Second of two articles. In the debate over regional growth and land use, few organizations play such a visible role, yet have so few friends, as the Metropolitan Council.

Council is often derided by local officials and developers who equate Council involvement as a loss of control over local land use. Somewhat ironically, the Council has enemies at the Legislature as well—the very body that created and empowered the Council, yet sometimes seems to misunderstand the Council’s mission and authority.

So when the Metropolitan Council set out in 1995, under legislative order, to come up with a plan for future growth in the seven-county region, many were either skeptical or leery of the potential changes that might occur under a Council-driven vision.

In December, the Metropolitan Council approved a formal growth strategy—"Metro 2040"—that proposed a number of changes to the way municipalities accommodate growth. Whether or not you agree with Metro 2040 depends on your disposition toward urban growth and the Metropolitan Council’s influence over it.

Metro 2040 is not a separate plan, but merely amendments to the Council’s existing Regional Blueprint. These amendments espouse some of the same priorities set forth in the Citizens League’s recent report, It Takes a Region to Build Livable Neighborhoods: emphasis on redevelopment, compact and efficient urban forms and attention to urban design.

Specifically, Metro 2040 proposes to channel two-thirds of all growth by the year 2020 inside the existing metropolitan urban service area (MUSA), while establishing an urban reserve boundary for the year 2040. It also emphasizes job creation in the fully developed

Nonfelony prosecution setups differ across state

by Jody A. Hauer

Although most criminal offenses we learn about on television and in newspapers are felonies, the overwhelming majority of offenses committed in Minnesota are less serious crimes. Nonfelony offenses—gross misdemeanors, misdemeanors, petty misdemeanors, and ordinance or rule violations—constituted 99 percent of all offenses in the state during 1995. County attorneys and city prosecutors are responsible for prosecuting these offenses.

The Legislative Auditor’s Office recently completed a best practices review of nonfelony prosecution in Minnesota. We surveyed county attorneys (with responses from 67 of the state’s 87 counties) and a representative sample of cities around the state.

Most cities use either a private law firm or the county attorney to prosecute nonfelonies on their behalf. By some measures certain communities—those who use county attorneys to prosecute nonfelonies and larger cities using either their own prosecutors or private law

Poverty not major factor in 8th-grade test scores

by Samuel L. Myers, Jr.

What makes a difference in students’ performance on Minnesota’s new eighth-grade Basic Standards math and reading exams?

Regular school attendance is the most consistent and reliable predictor of success on the tests. High achievers on the tests tend to change schools infrequently.

Another important predictor of students’ test scores is their performance on achievement tests as second graders. Participation in a gifted and talented program is important, too, and has a greater effect on minority students’ test performance than on that of whites. And all of these factors have a much stronger impact on students’ eighth-grade test scores than individual, school or neighborhood poverty.

These are among the results of the first comprehensive empirical analysis of the 1996 eighth-grade test score data, conducted by the Humphrey Institute’s Wilkins Center. Using data merged from the MARRS (Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System) and
Editors fear, welcome idea of elected Metro Council

Red Wing Republican Eagle

Red Wing Republican Eagle said (Mar. 26) a proposal to change the Metropolitan Council on an appointive to electively "could have serious repercussions for Goodhue County" and "should be stopped in its tracks."

"The Metro Council no doubt is licking its lips at the prospect of reaching out sometime to grab Goodhue County and share in the "lucrative property tax base" of NSSP's Prairie Island nuclear plant. Star Tribune urged (Mar. 27) legislators to make the Met Council an elected body to make it accountable to citizens.

Pioneer Press said (Mar. 26) if the Met Council is disbanded, as some legislators have proposed, efforts to manage the region's growth would be "irreparably harmed." It said it would be better to make the Met Council an elected body "if that is what is needed to have a strong and effective regional planning organization."

Duluth News-Tribune said (Mar. 21) eighth-grade test scores should not be adjusted to reflect the difficulties of teaching poor students. The 'real world' seldom considers such background when hiring...The strength of having these tests and publishing results is that everyone involved...is getting a wakeup call." It said (Mar. 22) it's still unclear how schools will deal with students with special needs who can't pass the test and others who don't. "[W]e can't let the reality that some will fail to meet demands of the grad rule keep the state from setting standards that will allow a diploma from a Minnesota high school to mean something."

Mankato Free Press criticized (Apr. 4) Gov. Arne Carlson's voucher proposal, "[I]nstead of trying to spend public money on vouchers for private schools, the governor should be focusing on improvements for public schools."

Duluth News-Tribune called (Apr. 8) Sen. Larry Pogemiller's (DFL-Minneapolis) Schools of Excellence plan "an interesting proposal." It said the plan raises some questions, but "might keep alive chances for meaningful reform on school choice, which parents deserve."

St. Paul Pioneer Press said (Apr. 9) concerns about Pogemiller's plan "shouldn't be enough to derail it completely. While injecting greater market forces into education, the proposal could form a basis for productive negotiation among competing interests, many of whom have planted their heels and are resisting compromise."

Duluth News-Tribune said (Mar. 13) criticisms that the planned Edison Project charter schools in Duluth will offer some programs not available in regular schools should not scuttle the proposal. "[C]harter schools are designed to be different from regular public schools...Perhaps the model of the charter schools can show the way to expanding the programs in regular schools." It said (Mar. 19) of legislation that would prohibit any for-profit charter schools: "If Edison's programs live up to expectations, and results show Duluth kids involved in the project perform better on tests and benefit in other ways from a longer school day and longer school year, it makes no sense for the state to outlaw similar programs elsewhere just because they might be operated by a for-profit company."

Star Tribune said (Mar. 31) the state would benefit from allowing private firms to bid on operating the Rush City prison after it opens in 2000. "[It] would force the Minnesota Department of Corrections to make a plain case for itself and the way it spends money. Duluth News-Tribune said (Mar. 25) government "should be open to letting private companies bid on public services as long as they can do better for the same money or they can do a good job and save money...Government agencies should lay out clear standards and monitor performance to assure firms aren't exploiting vulnerable citizens for profits...At the very least, the prospect of competition will make government more efficient." It said (Mar. 27) businesses in the public arena will have to be more open about allowing public scrutiny of their books."

Another view:

Studies avoid questions

Unlike cleverer urban papers (the story I saw in the Strib confined itself to larger schools) our local shopper (Winona) printed all the state scores on "graduation readiness."
The list sent me to the state map, because so many of the top schools were in small towns in the western part of the state. I mention this to suggest that the gap is not so much "rich-poor" as is the current chat.

Further, I segue into a reminiscence of Sen. Patrick Mahoney: "...from the spring of 1966. It's the Harvard Faculty Club and Seymour Martin Lipset comes over and says, 'You know what Coleman's finding, don't you?' And I said, 'What?' And he said, 'All family.' And I said, 'Oh God.'...Our small exchange had undertones that explain more in retrospect than they did at the time about the hostility to that finding. The largest social science project in history had come up with the wrong answers."

So it seems that Minnesota education studies still want to avoid the right questions...to spend effort where the nicer questions can be asked, rather than the accurate ones.

Tim Slade, Winona

The Minnesota Journal

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The Minnesota Journal (ISSN 0741-9449) is a publication of the Citizens League, a nonprofit nonprofit Twin Cities public affairs organization, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415, Mike Christensen, president. Articles and commentary are drawn from a broad range of perspectives and do not necessarily reflect League positions on policy questions. The Journal is published once a month. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN.

Annual subscription rate for nonmembers is $40.

Orders may be placed at 612/358-0337 or by mail at the above address.

Postmaster: Send address changes to The Minnesota Journal, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415

April 22, 1997

MINNESOTA JOURNAL
Making schools work: More than just more money

The public education system’s record with students of color suggests that poverty is a major factor in their underperformance. That was one of the conclusions of the Citizens League’s 1997 study “The Low Income School.” As one committee member observed, “If white middle-class kids were failures at school in a few neighborhoods, education suffers. A wide variety of state and local policies contribute to the race, housing, transportation and other matters, along with persistent racial discrimination.”

In an alternative education model, the state wants to alleviate poverty concentration, the Citizens League, Metropolitan Council, and City Hall have to have only to reverse the destruc-
tive policies of the past books, but make future policies be explicitly designed to promote inclusive and local communities. Turning this situation around will take a level of attention and commitment of resources that has not been seen in Minnesota—or perhaps in the country.

Abash such a major reconfigura-
tion of the urban landscape, courts have often ordered more money be- dispached to inner-city school dis-
tricts. Efforts in Kansas and Mary-
land, for example, where expensive after-the-fact remedies have been ordered by the courts, have not produced promising results in terms of student achievement. Meanwhile, city and state expenditures within essentially unequa-
ed education districts often seem to help much. Clearly, more is needed than “more money.”

In the view of many, the education system currently is designed to meet the needs of white middle-class stu-
dents. Even if poverty concentra-
tion and other problems related to health, housing, and transportation are solved, that won’t be enough. We still need a system that puts student achievement first.

How do we get there? In its report, Straight A’s for Minnesota’s Schools, the League recommended several steps, including a high-

quality student assessment system that ensures that educators, parents and taxpayers are well informed about student

system performance and system performance.

In an encouraging move, the Legis-

dature passed a bill early this ses-
tion requiring a uniform, statewide system for assessing students’ read-
ing and writing skills. A joint House-Senate committee has been working to flesh out the details of the system. Meanwhile, some critics are worried that if testing is performed in comparable districts, the scores won’t be pub-
lished; or, if the scores are pub-
lished so that the public can be “adjusted” for demographic differences among districts. Taxpayers, parents and students may not be able to see the truth about how well kids are learning. Low-income and minority kids would be given the message that less is expected of them, and how will their white, middle-class peers.

We hope the Legislature avoids that temptation. Providing parents and students with good, honest information, it seems to us, is one of the best ways to make the sys-
tem itself accountable to students.

Another key: Making sure parents have choices. The League’s report reiterated our support for expand-

ing the voucher program. There’s no doubt it is lacking in its pursuit of reaching some- thing closer to the “literate property tax base” of NPS’s Prairie Island nuclear plant. Star Tribune urged (Mar. 27) to legislate the makers to make the voucher program more “moving” to be accountable to it.

Pioneer Press quoted (Mar. 26) that if some legislators have proposed, efforts to manage the region’s growth needs to be “broadened.” It would be said it would required more money. “It was the plan raised some questions, but ‘might keep alive chances for meaningful reform on school choice, which many of whom have pushed their plans, many of whom are resisting collapse.”

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On Balance

The future isn’t what it used to be,”— J. Berntson

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Nobody’s success depends on students

Title I, people & kids

About 1990 the state

Within its big city is fairly well targeted — as schools over 50 percent of the kids are eligible for Title I, with the poor more likely to have children being

Nobodyys there. Nobody votes

In Los Angeles this resulted in the Rodriguez case. The district is now equalizing pupil spending by school district, a significant

It’s fascinating to think what might have happened if the state — some of the suit parties, at least — had heard the complaint. It might have been viewed as a legal battle (far the role and powers of boards so their primary obligation would be to provide and fund operations, but would be studying learning.

With no solution in sight for the lawsuits, the efforts to get the changes needed continue to be made through the legislative process. There are bills that would move boards gradually to the state board. The standards and assessment proposals, of course, are part of the same package. These bills cannot change and improve their programs dramatically enough to raise student performance to meet the standards in the time allowed.

For the title I funds school districts now have structured an all children, poor districts are a source of money. The Department began to see a

With the bill’s school-based

Within the big city is fairly well targeted — as schools over 50 percent of the kids are eligible for Title I, with the poor more likely to have children being

McElveen said, and criteria are being developed to match funding, maintaining and capital budgets with Metro 2040 goals.

However, this might encourage local officials to prioritize

Some communities see comprehensive planning as a way to resolve local issues, but they are not interested in the Council and not for the benefit of the local community.

It’s "popular to talk about partner- ship in the Council," said Hurbut. “But the bottom line is that cities have control over their budgets. Some want to know what power the Council will exercise over them." Some cities even express the desire to see the Council disappear, said Hurbut, "which is why there’s no legislation to require the Council to do anything."

At a minimum, a state law was passed that requires the Council for regional land use and comprehensive planning. But some officials believe the new law doesn’t seem to know what expectations are reasonable, said Hurbut, “and that’s frustrating.” Hurbut added, "I don’t know what the state want the Council to do.

But the Council appears to be looking at some solutions to the problems, including

It’s the price you pay to get big city support for the regrouping and education finance that year.

Since 1971 something between $1.5 and $2 billion that was intended for Title I has been allocated to the schools where they are, in fact, enrolled. About 1990 the state began giving the federal Title I money to all schools and districts, regardless of need.

Schools get allocated equal numbers of teachers, not equal dollars. Senior teachers represent more dollar than younger teachers. Teachers use their seniority rights under the contract to get jobs in the other city schools and in high schools and in schools in the centers of the city. This creates significant intradistrict disparities.

Metro 2040

Continued from page 1 area, with particular emphasis on top of polluted lands.

The Council hopes such efforts” rapid urban expansion, enormous suburban sprawl and the rapid growth of certain areas for long-term agriculture. Meet these goals, in fact, are targeted to 2040.

The real change, Kari said, is trying to get local governments to understand the need for increased revenues to carry on. They need to raise $10 to $15 million in public

Metro 2040 is a voluntary guide line for future growth. By the road

This year (Metro 2040) the Council is trying to be the plan’s ultimate goal.

The Council is wanting to see how much agreement there is on those basic assumptions about moving too fast or slow for population forecast, land use, land demand, and general population trends — all with an eye to basic

The residential and commercial areas and the central city are the valleys’ main implementation goals. The residential and commercial areas and the central city are the valleys’ main implementation goals.

McElveen said, and criteria are being developed to match funding, maintaining and capital budgets with Metro 2040 goals.
Continued from page 1

firms—receive a higher level of service than others. We also found cities that collected efficient and sufficient service at improved service at equal or reduced costs.

Who prosecutes nonfelony offenses?

The responsibility for prosecuting nonfelony offenses varies among communities. Some county attorneys, about 14 percent in Minnesota, prosecute all nonfelony offenses committed in the county. In these counties, no cities have their own local prosecutors. In another 27 percent of counties, every city in the county has its own prosecutor and the county attorney does not prosecute for any city. A majority of counties, although about 59 percent, have a mix, where the county attorney prosecutes nonfelony offenses on behalf of some cities, while other cities retain their own prosecutor.

Among cities, about half use the county attorney for nonfelony prosecution. Another 46 percent of Minnesota cities use a private law firm or have a city council-provided prosecution through a common provider.

Goals for prosecution. Based on established standards in which we identified four primary goals for offices that prosecute nonfelony offenses. Prosecution offices should:

1. Fulfill their statutory obligations and ensure that relevant ethical standards are met.
2. Encourage just and fair criminal proceedings unhampered by unjustifiable expense and delay.
3. Communicate clearly with the sheriffs and law enforcement to prevent a sharing of effort in a shared crime control and promoting law-abiding activity; and
4. Maintain a judicious balance between protecting the rights of both individuals involved in crimes.

We found nine important actions that can help prosecution offices reach these goals. Some of these actions are common across Minnesota and others less so.

Effective and efficient service delivery. First, prosecutors must provide effective and efficient service delivery. We compared counties on numerous measures of effectiveness and efficiency such as whether prosecutors provided adequate services to peace officers, whether they used a victim and witness assistance program, and the number of hundred per full-time equivalent (FTE) attorney.

We found that county attorney offices performed generally well in 1995, regardless of whether they prosecuted nonfelony offenses for all or some counties. One exception was that when county attorneys prosecuted on behalf of all or most cities, their offices tended to handle a larger number of cases per FTE staff than others.

Cities with their own prosecutors on staff—typically large cities with heavy caseloads—performed very poorly in both effectiveness and efficiency.

Most of the other cities were nearly evenly divided between those receiving prosecution services two ways, and those receiving services through private providers. In general, these two groups performed comparable to each other. But we noted several exceptions.

Cities relying on county attorneys for nonfelony prosecution were more likely to receive adequate services as compared to private firms to have: (1) victim and witness assistance services available; (2) flexible and nonstandardized training provided by prosecutors to law enforcement; (3) increasing the number of higher percentages of cases disposed at an early stage of the judicial process; (4) in the case of some prosecutor communication with local elected officials and the community at large; (5) in cities using private law firms, cities were more likely than those using county attorney services to provide employees training opportunities for prosecutors specifically focused on employee training needs. Among cities using private firms, those with larger police departments were more likely than smaller cities to have higher levels of service.

A small number of cities have found efficiencies by joining together for cooperative prosecution services. For example, some Scott County cities, have formed joint powers compacts to collect and disseminate information and work together on the collection of information. In Hennepin County, four county cities form four collaborative services with Minnetonka, which has its own prosecutors on staff.

Working with law enforcement agencies. Effective prosecutors must maintain good working relationships with local law enforcement. Prosecutors should maintain formal and informal ties with law enforcement agencies. This includes: (1) forming a shared effort with law enforcement offices; (2) providing normal resources to law enforcement for professional police officers; (3) where the prosecutor’s office works with the sheriffs and local police department to form two offices working in tandem; and (4) maintaining contact with police officers, whether they are used a victim and witness assistance program.

Operating procedures. Effective prosecutors must maintain good working relationships with local law enforcement. Prosecutors should maintain formal and informal ties with law enforcement offices.

In these counties, they están todos empeñados en el mismo nivel de servicio, todas las oficinas tienen un nivel de servicio similar. Hay algunas diferencias significativas entre las ciudades y los condados. En general, las oficinas que dependen de los condados en el servicio de procesamiento de ofensas no graves tienen un rendimiento similar en lo que respecta a la eficiencia y la eficacia. Sin embargo, en las ciudades con sus propios abogados, los servicios son más eficientes y eficaces, lo que se puede atribuir a la mayor centralización de los servicios en las ciudades. En general, se observa una mayor uniformidad en los resultados, lo que sugiere que las ciudades con sus propios abogados en este ámbito pueden estar mejor equipadas para abordar eficientemente las solicitudes de servicios de procesamiento de ofensas no graves.
Quarter of Minneapolis 9th graders pass state retests

In the flurry of reporting about the results of this year’s statewide eighth-grade Basic Standards test, nothing was said about the performance of ninth graders who were retaking the test after failing last year. As it turns out, the Department of Children, Families and Learning won’t have statewide information on the test takers until next fall.

But retesting statistics are available in Minneapolis, where 1,137 ninth graders retested this year. Only 29 percent of them passed the reading test and only 25 percent the math test—that despite another year of school and special pretest tutoring offered at some schools. (The statistics are not yet available in St. Paul.) For this year’s ninth graders a passing score remained at 70 percent, even though this year’s eighth graders had to score 75 percent to pass.

So about 850 Minneapolis ninth graders have failed the math test twice and about 920 have failed the reading test twice. Assume passing rates remain at 25 percent for each of this group’s next three years in high school (which might be tough, given that two-time test takers are more likely to have significant learning obstacles). If that happens, about 350 to 390 Minneapolis students will have failed to pass one or both tests by the spring of what should be their senior year. That’s more than the average size of a graduating class at one of the city’s seven high schools. Will they be denied diplomas, as the state standards dictate? Worse yet, will many of them have dropped out before that time? Or will we have figured out a way to teach them enough so they can pass these basic tests?—Don Schroeder.

A recent survey of shelters in Minnesota showed homelessness appears to be increasing.

The survey, conducted by the Department of Children, Families, polled those living in overnight and transitional housing on Nov. 26, 1996. Results were then compared to the same poll taken exactly one year earlier. Obviously, numerous factors, such as weather conditions, could skew results of “same-day polls” of homelessness. However, the survey produced some interesting points to ponder.

For instance, the number of homeless people jumped 23 percent to almost 5,000 people from the previous year. Of this total, 43 percent were children, 31 percent women and 26 percent men. Despite the apparent increase in the homeless population for that particular night, the number of available shelter beds actually decreased five percent from the previous year. Shelters for battered women and transitional housing remained stable, but beds in overnight shelters dropped 22 percent.

Even more telling, in 1985, when the department first started this shelter survey, 45 percent of those in shelters were men, 27 percent women, and 28 percent children.—Ron Wirtz.

In the Senate education committee the other night, people were puzzling why Detroit Lakes would cut an accelerated learning program, while Forest Lake would keep it—particularly, as the chair, Sen. Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Minneapolis), pointed out, when Detroit Lakes has more money to spend than Forest Lake.

The apparent explanation: Forest Lake can’t safely cut that program. Its students have other choices. Detroit Lakes can: Its students don’t. It’s a lesson. What puts students first is not “good intentions.” It’s the forces that bear on districts.—Ted Kolderie.

But great philosophical differences and money constraints, even with the surplus, are discouraging. At best, she said, the final bill will be a compromise among various ideas. But she thinks time and again, “This is all going to blow up.” It’s a showdown over how much money should be spent on K-12 education and how much on property-tax reform, says Olson. There’s also the issue of whether a new tax, such as an expanded sales tax, should be used to reduce property taxes when “some feel strongly that, given the surplus, this is not the time when we can add a tax.”—Betty Wilson.

At a recent conference at the University of Minnesota on demographics for policymakers, Barbara Raye, director of policy analysis and planning for Ramsey County, presented some intriguing research findings showing big differences between men’s and women’s attitudes toward government. In a survey that asked for feedback on the county’s visions for human services, highways and transit, waste management, parks and other countywide services, women’s responses consistently reflected a more positive view not only of Ramsey County’s plan, but of government in general.

As it happens, an earlier speaker had presented a slew of data showing that female heads of household are more likely to be renters rather than homeowners, more likely to live in substandard rental housing, and more likely to pay more than 30 percent of their incomes in rent. Citizens League studies have repeatedly pointed out that Minnesota’s property-tax policies, municipal zoning laws and building codes contribute to the shortage of affordable rental housing and put an unfair tax burden on renters—whose incomes, on average, are lower than those of homeowners.

We wonder whether women’s positive feelings would change if these behind-the-scenes workings of government were as obvious as services like health care, housing assistance and schooling.—Janet Diodrow.

In a February speech at the University of Minnesota’s Center of Transportation Studies, C. Kenneth Orski, director of the International Mobility Observatory, noted that governments in some countries are looking to alternatives to car ownership in response to the rapid growth in total motorization, while still allowing the auto industry to prosper.

Singapore, for example, has experimented with “weekend cars” to provide tax rebates for those who agree not to use cars during peak travel times. In France, “city cars” are available to subscribers in different locations throughout a city. “Auto cooperatives” are being tested in Germany and Switzerland, allowing people to time-share vehicles.—R.W.

Contributors to “Take Note” include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and Betty Wilson, a freelance writer and former Star Tribune political writer.

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PERIODICALS
POSTAGE PAID
AT MINNEAPOLIS
MINNESOTA
Volunteers promote League agenda at Capitol

More than 2,400 bills have been introduced in the 1997 Legislature. Obviously the League can’t begin to track all of these bills. However, League representatives have weighed in on a number of issues in which the League has a long-standing interest, such as tax policy and regent selection. But basically, the League’s efforts are focused on three areas: urban growth and metropolitan governance; economic competitiveness; and K-12 education. The following is a thumbnail sketch of the action in those three areas.

Urban Growth/Metro Governance

The Legislature can always be counted on for a good head-scratching when it comes to metro issues. For instance, a House committee voted to abolish, then elect, and finally study the Metropolitan Council—all in the space of one committee meeting.

Don Fraser, co-chair of the committee that produced the report, It Takes a Region to Build Livable Neighborhoods, has testified on three different occasions for bills in both houses calling for an elected Metropolitan Council.

Executive Director Lyle Wray has also testified on numerous bills, including against a bill to abolish the Metro Council.

Senators Steve Morse (DFL-Dakota) and John Hottinger (DFL-Mankato) and Rep. Joe Opatz (DFL-St. Cloud) have spearheaded statewide land-use planning efforts. Two separate bills were introduced (HF 217/SF 820; and SF 738/HF 1000). The two Senate bills have since been combined, while the two House bills remain independent of each other.

All of these land-use bills have seen considerable debate and revision, but are moving through their respective committees. At present, all of the bills promote some degree of state wide, but locally-based, comprehensive planning.

The League has endorsed a bill (HF 771/SF 319), sponsored by Rep. Dee Long (DFL-Mpls) and Sen. Randy Kelly (DFL-St. Paul), that would create a fund for large-scale polluted site cleanup and subsequent redevelopment. The bill is moving through the Legislature and appears to have the support from Gov. Carlson.

Finally, the League is tracking a bill (HF 1317) that would create an advisory council to study the appropriate roles and responsibilities of local and regional governments in the metro area. Such a study mirrors a recommendation that appears in several recent League reports calling for clearer accountability links between the service provider, the service itself and the taxes paid for the service.

Economic Competitiveness

Among the proposals being debated is a bill (SF 1639/HF 1536) that would put in motion a process for crafting a broad strategy for public sector investment in Minnesota’s long-term economic future.

David Hunt, who co-chaired the League’s 1996 study committee on economic competitiveness, testified in support of the House bill at an Economic Development and International Trade committee hearing March 19. “Our economic future is dependent on many factors with significant public sector involvements: workforce development, post-secondary education, public amenities, state-of-the-art telecommunications, transportation and key infrastructure. Many of these factors are beyond the reach of traditional economic development programs,” Hunt said.

At a hearing before the House State Government Finance Division, League president Mike Christenson reiterated the League’s finding that Minnesota currently has no comprehensive strategy or ongoing process to help the public sector fulfill its role in the long-term economic development of the state. Other states and metropolitan areas have developed strategic plans, Christenson said.

The bill would establish an
Making Welfare Work next Mind-Opener

Coinciding with the tumultuous debate nationwide and in our own Legislature over reforming the welfare system, the League’s final Mind-Opener series of the 1996-97 season will feature four speakers who bring uniquely different perspectives.

With deadlines looming for the state to begin implementing plans for welfare reform, the Legislature is under pressure to pass a reform proposal or risk losing millions of federal support dollars.

Currently, the Legislature is considering a proposal to expand the innovative Minnesota Family Investment Program to the entire state. This bill would put a 60-month lifetime limit on assistance, establish a 30-day residency requirement, and require that counties implement education and training programs by January 1, 1998.

The four-week Mind-Opener series, which starts on April 29, will explore whether proposed changes to the state’s welfare programs will be enough to empower real change, making work more attractive and feasible while providing long-term solutions to poverty, and real opportunity for economic prosperity for lower-income households. This series will feature the following speakers:

On Tuesday, April 29, Sen. Don Samuelsen (DFL-Brainerd) will discuss the intent and goals of the welfare reform legislation he authored.

On Tuesday, May 6, Deborah L. Huskins, Assistant Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Human Services, will discuss the state’s role and strategy in helping people off welfare.

On Tuesday, May 13, Marcia Keller Avner, Public Policy Director, Minnesota Council of Non-Profits, will address the broad effects of welfare reform on the non-profit community.

The series will end on Tuesday, May 20, with Carole Mae Olson, Executive Director, Episcopal Community Services, who will give an inside look at the impact of reform on providers and the people they serve.

League Legislative activities

interim economic strategy group and eventually an ongoing economic policy council. The proposal was shaped in part by the League’s 1996 report Compete Globally, ThriveLocally.

A tip of the hat to Representatives Jean Wagenius (DFL-Minneapolis), Dan McElroy (R-Burnsville), Ted Winter (DFL-Fulda), and Ron Abrams (R-Minnetonka); and Senators Tracy Beckman (DFL-Bricelyn), Martha Robertson (R-Minnetonka), Randy Kelly (DFL-St. Paul), Ed Oliver (R-Dephaven), and Linda Runbeck (R-Circle Pines) for their leadership in sponsoring the bills.

K-12 Education

The League’s 1997 report, Straight A’s for Minnesota’s Schools, urged the Legislature to define its expectations for the performance of the state’s education institutions, set broad policy and arrange the system in ways that prompt continuous improvement.

The League is now following a handful of key debates in the Legislature. Among them: a proposal to expand and strengthen Minnesota’s charter schools law and level the financial playing field between charter and “regular” schools.

Gov. Arne Carlson’s bold proposal included a boost for charter schools and the Senate is now debating a bill sponsored by Ember Reichgott Junge (DFL-New Hope) and Gen Olson (R-Minnetonka), which would make great strides in supporting charter schools.

The League has expressed its support for the bill, and has also said Legislators should resist any attempt to prohibit charter schools from contracting with for-profit firms for services related to instruction. The League believes the Legislature should hold schools accountable for student achievement—not intrude on local districts’ or schools’ prerogative to design their own instructional strategies.

The League is also following the details of the statewide system for assessing students’ core knowledge and skills, which was passed by the Legislature early in the session and is awaiting final touches.

Study committee co-chair and League board member Pam Neary encouraged the House QualityInitiatives Subcommittee to include both standardized tests and other measures in the assessment system. “The state must provide consistent and comparable information about student and school performance to provide clear accountability to parents and taxpayers,” Neary said.

Cowles Media grant puts the League on-air

The Cowles Media Foundation has approved a $25,000 grant to help the League expand its “delivery” system through a regular League program on cable television. Each year the League sponsors as many as 50 policy forums and meetings. Attendees at these meetings are accustomed to very informative and high quality public affairs discussions with leading policy makers. Unfortunately, the time and place of these meetings is not always convenient for people interested in the program. The grant from Cowles Media will enable the League to broadcast selected programs on a regular time slot on cable television. Details of the new League program will be announced soon. And don’t forget—the League’s web site also features a calendar and transcripts of some League events and excerpts from the Minnesota Journal. Stay in touch with the League and public affairs through the web at http://freenet.msp.mn.us/ip/pol/citizen and the League’s new cable television program. Thanks to Cowles Media!

Board of Directors Election

The League Board of Directors has set Monday, June 30 for the annual election of Directors. Eight Directors will be elected to three-year terms. League by-laws require the Nominating Committee, chaired this year by Barbara Lukermann, to submit a slate of candidates to the membership by May 26. The by-laws a stipulate that any member of the League may be nominated for Director upon the written petition of 25 members submitted to the Secretary (Jane Vanderpoel) at least 25 days before the election.