on public waters.	4/20/2006	
181	3310*	2969	Advance deposits and payments authorized for boat slip rental.	4/20/2006	
182	2998*	1553	Firefighter labor arbitration provision sunset repealed.	4/27/2006	
183	680*	1217	Utility metering and billing provisions relating to landlord and tenant regulations clarified.	4/27/2006	
184	2645*	2622	Swift county rural development finance authority board membership increased.	4/27/2006	
185	3169*	3254	Local government units prohibited from imposing fees related to students at postsecondary institutions.	4/27/2006	
186	1480*	1364	Red Lake County drainage system outlet fee authorized for drainage originating in Pennington County.	5/5/2006	
187	3142*	2754	Hennepin County regional park district provisions modified.	5/5/2006	
188	2745*	2721	Medical license provisions modified.	5/5/2006	
189	1838*	1811	Local governments authorized to permit low-speed neighborhood electric vehicles to be operated on residential roadways.	5/4/2006	
190	2810	2532*	Radiation therapy facility construction limitations expiration date extended.	5/4/2006	
191	3944	3615*	Child care assistance parent fees modified.	5/5/2006	
192	3401	2646*	Driver education required to contain education on organ and tissue donation, and vehicle insurance sampling program statutes permanently suspended.		
193	3111*	2881	Interstate contracts for chemical health services provided.	5/10/2006	
194	3285*	2929	Metropolitan Council review of school district capital improvement programs requirement repealed.		

\*The legislative bill marked with an asterisk denotes the file submitted to the governor.

CH	HF	SF	Description	Signed	Vetoed
195	2985*	2614	Funeral, memorial, and burial service disruption prohibited; penalties imposed; and civil remedy provided.	5/9/2006	
196	2514*	2319	Uniform Securities Act of 2002 adopted and modified, and criminal penalties prescribed.		
197	3464*	3079	Barber and cosmetologist licensing provision modified.		
198	3665*	3096	Veterans Homes Board authorized to conduct certain meetings by telephone or other electronic means.	5/10/2006	
199	3771*	3457	Medical practice board examination provision modified relating to active military service.	5/10/2006	
200	3449*	2887	Manufactured home park conversions regulated.	5/10/2006	
201	3712*	3398	Mercury Emissions Reduction Act of 2006 adopted.	5/11/2006	

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Unofficial list as of 4/27//06

## Monday, May 8

### HF4191-Hortman (DFL) Transportation Finance

Metropolitan area transit sales tax referendum proposed and revenue allocated.

### HF4192-Dorn (DFL)

#### Governmental Operations & Veterans Affairs

Constitutional amendment proposed to change the method for amending the constitution.

### HF4193-Dorn (DFL)

#### Governmental Operations & Veterans Affairs

Constitutional amendment proposed requiring two-thirds of the members of each house of the Legislature required to propose amendments to the constitution.

### HF4194-Atkins (DFL)

#### Taxes

Foreign operating corporations income treatment modified, local government aid increased, property tax rebate provided, school district operating capital revenue tax rate established and money appropriated.

### HF4195-Larson (DFL)

#### Transportation

Gasoline sales at grossly excessive price prohibited.

### HF4196-Otremba (DFL)

#### Transportation Finance

Road construction impact grant program established and money appropriated.

### HF4197-Anderson, B. (R)

#### Health Policy & Finance

Human services appeals oversight board established.

## Tuesday, May 9

### HF4198-Loeffler (DFL)

#### Governmental Operations & Veterans Affairs

Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission required to consider commissioning new art to convey and celebrate Minnesota's history.

## Thursday, May 11, 2006

### HF4199-Hamilton (R)

#### Health Policy & Finance

Medical Assistance operating payment rates adjusted for low-payment rate nurse facilities and money appropriated.

## Mercury continued from page 14

someone's got to lead the way," Evans said.

The bill focuses on Xcel's older coal-burning power plants in Becker, Oak Park Heights and Cohasset, which are collectively responsible for more than 1,300 pounds of mercury emissions every year. When all the reduction measures are fully implemented, mercury emissions at these plants will decrease by 90 percent, or roughly 1,200 pounds per year.

Although some criticized the bill as not doing enough to reduce mercury emissions — or, conversely, of doing too much too soon — by and large, all parties involved hailed the bill as a reasonable and progressive compromise.

"Xcel Energy was very happy with this solution. It's gradual enough to fit our timetable and to not force us to do things too rapidly or inefficiently, but it gets the job done," Evans said.

Bill Grant, associate executive director for the Midwest office of the Izaak Walton League of America, agreed.

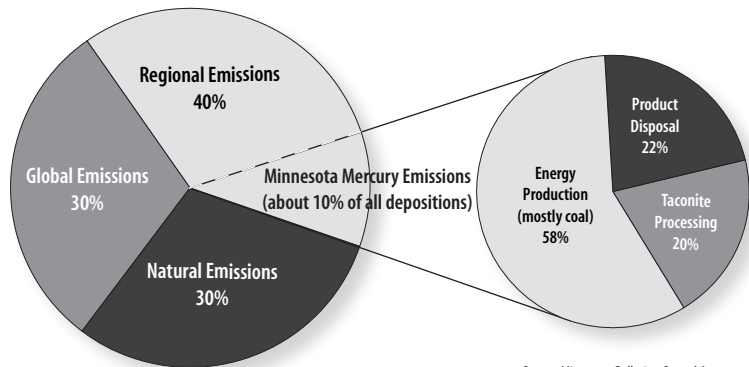
"I think what we got was the strictest bill

current technology will allow us to achieve," he said, adding that the legislation represented a "major step forward" in reducing mercury pollution.

Thornton said the bill is extremely significant not only for its environmental benefits but also for its symbolic value.

"While mercury is a global problem, we need to do our part and this will help demonstrate to others that it's something that can be accomplished, and that can be accomplished in a way that is reasonable and fair, and I think that that's the big deal here," Thornton said.

Sources of Atmospheric Mercury Deposition to Minnesota,  
2005 Minnesota Emissions



Source: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

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## MINNESOTA INDEX

### A bushel and a peck

In 2005, average date in May on which corn was planted in Minnesota.....	3
In 1968 .....	20
Number of years between 1968 and 2005 when corn was planted, on average, prior to May 1 .....	4
Acres, in millions, of corn planted for grain in state in 2005 .....	7.3
Bushel yield per acre, on average .....	174
Average price per bushel .....	\$1.75
State rank in number of acres dedicated to growing corn for grain in 2002 .....	4
Soil temperature range at which it is safe to plant soybeans, in degrees .....	60-70
Acres in millions, of soybeans planted in state in 2005 .....	6.9
Average bushel yield per acre .....	45
Price per bushel .....	\$5.45
State rank in number of acres dedicated to soybeans in 2002 .....	3
State rank in total value of agricultural products sold in 2002 .....	6
Total value of agricultural products sold in billions in 2002 .....	\$8.57
State rank in total value of vegetables and potatoes in 2002 .....	13
Rank in number of acres dedicated for sugarbeets that are used for sugar in 2002 .....	1
Number of harvested acres in state of sugarbeets, on average in 2005 .....	460,000
Number of Caucasian farmers in the state in 2002 .....	111,794
American Indian or Alaska Native .....	188
Asian .....	100
Number of males in state in 2002 as principal operators of a farm .....	74,469
Females .....	6,370
Average age of principal operator in 2002 .....	52.9
In 1974 .....	49.8
Number of farms in the state in 2005 .....	79,600
In 1974 .....	98,537
Average state farm size in 2005, in acres .....	345
In 1974 .....	280
Number of acres, in millions, being farmed in 2005 .....	27.5
In 1974 .....	27.6

Sources: [Minnesota Department of Agriculture](#); [United States Department of Agriculture](#);  
[University of Minnesota Extension Service](#).

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