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EDUCATION

LWVMN Position: All Minnesota children should have equal access to a good public education. State funding for education should be at a level that makes programs of comparable substance and quality available to all. A student’s access to a good education should not depend on the wealth of his or her school district.

Kay Kessel, lobbyist, 612-926-1387

The Senate E-12 Education Budget Division held one meeting these past two weeks and two bills were considered on February 6. Sen. Tarryl Clark (DFL-St. Cloud) presented SF3 on early childhood learning. This bill establishes allowances for early childhood learning preparedness and enrichment experiences. Clark said the bill also increases the per pupil unit for pupils in kindergarten and for pupils in grades 1 to 3, which will result in reduced class sizes for K-3 classes. It decreases the per pupil unit for high school students. The bill was laid over for further discussion.

Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Plummer) presented SF406 which updates appropriations for adult basic education services. This is an important service for immigrants as was shown in the LWVMN Immigration Study, 2002. The measure was approved and advanced to the Finance Committee.

Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville), House K-12 Finance Division Committee chair, and Rep. Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul), E-12 Education Committee chair, held a public hearing on Monday, February 5 in North Minneapolis at the Glover-Sudduth Center. It was well attended and many questions were raised about the education achievement gap.

The K-12 Finance Division has had two full weeks of committee meetings three times per week. PS Minnesota testified and the legislators discussed with interest their proposal for a new paradigm in education finance. PS Minnesota leaders were the major focus at the Parents United for Public Schools annual conference held on Monday, February 12.

Pressure from rising property taxes to fund education is on the minds of all legislators. Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth) has introduced HF3, which includes a school district levy modification, an increase in property tax refunds, a change in senior citizen property tax deferral eligibility and a local government aid increase. Rep. Marquart has the maximum 34 co-authors. Sen. Dan Larson (DFL-Bloomington) has the companion bill, SF349.

Special education costs are greatly increasing. Three legislators presented bills to the K-12 Finance Division and had superintendents and others testify in support. There are many reasons for the increase,

The on-line version of the Capitol Letter™ at www.lwvmn.org contains links to the elected officials and bills listed here. For contact information for elected officials see the following websites.

MN State Senators:

www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/members/member_list.php?sort=a#header

MN State Representatives:

www.house.leg.state.mn.us/members/housemembers.asp

Elected officials for your address:

geo.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/districts/start.html

among them the fact that autism has increased. Today, one out of every 150 children born will be diagnosed with autism. This is among the most expensive of many special education programs that have escalating costs which strain education funding.

The three bills introduced were:

- Rep. Will Morgan (DFL-Burnsville), HF649, Special education excess cost program funding increased
- Rep. Debra Hilstrom (DFL-Brooklyn Center), HF786, Increasing funding for special education programs
- Rep. Larry Haws (DFL-St. Cloud), HF778, Creating a new component of special education funding for districts with extraordinary special education service needs. That would include cities like St. Cloud, where families move to be near medical centers.

All three of these bills were laid over for possible inclusion in the omnibus K-12 education finance bill.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

LWVUS Position: LWVUS supports policies and programs at all levels... that promote the well being, encourage the full development and ensure the safety of all children. These include... early childhood education.

LWVMN Position: Support of increased state responsibility in creating equal public educational opportunities for all Minnesota children....

LWVMN Position: Support of policies to ensure equality of opportunity in... education and other public services for all persons.

Child Care

LWVUS Position: LWVUS supports programs, services and policies at all levels of government to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it, in order to increase access to employment and to prevent and reduce poverty.

LWVMN Position: Support of coordinated public policies and funding to ensure safe, affordable, quality child care throughout the state.

Jill Lund, intern lobbyist, (651) 487-2357

On February 6, the Senate E-12 Education Budget Division chaired by Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Plummer) heard testimony on SF3, a bill that would create an allowance for families to use for quality early childhood programs. SF3 is authored by Sen. Tarryl Clark (DFL-St. Cloud), Sen. Stumpf, Sen. Terri Bonoff (DFL-Minnetonka), Sen. Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury) and Sen. Gen Olson (R-Minnetrista). The early childhood allowance proposed in this legislation would provide a minimum of \$200 a year to every Minnesota child enrolled in a high-quality pre-school program. Higher amounts, up to \$3,800 per year, would go to families on a sliding scale based on income. Parents could select any public or private program as long as the program met state quality standards.

Testimony supporting this legislation was given by Duane Benson, executive director of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation, and Art Rolnick, an economist and Senior Vice President and Director of Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. They stated that this bill would increase the

school readiness of incoming kindergarteners, invest in children who are at risk, and empower parents. Ready 4 K data indicates that “only half of Minnesota’s kindergarteners start school fully ready to succeed.”

The companion bill, HF170, was introduced in the House by Rep. Nora Slawik (DFL-Maplewood), Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield), Rep. Sheldon Johnson (DFL-St. Paul), Rep. John Ward (DFL-Brainerd) and Rep. Bev Scalze (DFL-Little Canada).

On February 7, four bills that would provide funding for voluntary all-day kindergarten were introduced and referred to the House K-12 Education Finance Division chaired by Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville). The current half-day kindergarten program costs the state of Minnesota \$195 million per year. If all school districts were to offer all-day kindergarten and all parents were to choose this option for their children, the additional cost to the state would be \$143 million per year. The four bills are as follows:

- HF2 was introduced by Rep. Marsha Swails (DFL-Woodbury) and the maximum of 34 co-authors, including Speaker Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Minneapolis). The companion bill, SF174, was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Saltzman, Sen. Clark, Sen. Betsy Wergin (R-Princeton), Sen. Sandy Rummel (DFL-White Bear Lake) and Sen. Patricia Torres Ray (DFL-Minneapolis). It provides for voluntary all-day kindergarten.
- HF78, introduced by Rep. Terry Morrow (DFL-St. Peter), Rep. Kathy Brynaert (DFL-Mankato), Rep. Scott Kranz (DFL-Blaine), Rep. Erin Murphy (DFL-St. Paul), and six others would also

provide funding for voluntary all-day kindergarten beginning in the fall of 2008.

- HF597 was introduced by Rep. Robin Brown (DFL-Austin), Rep. Tim Faust (DFL-Mora), Rep. Rick Hansen (DFL-South St. Paul) and Rep. Andy Welti (DFL-Plainview). It would phase in funding for voluntary all-day kindergarten over four years, from 2008 to 2011.
- HF637 was introduced by Rep. Denise Dittrich (DFL-Champlin), Rep. Faust, Rep. Maria Ruud (DFL-Minnetonka), Rep. John Benson (DFL-Minnetonka), Rep. Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover), Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka), Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-St. Louis Park) and two others. This bill authorizes a sliding scale fee for state funding of full-day kindergarten which would provide full funding for the 30% of children who would benefit the most from full-day Kindergarten; it would allow local school boards to charge a fee to cover the additional cost of the full-day option for other families.

Lobbyists representing the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD), Education Minnesota (EM) and the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) testified that the organizations they represent support state funding of voluntary full-day kindergarten.

STATE GOVERNMENT FINANCE

LWVMN Position: Support of a balanced and diversified revenue system that is equitable, progressive, and reliable. Support of long-term financial management projections and a budget reserve. (1995)

LWVMN Position on Government Spending: LWVMN believes that the highest priority areas for state spending are the following: (1) K-12 (regular) education; (2) Health Care; (3) Environmental protection....

Evon M. Spangler, lobbyist, (651) 776-2900

LWVMN's position on spending is long and detailed, but there is no question that number one is providing high-quality educational opportunities for all Minnesotans, number two is providing for a basic level of health and human services for all Minnesotans, and number three is protecting the state's natural environment.

The governor's proposal as it addresses our priorities, which were arrived at after study and consensus (and confirmed each year), is lacking. The primary reason why education, health care and environmental protection funding are lacking is because there are no provisions to generate new revenues. Equally important is the proposal's failure in truthfulness. LWVMN believes that budgets should include adequate funding for budget reserves, and should factor in inflation. The governor's budget does neither.

ELECTION LAW

LWVMN Position: Support of improvements in election laws regulating election procedures, voting and school district elections.

Gwen Myers, lobbyist, 952-545-8696

LWVMN took part in Election Legislation Stakeholders' meetings on January 31 and February 5, organized by the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS). Stakeholders attending the meeting were officials representing counties, townships, and school boards as well

as representatives from the Voting Rights Coalition (VRC).* The purpose of the meetings was to review Secretary of State Mark Ritchie's legislative agenda with the people who administer our election laws and with others concerned with election legislation, to look for areas of agreement and to reach a consensus on areas of disagreement, if possible.

Secretary Ritchie's agenda includes the following:

- Automatic Voter Registration wherein a person who is eligible to vote in Minnesota is automatically registered when he/she completes a driver's license or identification card application
- An Election Administration bill which includes such things as registering online, rules for voter-registration drives, notifying voters of their polling places, rules for filing for election, a voter complaint system, rules governing mail balloting and sample-ballot posting
- A Military Voting bill to facilitate voting by military personnel stationed overseas, including ranked voting in primaries in case the general election ballot is not returned in time for the general election
- A Voters' Guide bill which would require the OSS to publish and distribute a voter's guide to every household in the state
- A Housekeeping Bill to clean up and clarify the language in our election laws

Priorities of other groups include:

- Easing restrictions on absentee voting

- Expanding options for Election Day registration identification
- Increasing the post-election audit requirement to a statistically significant percentage
- Allowing felons to vote upon release from incarceration
- Allowing non-partisan election judges to serve, as long as major parties are represented at each precinct
- Requiring election materials to be translated, based on population projections by the state demographer

The first of our bills to be heard by the Senate Elections Subcommittee was the bill to simplify the absentee voting process, SF208, authored by Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato). As introduced this bill allows any eligible voter to vote by absentee ballot – no explanation required. At the behest of the VRC, Sen. Sheran offered an author’s amendment to expand the circumstances under which one may have a ballot delivered, called agent delivery. Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville) offered the VRC’s other two amendments, one to remove the requirement that a registered Minnesota voter witness the completion of the absentee ballot (difficult for military personnel or out-of-state college students) and the other to improve the permanent absentee ballot list, so that ballots are automatically mailed out to those on the list. All three of these amendments passed, though questions were raised about the administration of the permanent list. The subcommittee agreed to pass the provision and to consider it again when the bill comes before the full State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee, which is scheduled for February 12.

*The Voting Rights Coalition includes the MN Council of Nonprofits, TakeAction MN, Education MN, AFL-CIO, League of Minnesota Cities, MN Trial Lawyers, the Disability Law Center, ACORN, the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition and LWVMN, among others, and is chaired by C. Scott Cooper of TakeAction MN.

REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

LWVUS Position: Protect the constitutional right of the individual to make reproductive choices.

*Anne Salisbury, lobbyist,
651-430-1091*

*Laura Wang, Legislative Coordinator,
651-224-5445*

Good news continues on the choice front. On February 8, HF298, authored by Rep. Thomas Huntley (DFL-Duluth) and 34 others, was heard in the House Health Care and Human Services Committee, amended and referred to the Health Care and Human Services Finance Division.

HF298 increases access to community clinics offering family planning services by restoring cuts that are ready to take effect this July. The goal of these clinics is to prevent unintended pregnancies and, when they do occur, ensure access to full and accurate information about all options. Other provisions of the bill will allow registered nurses employed by these clinics to dispense oral contraceptives when they have been prescribed by licensed practitioners and will make nonprofit community health clinics that provide health services to low-income or rural populations eligible for family planning service reimbursements. Coverage is also provided for testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

During debate Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano) offered an amendment to prohibit the use of state funds for abortions. The Attorney General had already determined this amendment to be unconstitutional last year. The amendment failed. Committee members voting against this attempt to weaken the bill were Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Minneapolis), Rep. Julie Bunn (DFL-Lake Elmo), Rep. Huntley, Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL-Rochester), Rep. Diane Loeffler (DFL-Minneapolis), Rep. Erin Murphy (DFL-St. Paul), Rep. Kim Norton (DFL-Rochester), Rep. Maria Ruud (DFL-Minnetonka), Rep. Cy Thao (DFL-St. Paul), Rep. Ken Tschumper (DFL-La Crescent) and Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Minneapolis).

Its Senate companion, SF184, was introduced by Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville) and four others and awaits a hearing in the Senate Health, Housing and Family Security Committee.

On February 5 Rep. Walker and 28 others introduced HF615, a bill providing comprehensive family life and sexuality education programs. It was referred to the E-12 Education Committee. The bill calls for age-appropriate, medically-accurate curricula that emphasize family communication, healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making. Resources will be made available for teacher training and curriculum development. Materials are to include the “value of abstinence from sexual intercourse as the only certain way to prevent unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections” and the “effectiveness and safety of all FDA-approved methods for preventing and reducing risk for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.” On February 7, the Senate version SF588 was introduced by Sen. Sandra Pappas (DFL-St. Paul) and four

others, and sent to the Senate Education Committee.

ENERGY

LWVUS Position: Among other things, LWVUS supports reduction of energy growth rates; use of a variety of energy sources, with emphasis on conserving energy and using energy-efficient technologies; predominant reliance on renewable resources; action by appropriate levels of government to encourage the use of renewable resources and energy conservation through funding for research and development, financial incentives, rate-setting policies and mandatory standards....

Julie Risser, lobbyist, 952-927-7538

Energy legislation is picking up steam. SF4/HF4, the Renewable Energy Standard (RES) bill requiring utilities to generate at least 25 percent of their power from renewable energy by 2025 passed out of the Senate on February 7 with a strong 61-4 vote. Sponsored by Sen. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul) and Rep. Aaron Peterson (DFL-Appleton), this legislation has broad support from utilities, environmental groups, and the governor. Critics of the legislation doubt it will result in significant reduction of carbon dioxide emissions or provide the means needed to get utilities to meet renewable energy targets. Sen. David Hann (R-Eden Prairie) is on record as stating "the benefit will be small, but the costs might be significant." (*Star Tribune*, February 7)

Under the legislation, Xcel Energy would need to generate 30 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020. Xcel is already required by state law to invest in renewable energy in exchange for additional nuclear waste storage capacity at the Prairie Island facility.

Several other bills to promote renewable energy, conservation, and efficiency have surfaced. Sen. John Doll (DFL-Burnsville) and Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield) introduced SF563/HF660 which requires development of an economic strategy for the renewable electric energy industry. The bill has been referred to the Senate Energy, Utilities, Technology and Communications Committee and the House Energy Finance and Policy Division. Sen. Scott Dibble (DFL-Minneapolis) and Rep. Jeremy Kalin (DFL-Lindstrom) introduced SF628/HF789 which calls for energy efficiency and conservation improvement plans by public utilities. This legislation has also been referred to the Senate Energy, Utilities, Technology and Communications Committee.

Responding to global warming directly, Sen. Anderson introduced SF192 and Rep. Maria Ruud (DFL-Minnetonka) introduced the companion bill HF375. Called the Global Warming Mitigation Act of 2007, this legislation promotes a cap and trade system that would impose a limit on the greenhouse gas emissions a group of sources could emit. It requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to a level at least 15% below the 2005 emission levels by 2015, at least 30% below 2005 emission levels by 2025, and at least 80% below 2005 levels by 2050. This was referred to Energy, Utilities, Technology and Communications in the Senate and the Environment and Natural Resources Committee in the House.

In addition, Sen. Rick Olseen (DFL-Harris) and Rep. Bev Scalze (DFL-Little Canada) introduced legislation for a geothermal heat pump study, SF474/HF393. The legislation calls for no more than \$50,000 to analyze geothermal heat pump use and potential in the state. The study

would result in recommendations for legislative action.

Finally, there is now legislation calling for a feasibility study for a plasma torch gasification facility. Sen. Tom Saxhaug (DFL-Grand Rapids) and Rep. Tom Anzelc (DFL-Balsam Township) introduced SF477/HF607. It calls for \$400,000 from the general fund for a grant to the Koochiching Economic Development Authority to study a plant that would convert municipal solid waste into energy and slag.

ENVIRONMENT/TRAILS AND OHVs

LWVUS Position: Natural resources should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem and to protect public health.

Gwen Myers, lobbyist, 952-545-869

Mississippi Headwaters State Forest

As the session began in January, the Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Coalition* did not consider the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest (MHSF) a legislative issue. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) forest reclassification process was proceeding apace and, given the unique nature of the forest and the level of local organization in the area, we expected that the DNR would close MHSF to ATVs and other Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs).

The arguments for closing this forest are many. It borders the first segment of the Mississippi River on

both sides from Itasca State Park nearly all the way to Bemidji, which is a magnificent, semi-wilderness part of the river, a hidden treasure alternating from boreal forests to vast wetlands rich in the history of north central Minnesota. The region is habitat for trumpeter swans, wolves, fur bearers and an incredible diversity of waterfowl in its wild rice lakes, sedge meadows and bog lands. Jack pine and red pine forests intermingle within the wetlands, making for an amazingly rich ecosystem.

Add to this the fact that ATV damage in MHSF is extreme. Campgrounds are rutted and damaged, e.g., Coffee Pot Landing and Pine Point. ATVs are riding in the river in a number of locations, e.g., Stumphges Rapids. Designating ATV trails has not stopped the illegal riding in other areas, unfortunately, and cannot be expected to do so in this area.

Further, this is an internationally recognized river, an important symbol of Minnesota. MHSF contains the most pristine stretch of the Mississippi River in Minnesota. It is in the interest of all Americans to protect this last remaining stretch of wild Mississippi for future citizens.

It now appears that the DNR, under Gov. Pawlenty's newly appointed DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten, is not impressed with these arguments. As explained to a local group recently, it appears that the DNR will designate three river ATV trail crossings: County Road 5, Stumphges, & Coffee Pot. Two of these crossings (Stumphges & Coffee Pot) are in areas that have suffered egregious ATV damage. Coffee Pot, which has been a "closed to motorized use" area, has been repeatedly desecrated by illegal ATV use; now it is being proposed as an ATV crossing! Local groups have

been complaining to the DNR for years about how Coffee Pot has been destroyed by ATVs hill climbing, ATVs riding in the river, and ATVs generally trashing this nice campsite on a designated canoe route. The DNR's response, apparently, is to open this closed area to ATV traffic.

1. We must set a precedent of good stewardship for this internationally recognized river, an important symbol of Minnesota.
2. Closing the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest to ATV use will provide the necessary buffer for a quiet experience through the headwaters of this special river.
3. Currently, OHV damage in MHSF is extreme. Campgrounds are rutted and damaged, e.g., Coffee Pot Landing and Pine Point. ATVs are riding in the river in a number of locations, e.g., Stumphges Rapids. Designating ATV trails has not stopped the illegal riding in other areas, unfortunately.
4. The importance of keeping these waters unpolluted and preventing further soil erosion dictates the need to keep ATV machines out of the river, off of the river banks and out of the Forest.
5. The Mississippi Headwaters State Forest is a narrow corridor. It contains the most pristine stretch of the Mississippi River in Minnesota. It is in the interest of all Americans to protect this last remaining stretch of wild Mississippi for future citizens.
6. It will difficult for DNR enforcement to strictly monitor any portion of this area because this part of the Mississippi is so remote. Classifying the MHSF "closed" would greatly aid in protecting the river itself.

Again your comments and thoughts are needed if we are to be successful in getting this valuable asset closed to ATV traffic.

Complete information on the DNR plan is on their website at www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/ohv/designation/status.html ; scroll down to the West Central Group. Information on all the state forests in this group is available. *Thanks to the Jack Pine Coalition for much of this information.*

ENVIRONMENT

LWVUS Position: Natural resources should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem and to protect public health.

LWVMN Position - Natural Resources: Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest by recognizing the interrelationships of air quality, energy, land use, waste management and water resources.

Water resources: Support of a state role in the preservation and management of Minnesota's water resources through protection, allocation, conservation, pricing and interbasin transfer policies protective of Minnesota's current and future needs.

Marilyn Morem, lobbyist, 507-289-7831

Clean Water Legacy

The Minnesota Environmental Partnership Legislative Priorities state that \$100 million is required each year in order for the state to

comply with the 1972 federal Clean Water Act.

As mentioned in the last [Capitol Letter™](#), Governor Tim Pawlenty's proposed budget included only \$20 million each year for the next two years for this, but several bills regarding a constitutional amendment to dedicate funding for the environment have been debated in the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee. Theoretically, one of these would supply part of the \$100 million.

On February 7, the committee recommended to pass SF6, which is authored by Sen. Lawrence Pogemiller (DFL-Minneapolis), Sen. Dennis Frederickson (R-New Ulm), Sen. Richard Cohen (DFL-St. Paul), Sen. Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley), and Sen. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul). This bill is a constitutional amendment to increase the sales tax by three-eighths of one percent to fund natural resources, the arts and the clean water legacy. The committee also adopted an amendment that creates a forest legacy and forest consolidation account within the natural resources part of the bill; the amendment was offered by Sen. Tom Saxhaug (DFL-Grand Rapids). The bill now goes to the Senate State and Local Government Operations and Oversight Committee. There is no companion bill in the House, though Rep. Rick Hansen (DFL-South St. Paul) is expected to introduce a bill soon.

Note that LWVMN does not support funding initiatives via constitutional amendments.

TRANSPORTATION

LWV's Transportation Position is based on its Natural Resources Positions

LWVUS supports comprehensive long-range planning; wise decision making requires consideration of environmental, public health, social and economic impacts of proposed plans...

LWVUS - Air Quality: Support for measures to reduce vehicular pollution, including... development of more energy-efficient transportation systems.

LWVUS - Land Use: Support for land-use planning that reflects conservation and wise management of resources.

Julie Risser, lobbyist 952-927-7538

The stalemate in transportation continues. SF5/HF23 introduced by Sen. Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing) and Rep. Ron Erhardt (R-Edina) isn't moving. In the Senate it was sent to the Transportation Committee on January 4th with no action since. The House referred it to the Transportation Finance Division on January 9th and there it sits.

Sen. Sandra Pappas (DFL- St. Paul) introduced SF614 and Rep. Alice Hausman (DFL-St. Paul) introduced HF381. The bill calls for \$40 million to be appropriated from the bond proceeds fund to the Metropolitan Council for the final design and construction of the Central Corridor Transit Way between St. Paul and Minneapolis. These were introduced on February 7 and January 29 respectively and are sitting in committees awaiting action.

There are now 63 bills in the Senate under the topic of Transportation and Transportation Department.

HEALTH CARE

LWVUS Position: LWVUS believes that a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost should be available to all US residents. Other US health care policy goals should

include the equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology and a reasonable total national expenditure level for health care. LWVUS favors a national health insurance plan financed through general taxes in place of individual insurance premium... [and] is opposed to a strictly private market based model of financing the health care system.... (1993)

Mary Lou Hill, Lobbyist, 612-374-4218
Susan Hill, Lobbyist intern 651-636-4784

Long Term Care

The Seniors and Workers for Quality (SWQ) bill has been introduced in both houses and been assigned tracking numbers. SF679 has bipartisan support, with chief author Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville) and co-authors Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL- Minneapolis), Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon (DFL-Duluth), Sen. Paul Koering (R-Fort Ripley) and Sen. Michelle Fischbach (R-Paynesville). The Senate bill may be heard by the Health, Housing and Family Security Committee on February 21st.

The House bill, HF721, is led by Rep. Patti Fritz (DFL-Faribault), joined by Rep. Tom Huntley (DFL-Duluth), Rep. Larry Hosch (DFL-St. Joseph), Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka), Rep. Brad Finstad (R-Comfrey), Rep. Maria Ruud (DFL-Minnetonka), and Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL-Rochester). This bill may be heard by the Health and Human Services Committee on February 27th or March 1st.

The SWQ bill includes a number of provisions: First is a rate increase for nursing homes, community programs and home care at five percent for each of the next two years. Three-quarters of that would be dedicated to cost-of-living-adjustment

increases for hands-on employees and one quarter would be used at the providers' discretion. The bill also clarifies standing of previous bargaining agreements as related to dollar amounts and staffing requirements in the bill.

In cases of need the bill provides the opportunity to apply for an additional one percent to raise staffing levels.

Finally, the bill includes an increase in reimbursement rates accomplished by adding case mix classifications for behavioral care, a need SWQ has strongly emphasized. It is open to various means of remedy that would not reduce care for persons in other classifications.

Altogether, this bill advances our goal of providing improved care for the elderly and disabled.

On another front, on March 14th SWQ will participate in Lobby Days at the Capitol in conjunction with AARP. LWVMN will give further details in a future [Capitol Letter™](#).

MN Universal Health Care Coalition

MUHCC is a coalition of twelve organizations, including LWVMN, who believe that a single-payer, or "Medicare for all," system is the only system that will allow for comprehensive, affordable, high quality health care for each and every citizen.

Our coalition has been meeting monthly through the summer, fall and up to the present time. Last summer and fall members met with candidates for the legislature who were interested in universal, single-payer health care legislation. Many of the candidates with whom coalition members met were elected, so planning for the session began last November with the names of legislators who favor universal health

care and single-payer proposals in mind.

MUHCC supports important changes in our health care system: single-payer health care, de-privatizing state health care programs, drug-purchasing coalitions, county-based purchasing, and insuring all kids. The Massachusetts law requiring health insurance has also been considered. Several other proposals were considered, including one that endorses a substitute for managed care as a means of ensuring quality. Another proposal requires insurance companies to reveal the prices they pay providers and drug companies, and the number of services they provide to patients.

One quality proposal would finance some real disease management, and it would encourage the Department of Human Services to adopt policies regarding coverage that resemble those adopted over the last decade by CMS, the agency that runs Medicare. Such a disease management plan would pay for nurses and social workers to do community outreach and education on problems such as diabetes, obesity and tobacco use.

A sign of the importance of the health care issue is that HF1 and SF15 deal with children's health security. HF1, authored by Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Minneapolis) and the maximum 34 co-authors, including Speaker Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Minneapolis), sets up a children's health security account, establishes eligibility criteria and specifies the covered services. It also establishes a Legislative Task Force on Children's Health Care Coverage. SF15, authored by Sen. Yvonne Prettner Solon (DFL-Duluth), Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville), Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Minneapolis) and Sen. Steve Dille (R-Dassel), is called the Children's Health Security Act and is very similar to HF1,

though they are not companion bills. Both bills would give all Minnesota's children insurance with neither co-payments nor deductibles. This coverage is necessary to ensure that patients get the preventive care they need when they need it.

Unfortunately, there has been backpeddling on health care coverage for all children since the session began. Although both Governor Pawlenty and Speaker Kelliher said during the campaign that coverage for all children should be possible, there is not adequate money for this in the governor's budget and the Speaker also appears to be backing away from the idea.

MENTAL HEALTH

LWVMN position: Support of a comprehensive and coordinated system of programs and services for mentally ill adults and emotionally disturbed children and adolescents (hereafter referred to as "persons with mental illness"). Priority should be given to persons with serious and persistent mental illness and/or acute mental illness. Minnesota public policy and funding should sustain an array of community-based services, which are available and accessible to persons with mental illness. Administration of that policy should provide clients with appropriate and adequate services.

Barbara Flanigan, lobbyist, 612-928-8033

The main thrust of our activity at the Legislature during the 2007 session will focus on two major bills.

The first, authored by Rep. Mindy Greiling (DFL-Roseville) and Sen. John Marty (DFL-Roseville), HF196/SF148, includes changes in a number of programs affecting mental health services. According to its official description, mental health

provisions are modified, inmate assessments are required, children's mental health grants and training are established, a Crisis Intervention Team State Council is created, and money is appropriated.

HF196 is now being heard in the new House Mental Health Division, chaired by Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Minneapolis). At some point the bill will be divided into separate bills to be heard by different committees.

LWVMN plans to support most features of this bill. We believe it would strengthen the current under-funded mental health system. It would strengthen services for children and adolescents and improve services for people with mental illness in the corrections system. It would, however, be relatively expensive to implement.

The second bill is legislation to implement the governor's Mental Health Initiative. This initiative, partly developed by the Minnesota Mental Health Action Group (MMHAG) planning group, was introduced by Sen. Linda Berglin (DFL-Minneapolis) during the last session; certain components of the original bill were passed during that session.

The proposal has a number of positive features. Most important, it would extend the full benefits for mental health care currently available to people on Medical Assistance to people on MinnesotaCare and General Assistance Care, whose benefits currently are inadequate. It would also increase rates paid to a number of professionals, to help address staff shortages hampering the system. It would also create stronger crisis services throughout the state.

However, we believe there are a number of negative features, and, at this time, many unanswered questions. The proposal would

assign most public funds—Medical Assistance, MinnesotaCare and General Assistance Medical Care funds—to health plans which would provide care in a managed system. Counties, which now have the major responsibility for administering public mental health services, would generally serve only people who are underinsured or uninsured.

Last year, LWVMN opposed this legislation as written because it did not explicitly assign a priority to services for people with serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI). This is the group of people with very serious mental illness who, before new powerful medications, would have spent most of their adult lives in state hospitals. Minnesota assumed responsibility for funding services for them in the 1860s with the establishment of the first state hospital at St. Peter.

We believed that the focus on a purely "medical" model failed to recognize the importance of support services in the community that are essential if people with SPMI are to flourish in the community. Currently, community support (CSP) services and county case management help people find and maintain housing, learn about their illness, apply and re-apply for benefits, keep medical appointments, and maintain support groups. They help address the isolation which often is the cause for worsening of the illness. Such services must not be time limited since mental illness often fluctuates in the same person.

We are working with the Minnesota Legislative Network to create language safeguarding these crucial community support services. Summary sheets from the Department of Human Services detail some changes to the Governor's Initiative. We will wait to see the details and to see the

language of the bill that is introduced.

In addition to working on these major bills, we will continue to promote supported employment and housing subsidies for people with SPMI. LWVMN action in the past has been crucial to these programs.

IMMIGRATION

LWVMN Position: Support incorporating immigrants into our communities by providing access to education, by endorsing the development of secure identification documents, and by respecting the right of law enforcement personnel to perform their duties without the burden of interpreting federal immigration policies. All Minnesota residents, regardless of their immigration status, should be eligible for in-state tuition at state colleges and universities under the same conditions, such as one year's state residency or graduation from a Minnesota high school. Oppose residents with legal immigrant status running for local office. State funding of Adult Basic Education for each program site should be adequate to meet the needs of the eligible residents.

Judy Stuthman, lobbyist, 651-644-8588

I just don't get it. I don't understand the opposition. The Minnesota DREAM Act bill has again been introduced, this time in the 2007 Legislative Session – the bill's 5th or 6th introduction. SF653 and HF0722 would allow students who have lived in Minnesota for at least three years, graduated, or the equivalent, from high school, and been accepted into a college or university, to go to institutions of higher learning for resident or in-state tuition rates regardless of their immigration status.

Ten other states have already passed similar legislation: Texas, California, Utah, Washington, New York, Oklahoma, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico and Nebraska.

Yes, this is about the undocumented. Yes, there are some loud anti-immigrant messages coming from constituents. But this is about Minnesota and its students. This is about a state that benefits greatly from immigrant labor in rural and urban areas. This is about striving to have an educated workforce to help our economy. This is about recognizing that there are young Minnesotans who are purposefully being excluded from an education even though they may have come as infants and spent most of their lives in our state. Why the controversy? Are the anti-immigrant voices louder in Minnesota than in these other states? Was there some nasty campaign literature last fall? There is a need for education on this issue.

The Minnesota Immigrant Freedom Network has and is continuing to work hard to get the DREAM Act passed. They provided some

information from the MN Dept. of Education and the MN Office of Higher Education, including information on tuition rates in Minnesota. At the University of Minnesota, an undergraduate paying an in-state rate will pay \$9,410 compared to an out-of-state rate of \$21,040. At Minneapolis Community and Technical College the in-state rate is \$4,284 compared to out-of-state at \$8,207. Clearly this bill makes an enormous difference to these young people and their families.

The bills were introduced in both the Senate and House on February 8 with bipartisan support.

SF0653 is authored by Sen. Sandra Pappas (DFL-St. Paul), Sen. Claire Robling (R-Jordan), Sen. Thomas Neuville (R-Northfield), Sen. Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Minneapolis) and Sen. Richard Cohen (DFL-St. Paul).

HF722 is authored by Rep. Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul), Rep. Rod Hamilton (R-Mountain Lake), Rep. Tom Rukavina (DFL-Virginia), Rep. Bob Gunther (R-Fairmont), Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Minneapolis),

Rep. Dennis Ozment (R-Rosemount), Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka), Rep. Frank Hornstein (DFL-Minneapolis), Rep. Neva Walker (DFL-Minneapolis), Rep. Denny McNamara (R-Hastings), Rep. Shelley Madore (DFL-Apple Valley), Rep. Jim Davnie (DFL-Minneapolis), Rep. Augustine Dominguez (DFL-Minneapolis), Rep. Al Juhnke (DFL-Willmar), Rep. Morrie Lanning (R-Moorhead), Rep. Ron Erhardt (R-Edina), Rep. Doug Magnus (R-Slayton), Rep. David Bly (DFL-Northfield), Rep. Tim Mahoney (DFL-St. Paul), Rep. Tom Hackbarth (R-Cedar), Rep. Neil Peterson (R-Bloomington), Rep. Randy Demmer (R-Hayfield), Rep. Sandra Masin (DFL-Eagan), and Rep. Aaron Peterson (DFL-Appleton).

These legislators indicate bipartisan, state-wide support for the DREAM Act. THANK YOU!

The MN DREAM Act is about equal opportunity and access to higher education for ALL Minnesota students, no more and no less.

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