

NEWS

from the

MINNESOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION OFFICE, ROOM 8, STATE CAPITOL, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA 55155 • 612-296-2146

for immediate release
March 4, 1983

Contact: Sarah Gardner
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Minnesota House Agriculture Committee wants barley included
in federal government's new PIK program

People who grow barley are just as entitled to the benefits of the new Payment-in-Kind (PIK) program as corn and wheat producers, says Rep. Wallace Sparby (DFL-Thief River Falls).

Sparby presented the Minnesota House Agriculture Committee with a resolution March 2 that asks Congress to include barley in PIK, and the committee recommended its passage. Sparby told the committee barley is a major feed grain in Minnesota with an annual production over 50 million bushels. Some Minnesota farms are basically suited to growing only barley, he said, so it's important that barley be included in PIK.

Under PIK, the federal government will pay farmers surplus grain in exchange for idling part of their farmland. It's an incentive to reduce crop production, which the federal government hopes will bring grain prices up and government spending down for surplus commodity purchases and farm loans.

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Bill spells out "Worker's Right to Know" about toxic substances

Workers should have access to information about the toxic chemicals they work with, Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Mpls.) told the Minnesota House General Labor Legislation subcommittee March 3.

Clark sponsors HF242 , "The Employee Right to Know Act of 1983," which would require employers to give workers information about the toxic substances they routinely work with, such as the level of hazardous exposure, the symptoms and effects of exposure, proper procedures for use and clean up of spills, and appropriate emergency treatment.

Workers could refuse to work under conditions they believe seriously violate state OSHA law (Occupational Safety and Health Act) under HF242, including failure by an employer to inform or train employees about hazardous substances they work with. Employers couldn't withhold pay or other benefits from employees who refuse to work with the substances.

Dr. Roger Lueckman, St. Paul Ramsey Hospital, told the subcommittee the increased accessibility of information under the bill would help doctors diagnose patients' symptoms.

Clark said she is negotiating a compromise bill with industry people and others who have concerns about the legislation. The definition of "toxic substance or harmful agent" and the worker's right to refuse to work are two items under negotiation.

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Minnesota House subcommittee studies proposed
Minnesota Fair Debt Collections Act

Members of the Minnesota House Consumer Affairs and Tourism subcommittee began hearings March 1 on the proposed Minnesota Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

Representative Randy Staten (DFL-Mpls.), author of the bill, said some debt collectors use abusive practices to recover debts, including threats of violence, use of obscene and profane language, telephone calls to consumers at unreasonable hours, and disclosure of a consumer's personal affairs to friends and relatives in an attempt to get payment.

The bill would prohibit those abuses, and others, including misrepresenting oneself as an attorney, government official, or police officer, and collecting interest payments or unauthorized fees.

Staten's proposal is like the existing federal debt collection law, but it closes a loophole left open at the federal level. Staten's bill applies, not only to collection agencies, as does the federal act, but applies, too, to creditors, such as retailers, and individuals who collect debts for creditors.

Staten said creditors collect the majority of debts in Minnesota, and they should come under state regulation.

The bill comes up before the subcommittee again on March 8.

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Minnesota House Division approves anti-terrorism bill

"The state of Minnesota will not tolerate acts of violence or terroristic threats against members of certain vulnerable groups," said Representative Lee Greenfield (DFL-Mpls) at a March 2 meeting of the Criminal Justice Division of the House Judiciary Committee.

Greenfield says a bill he's sponsoring, HF89, would target individuals or organizations who commit, or threaten to commit, crimes against certain members of society with the intention of frightening those people.

"The bill adds to the list of aggravated criminal damage to property, damage inflicted with the intent to cause fear in the owner or another person," said Greenfield, "because of the other person's race, color, religion, physical or mental handicap, affectional or sexual orientation, or national origin."

Opponents to the bill, which would carry penalties of up to five years in prison and, or, a fine of up to \$5000, object to giving some people special protected status, making them "more equal" than others.

Mary Prior, from Pro-Family Lobby, Inc., objects to granting "special rights and privileges" to homosexuals.

Prior says, "The bill is granting special privileges to a class of people who are breaking the law, and the moral order with their actions."

The bill got committee approval and goes next to the full House.

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Committee approves gas tax, construction fund,
and highway bonding

On March 2, the Minnesota House Transportation Committee approved HF371 (Jensen, DFL-Farmington) which would bring the state tax on gasoline up to 18 cents per gallon and could go into effect within one month after the bill becomes law. The bill includes an incentive for the use of gasohol by making the tax increase on gasohol three cents less than the tax raise on gasoline.

The bill designates 15 percent of the fuel tax for 68 new trunk highway projects and specifies location of the trunk highway projects.

"I feel very strongly that we have been issuing blank checks to departments in the past," said the bill's author, Representative Bob Jensen, "and I think it's time we have more legislative input into how and where the money is being spent."

Money from the highway-user distribution fund which the Legislature dedicated for highway projects in 1982 went into the state's general fund because of budget shortages. Jensen's bill would return that money to the dedicated fund despite the governor's recommendation to delay the special funding two more years.

HF371 would authorize the sale of \$75 million in highway bonds to finance construction projects and provide for more than 4,000 jobs.

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Minnesota could toughen auto child restraint laws

"Child safety seats can and do save lives," said Minnesota House Representative Wesley Skoglund of Minneapolis, "and this bill will save kids' lives in our state."

Skoglund is chief author of HF90, a bill that would put some teeth into Minnesota's current child restraint law, that, according to Chief Roger Ledding of the State Patrol, is unenforcable.

Under the bill, parents not having or not using a federally approved child restraint device for children age four or under, would get a ticket and face petty misdemeanor charges, with stricter penalties going to repeat violators.

"The bill is not a punitive bill," said Skoglund. "It's a bill that will save kids' lives. Charges for not having a seat would be dropped if parents proved they purchased or rented a seat."

Opposition to the bill, which the House Transportation Committee approved March 7, said loopholes make out-of-state visitors, grandparents, relatives, and friends immune from the law, and does not require proof of age for children riding in vehicles. Skoglund said he hopes stricter penalties will increase awareness of the need for anyone transporting children to use the restraint devices.

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Minnesota House Committees hear stricter child abuse reporting bills

Tougher laws are needed to insure reporting of child abuse and neglect, according to Minnesota House Representative Ann Wynia (DFL-St. Paul) and Robert Ellingson (DFL-Brooklyn Center) who have authored two bills the Minnesota House Health/Welfare Committee and the Social Services subcommittee heard March 8, 1983.

Children and vulnerable adults need protection in facilities, said Wynia, and HF107 would require stricter investigation into the backgrounds of people applying for day-care and foster-care licenses. The bill also would require workers in such homes to report any abuse and it would amend the state's Juvenile Court Act to declare that interests of children prevail over the rights of parents when a conflict occurs.

In a similar bill, HF315, abuse-reporting laws would expand to include persons who work in school or community settings such as camps or scout troops. The bill's necessary, according to Ellingson, because, now, school and community workers must report only suspected home-abuse cases. The law doesn't mandate school districts to require employees to report abuse that occurs away from home, and local law-enforcement agencies and welfare agencies often don't have enough information to prosecute offenders or counsel victims, said Ellingson.

Workers failing to report suspected abuse cases directly to local welfare or law-enforcement agencies would be guilty of a misdemeanor.

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Farm tax breaks don't always mean lower farm taxes

A 1981 law tried to make farm valuation more equitable for farmers by changing the way local assessors determine the value of a farm through use of a rent capitalization system. Under the law, assessors would base the value of farms on the rent owners get for their land, instead of on the sale price of farms.

On March 10, at the Capitol, the Minnesota House Tax Laws Division looked at how the '81 law would work and at HF217, a bill Representative Elton Redalen (IR-Fountain) has introduced to plug what he sees as loopholes in the farm tax credit law as it works now.

Testimony at the March 10 meeting showed that, according to research data, if the rent cap system had been in effect for 1983 taxes, farm value statewide would have been seven percent lower for ag homesteads, five percent lower for non-homestead ag property.

But that wouldn't mean lower taxes. If farm values are lower, gross tax is less, but tax credits go down, too. On the average, in 1983, net tax on agricultural homesteads would have been .7 percent higher, non-agricultural homesteads .8 percent lower. Residential property would have picked up an extra tax burden, with .3 percent higher tax bills.

Redalen's bill would address a problem with the current definition of a farm in Minnesota law that determines who gets farm tax breaks. HF217, Redalen says, would tighten things up by defining a farm as federal law does and require that a person earn \$1000 of income from sale of farm goods to qualify for farm tax credits as a farmer. Under that definition, 21,000 fewer people in Minnesota would have qualified for farm tax breaks last year.

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Minnesota House bills aim to increase weatherization efforts by landlords

The Minnesota House subcommittee on Energy and Society heard two bills March 8 that would give landlords good reason to weatherize their buildings. Representative Randy Staten (DFL-Mpls.) is author of HF288, a bill that would require landlords of residential buildings that date back further than 1976 to obtain and file a certificate that shows they meet state energy efficiency standards by Jan. 1, 1984.

If the landlord hasn't filed the certificate by Jan. 1, 1984, a tenant may file a civil action and recover \$200. Also, tenants landlords are evicting or suing for rent or damages may ask for a stay in action until the landlord files the certificate.

Another bill, HF258, would allow tenants in buildings with construction dates before 1976 to weatherize their apartments and deduct the cost from their rent, up to a maximum of two month's rent. Bill author Rep. Lee Greenfield (DFL-Mpls.) said tenants would have to improve conditions that violate state weatherization standards and give at least 30 days written notice of their plans to weatherize so landlords could respond.

The bill provides certain protections for both landlords and tenants in cases of lawsuits that relate to tenant enforcement of state weatherization standards.

Michael Murphy, Department of Energy, Planning, and Development said the weatherization standards for rental property have been on the books over two years, but many landlords have failed to make the improvements.

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Minnesota may join inter-state compact for low-level radioactive waste

Minnesota has two options for complying with the 1980 Federal Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act. The state can go-it-alone, or join in a compact with other states.

Under federal law, each state is responsible for its own low-level radioactive waste. But states can choose to form compacts and establish regional disposal sites, rather than develop their own.

On March 10, Richard Paton from the State Environmental Quality Board, who worked with the Governor's Task Force on Radio Active Waste, told a Minnesota House Environment subcommittee he feels the interstate compact is the better of the two options. Paton supports HF524 (Kahn, DFL-Mpls), a bill which would make Minnesota an eligible, voting member of the Midwest Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Compact.

According to Paton, the Governor's Task Force likes the compact option because: regional management waste would be safer and effective; the compact would give some assurance the facility would be economically viable; it would limit the number of disposal sites in one region and protect against states from outside the compact bringing in waste.

The go-it-alone option may not allow Minnesota to exclude waste from other states because of a Constitutional inter-state commerce clause, said Paton, and it may not be economically sound, because Minnesota doesn't produce enough waste to cover cost of a site.

As a member of the possible 17-member compact, Kahn told subcommittee members, Minnesota could become a host state, but would have the option of withdrawing from the compact. The subcommittee will continue hearings on the bill, March 17.

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Beer keg bill gets Minnesota House Committee approval

Teen-age beer parties and illegal liquor profits are out of hand, according to State Representative Joe Begich (DFL-Eveleth), author of a bill the House Regulated Industries Committee approved March 14.

Under the bill, HF138, breweries would have to indelibly mark all seven-or-more-gallon-sized retail off-sale beer kegs.

Retailers would have to register the kegs with buyers and keep records for local law-enforcement use in investigating and prosecuting illegal sale of beer to minors or for illegal profits.

Although several towns and counties in Minnesota have adopted beer keg registration policies, a statewide law is needed to keep buyers from driving outside of their jurisdictions to avoid registration, said Begich.

Opponents to the bill testified the law could cause problems for border communities where neighboring state laws are not so strict. And they said the cost of marking kegs may drive the already shaky brewery business out of Minnesota.

If the bill becomes law, registration wouldn't begin until Jan. 1, 1984, to give retailers and manufacturers time to develop marking and registration procedures.

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Minnesota Legislature Labor division works on workers' comp bill

A workers' comp proposal that Labor Commissioner Steve Keefe would like to see become law got a hearing in a Minnesota Labor Committee division on March 14.

The proposal calls for the commissioner of Labor and Industry to rate injuries by degree of physical impairment. This would cut a large part of the 40 percent of workers' comp litigation that occurs when insurance companies, doctors, employers, and employees don't agree on levels of disability, according to Keefe. Fewer law cases could mean lower employer insurance premiums, and faster benefits for injured workers, he says.

The proposal would make benefit changes that Keefe says would be fair to injured workers, and give them incentives to return to work; create a voluntary public-private group self-insurance pool and a board to review doctor performance and cost; and would call for better training on workers' comp for lawyers, employers, and insurance claims examiners.

Keefe also wants to beef up the Department of Labor and Industry to educate people about workers' comp law and answer questions, speed processing of problems, and monitor compliance with the laws.

The committee put the language of Keefe's proposal into HF24, which Workers' Compensation Division Chairman Wayne Simoneau (DFL-Fridley) authors. Keefe commented that the proposal doesn't have the blessing of labor and industry, but he hopes to use the bill as a starting point for negotiations.

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AVTI's could get governing board, higher education boards more power

Post-secondary and adult segments of Minnesota's 33 vocational technical schools would get a governing board similar to state university and community college boards, and all higher education boards would get more power if HF334, a bill now in the Legislature, becomes law.

The House Education Committee amended and approved HF334 (Welch, DFL-Cambridge) on March 16, and sent it to the Committee on Governmental Operations.

Under the bill, state university and community college boards could set tuition levels, close campuses, search out and keep money from private sources without losing state aid, and carry savings over from year to year.

Representative Jim Heap (IR-Golden Valley), a co-author of the bill, told legislators times have changed, and the college and university boards need flexibility and power to make adjustments to declining dollar resources and fewer students.

Change in AVTI governance caused most committee debate. Currently, the Board of Education regulates all AVTI programs: secondary, post-secondary, adult AVTI and non-AVTI programs. Representative Welch said he proposed a separate board to govern post-secondary and adult AVTI so they would be on equal ground with other post-secondary systems for planning programs and budgets and setting tuition.

The Board of Education and the Board for Vocational Technical Education would jointly make rules for secondary AVTI programs. According to Welch, local school districts would keep most of the powers they have, including personnel hiring.

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Crime victims bill of rights gets approval in Minnesota House committee

"Crime victims are the orphans of the criminal justice system," Representative Randy Kelly (DFL-St. Paul) told the Minnesota House Judiciary Committee March 14.

"Victims have long been the overlooked party, void of rights, while defendants have an array of constitutionally guaranteed rights. Indeed the only person with a major interest in the outcome of a specific criminal matter who has no guaranteed place in the system, is the victim," says Kelly.

Kelly is sponsor of HF218, a bill that would put a new law on Minnesota's books to recognize the role of witnesses and victims in the apprehension and prosecution of offenders, and give victims better access to information about sentencing of offenders and more say in their punishment.

Provisions in the bill would call for a plan to inform victims of types and locations of victim services in their area; give them the right to civil suit against offenders for three times the amount of actual damages or \$500, whichever is more, plus punitive or compensatory damages, court costs, and attorney fees.

The bill would also require that victims get more information about the sentencing and release of offenders, and would allow them to attend sentencing hearings, submit written objections to plea agreements, offer written sentencing recommendations, and request monetary restitution as part of a sentence.

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House bills offer state help in developing
markets for Minnesota products

Two bills that typify the governor's philosophy to develop national and foreign markets for Minnesota products came before House members March 16 and 17.

March 16, the House Exports and Marketing subcommittee recommended passage of HF555, (Schoenfeld, DFL-Waseca) a bill that would appropriate funds to the Commissioner of Agriculture to expand and develop new markets for Minnesota farm products. The money would go to advertise farm products, host foreign trade teams, develop new processing and marketing activities, and to help further state agricultural commodity organizations' promotion projects.

Bill Wendlandt, Minnesota Soybean Growers said the proposal was "new, unique and practical." He quoted a 1982 Chase Econometric study that showed farmers get \$57 dollars in gross income for every dollar they invest in market development.

March 17 the House Commerce and Economic Development Committee recommended passage of HF397, a bill that would create a state foreign trade agency to encourage and support small and medium-sized trading companies to export their products. The agency would provide marketing information and facilitate financing of Minnesota exports. Bill author Willis Eken, House majority leader, said he is still working on the finance portion of the bill.

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Legislation would remove limits on older mobile home sales

Mobile home park owners and the people whose homes rest on rented land in parks both have investments, and sometimes interests conflict. Minnesota's Legislature has tried in the last two years to balance rights and duties of the two groups through legislation.

On March 24, a House of Representatives Housing subcommittee heard a bill that would give more rights to mobile home owners to sell their homes in the park they're in. Current law allows park owners to force homeowners to move out of the park if their homes are more than 15 years old.

Park space in the Twin Cities area is limited, and moving a home is expensive. So the resale value falls at least 50 percent when buyers know they'll have to move homes they purchase, according to Gary Morgan, a Landfall mobile home owner, and others who testified at the hearing. Supporters of the bill also said declaring a home unworthy because of age, without respect to condition, is discriminatory.

Park owners say they should have the right to upgrade their parks by replacing older homes with newer, higher-value homes. A representative of the Manufactured Housing Industry says use of the 15-year rule is part of efforts to remove from parks older homes that, at the time of their manufacture, didn't come under HUD safety standards.

The subcommittee takes the bill up again March 29.

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Minnesota House committee approves jobs bill

A \$209 million program to put unemployed people back to work and restore aid to those who can't work, got the approval of the Minnesota House Governmental Operations Committee on March 22.

Representative Fred Norton (DFL--St. Paul) is sponsor of HF243 which would create:

--a small business job creation incentive program of loans to small businesses to hire the unemployed at an hourly wage of up to \$5, for up to six months. Businesses would begin to pay back the interest-free loans one year after getting the funds. Companies that retain an employee for a year, would pay back only 50 percent of funds they receive.

--a public service jobs program governmental or non-profit agencies would sponsor. The program would fund jobs at the rate of \$5 an hour, for up to six months. HF243 would also restore general assistance grants to people unable to work.

Though the bill is almost three times the governor's recommendation of \$75 million for a jobs program, Norton says the Legislature must take steps to alleviate the problem of 200,000 Minnesotans out of work. Norton says he expects between \$20 and \$30 million to come back to the state in the form of taxes the new jobs would generate.

The Governmental Legislation Committee recommended the bill to pass on a straight party-line vote of 15 to 10. The proposal goes next to the House Appropriations Committee.

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Education finance package would target aid to neediest

State financial aid dollars can't keep up with the increasing needs of Minnesota students, so the fairest thing to do is target the money to those who need it most, says Representative John Brandl (DFL-Mpls).

Brandl is author of HF716, a bill that incorporates the changes in the financial aid formula that the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) and the governor propose. A major policy change in the bill sets a higher student contribution than the current formula, but compensates for that by promising a level of state aid for poorer students that is also higher than the current level.

"We start from the expectation that 50 percent of room, board, and tuition is the responsibility of the student, the main beneficiary of the education," said Brandl. "After that, we calculate how much we can expect from the parent, how much the federal government will pick up, and then the state will pick up the rest."

Currently, students contribute less, but after figuring parental and federal contributions, if students need more than the \$1050 maximum state aid, there's no one to help them. Lower-income students could get more help under the proposed shared responsibility plan than they can with the \$1050 limit.

The Education Committee approved HF716 and sent it to the Appropriations Committee on March 23. Some Education Committee members said they supported the idea of the bill but didn't like the fact that the proposal doesn't help the increasing numbers of part-time and non-traditional students, who don't qualify for aid under HF716.

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House committee approves governor's proposal for Tourism Office

Minnesota's tourism division lacks visibility and is outspent by places like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ontario, according to Al Brodie, vice-president of the Minnesota Motel Association. The Minnesota House Commerce and Economic Development Committee recommended passage March 24 of a bill they hope will change that and attract more tourists to Minnesota.

HF572 (Berkelman, DFL-Duluth) would create a separate Office of Tourism and appropriate \$11.8 million over the next two years to market and advertise the state of Minnesota. Hank Todd, assistant commissioner of the Tourism Division in the Department of Energy, Planning and Development, told the committee the increased funding would support a high quality advertising program similar to Michigan's "Say Yes to Michigan" campaign.

It would also support advertising for six Minnesota tourism regions and assist local, non-profit organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce and arts and historical societies in promotional efforts.

The tourism division has put in a special request to the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources to start a computerized tourism data base that would provide visitors with up-to-date information on the state's resorts, entertainment and recreational opportunities.

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Legislature looks at major reforms for long-term health care funding

"Medical assistance costs for long-term care have soared wildly, and we just can't continue," says Representative John Clawson (DFL-Center City), author of HF670, a major bill the Minnesota House Health/Welfare subcommittee on Departmental Affairs heard March 23 and 24.

Medicaid pays the bills for the majority of Minnesota's nursing home residents, and over half of the state's welfare budget goes for Medicaid payments which are the second highest in the nation.

Clawson's bill would substantially change the way the state reimburses nursing homes for Medicaid residents and prohibit huge profits from over-payments. The new law would average out costs on the basis of a home's location and level of care with a financial incentive for more efficient management.

Currently, nursing homeowners realize profits from selling homes because of the state's nursing home investment plan, so Clawson's bill includes incentives for renting and a moratorium on the building of new homes.

"The amount of money spent does not reflect on the quality of care," says Clawson. He proposes an eight-member Interagency Board for Quality Assurance to develop and enforce quality assurance, and to raise fines for non-compliance from \$250 per day to \$1000.

The full Health/Welfare Committee considers the bill March 29.

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Bingo prizes may go up

"There's a new game in town, and we ought to be able to occasionally compete," says Representative James Swanson (DFL-Richfield), sponsor of HF664, a bill the Minnesota House Gaming Division heard March 23.

The bill would raise dollar limits on bingo prizes from \$100 to \$250 for single and cover-all games, if the total cover-all prize for one four-hour bingo event isn't over \$1500. The total limit for all prizes for one event would go from \$2500 to \$4000, but could be as high as \$5500 if game sponsors use the maximum cover-all limit.

Opponents to the bill say the large prize limits will force small charitable groups, with limited seating capacities, out of business because they can't afford the prizes.

Larger bingo operators, such as the VFW and American Legion, say the bill is necessary because they can't compete with even larger operations such as the Sioux Prior Lake-Shakopee bingo parlor. The Sioux operation is exempt from prize limitations because state law doesn't apply on a federal reservation.

The Legislature established state laws in 1976 to allow only non-profit groups to conduct bingo games, and to prevent competition and commercialization. The division will hear the bill again the first week in April.

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House subcommittee approves Grain Buyers' bill

Minnesota's grain producers don't have enough protection under the current Grain Buyers' act, due to expire this year, according to Representative Tom Shea, a DFL'er from Owatonna. The House Agricultural Exports and Marketing subcommittee recommended passage March 29 of Shea's bill, HF424, which would extend and amend the act.

Shea originally proposed establishment of a grain buyers' trust fund in 1983 to help farmers recover losses from buyer breach of contract, with a one-mill assessment on grain sales to finance the fund. But Shea amended the bill to hold off on the trust fund until a joint legislative committee could hold hearings on it throughout rural Minnesota this summer, to find out if grain producers want the fund. If not, Shea said he'd repeal the provision in the bill during the '84 legislative session that establishes the fund on August 1, 1984.

Several previous opponents to the fund said they'd support a farmer referendum on the issue. But independent truck grain buyers still oppose the bill because it increases bonding they must have for a grain buyer's license. Abe Rosenthal, Independent Truckers Association, said many independent truck grain buyers would be unable to get a \$50,000 bond.

The bill raises the bond levels for grain elevators from \$10,000 to \$50,000, to cover up to five warehouses.

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Legislature could give schools minimum class offering lists

The Minnesota Legislature might step into school district planning by listing the number of classes in several subject areas that schools would have to offer, and by setting strict penalties for districts that don't comply.

On March 25, the House Education Committee heard HF401 (Nelson, K., DFL-Mpls), a bill that would direct schools to offer certain courses and would require the State Board of Education to cut state aid to districts that don't comply.

HF401 would increase the number of classes a secondary school would have to offer in the fields of communication skills and social studies, and would specify minimum offerings in science, math, music, industrial arts, foreign languages, art, and vocational classes.

The bill doesn't require students to take a certain number of courses, said bill author Representative Ken Nelson. It says only that schools must make those classes available.

Gene Mammenga, from the Minnesota Education Association, praised the bill's concept, saying we can't say we have equal opportunity in schools around the state unless all students, in districts small and large, have the same access to educational programs.

After hearing testimony for and against the bill, the committee sent it to the Education Finance Division where, with further study, the proposal could become part of the comprehensive education finance package.

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Minnesota House committee approves tougher penalties on burglary

The Minnesota House Division on Criminal Justice approved HF435, March 30, which would increase penalties for burglary. The proposal would make burglary a "crime against persons" offense, making it a more serious crime than in its present status as a property offense. Representative Janet Clark (DFL--Mpls), sponsors the bill to establish four degrees of burglary. Highest penalties are for entering residential homes without consent.

First degree burglary would carry up to 20 years in prison and/or a fine up to \$20,000 for anyone who enters a home without consent to commit a crime, if someone is in the home, or the burglar has a dangerous weapon, or assaults the person in the home.

Second degree burglary would have a penalty of up to 10 years and/or \$10,000 for entering an unoccupied home without consent, or a bank, to commit a crime. Third degree burglary would mean up to five years and/or \$5000 for forcefully entering a building without consent, or to commit any felony or gross misdemeanor.

Entering a building without consent to commit a misdemeanor, such as disorderly conduct or minor property damage, would be fourth degree burglary, punishable up to one year and/or \$1000.

The bill had carried a mandatory minimum prison term for second-time offenders which legislators took out because: imprisonment is costly and ties up court resources, mandatory terms prohibit probation alternatives, and burglarly penalties would be heavier than for more serious crimes, possibly setting a precedent to mandate prison in other criminal cases which would overload prisons.