



# Minnesota Journal

## Inside This Issue

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New thinking for global economy. — Page 2.

A more effective, connected Met Council. — Page 3.

More people catching the bus. — Page 8.

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## Better sponsor oversight key for charters

by Jon Schroeder

Almost eight years after passing the nation's first charter school law, the Minnesota Legislature is continuing to debate both the "whether" and "how" of this important strategy for changing and improving public education. Much of the debate is about charter schools themselves—how they are funded, governed and staffed and how well they're doing at improving student achievement.

At the same time—in Minnesota and all around the country—increased attention is being given to charter school *sponsors*. Under each of the nation's 35 charter laws, school districts and other

sponsors have the responsibility to both authorize and oversee these less-regulated, more-autonomous public schools.

The increased focus on sponsors is reflected in legislative proposals to allow additional public bodies other than school districts to authorize charters. Other proposals are designed to make decisions on charter applications occur on the applications' merits—rather than their politics. Beyond these legislative proposals, at least some sponsors are also paying more attention to their role in providing effective

and appropriate oversight of the charters, once they are in operation.

### Growth despite reservations

Historically, the relationship between many charter schools and their sponsors has been at either of two extremes: suspicion—even hostility—or benign neglect.

Many school districts remain uneasy about their role as charter sponsors—concerned about losing students and income and unhappy about the time required to consider proposals and oversee schools outside their direct control. Some candid district leaders also admit to

Continued on page 5

## Met Council more visible, controversial in new role

by Dana Schroeder

In January 1995, when Curt Johnson was preparing to become chair of the Metropolitan Council, he said in an interview in the *Minnesota Journal* that his most important objective was "to ensure that the Metropolitan Council earns recognition for leadership in resolving major regionwide problems and stays on track in restoring its national reputation for doing the kind of planning and thinking that keeps the Twin Cities area on the leading edge."

"I hope I'm not kidding myself, but I think we did that," Johnson said in an interview last month, after he had resigned as Council chair and former state Sen. Ted Mondale (DFL-St. Louis Park) had been appointed by Gov. Jesse Ventura to succeed him.

"I think there are indications that people notice this place again," he said. "The number of invitations to national meetings to make presentations about things we were doing here dramatically accelerated over the last two or three years."

"And I think the Council is a more

Continued on page 4

## Not all good fire departments are full-time

by Jody A. Hauer

Many Minnesota fire departments with volunteer and part-time on-call firefighters do a good job, even measured against fire departments in comparably sized cities with full-time personnel, according to a best practices review of fire services recently completed by the Legislative Auditor's Office. The Auditor's office surveyed Minnesota fire departments and used State Fire Marshal data to analyze how well the fire departments fared against standards and guidelines promulgated by nationally recognized fire organizations, as well as state law.

Most Minnesota fire departments, about 92 percent, have members who are primarily volunteers or paid on an on-call basis. Just three percent of Minnesota's fire departments had exclusively full-time paid personnel in 1997. Another five percent, which the study defines as "combination" departments, employed at least six full-time firefighters, as well as volunteers or on-call firefighters.

Firefighters do more than fight fires. In 1997, about 70 percent of the state's fire departments also

conducted rescues, 60 percent offered some level of emergency medical services at the scene of accidents and about 80 percent were prepared to make basic responses to spills of hazardous materials, according to the study's survey of fire departments. Fire departments also conducted fire code inspections and educated groups on fire safety, although the extent of their involvement varied considerably. State Fire Marshal data indicate that only 13 percent of fire department responses to calls in 1997 were for extinguishing fires.

Continued on page 6



# State needs new thinking to face global economy

As the region and state accelerate into a global economy, we have to change our thinking in a number of areas, if we hope to find and defend a niche at the higher end of the economic food chain.

**First, the state must figure out an economic game plan for the new economy.** Statewide, we spend hundreds of millions of dollars on economic development without a clear, up-to-date vision of what we're trying to achieve. A state strategy based on real estate development and physical-capital investment is inadequate, when the key strategic resource to add value to the economy is *worker skills*, complemented by sophisticated tools and services.

- The state must move from the traditional strategy of "more new jobs" to filling strategic gaps left by the current labor shortage. Most federal and state legislation on workforce development is designed to reduce unemployment and offers little help in quickly filling critical labor shortages in high-wage, high-growth industries (like information technology and printing, to name two).

Today, there are thousands of high-wage, export-driven jobs available in Minnesota, but the "supply pipeline" for skilled workers is woefully inadequate. Our higher education system, along with the Minnesota Departments of Trade and Economic Development and

Economic Security, need to retool their respective missions and operations to be more responsive to the needs of employers.

Specifically, the state should create a "Minnesota New Economy Job Index." Then, state agencies and employers need to identify statewide vacancies in key industry clusters and get help from the higher ed system to ensure that enough trainees are in the pipeline. New money needs to be put on the table for partnerships with the private sector to meet strategic skills gaps or to overcome barriers that prevent workers from being productive.

- Once the state has a formal economic strategy, it will be easier to coordinate and guide local economic development that collectively benefits local communities, regions and the state. This does not diminish the local role, but instead merely demands that we better align local, regional and state goals and activities as other regions have done.

All economic development ultimately takes place at the local level. In the metropolitan area alone, there are 80 separate economic-development authorities. The large number of economic-development entities is both an obstacle and an advantage. Moving

ahead requires getting a lot of professional people "on-board" to this new thinking, and change can be hardest within local communities who like things the way they are, thank you very much.

But if the case for new thinking can be properly made to local development officials, the Twin Cities has a virtual army of people to lead in helping individual communities take advantage of the opportunities in the new economy—while implementing the larger economic framework.

**Another key part of this economic strategy is collaboration in research and education between higher education and industry.** In a 1997 report, the Citizens League argued for the creation of an industry-state-university partnership called the Northstar Research Coalition.

Such a collaboration would show a commitment to important industries in the new economy—like digital science and cellular and molecular biology—and provide for a rapid build-up of brainpower in the form of top-notch faculty in these priority research areas.

Currently the state spends significant resources helping many differ-

ent industries, but proportionately little is invested on emerging high-tech areas that will define the state's future economy. Instead of spending on more bricks and mortar (through traditional economic development programs), more investment should be directed to high-tech and other research that can enhance worker productivity.

**The final launching point for adapting to the new economy on my list is a balanced K-12 approach.** We have essentially abandoned vocational high schools and technology training for "academic rigor." While postsecondary education is increasingly important, many jobs in the next decade will require only two years or less of technical training. Meanwhile, the proportion of high school graduates going on for any higher education is falling, and high school drop-out rates for some communities of color is deplorable. While most every high school has a school-to-work program, nobody's quite sure what they all add up to.

Whether we like it or not, the new economy has already arrived. Doing "pretty good" in the future will not be enough to maintain our current high standard of living. We need new thinking and action to move beyond today's status quo.

*Lyle Wray is executive director of the Citizens League.*

## St. Paul vision: Retail, charter schools, housing, Twins

*From "State of the City" address by St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman on Mar. 23.*

Our vision includes renovating Dayton's, more mainstream, main street retail and...the work of continuing to create and maintain jobs in Saint Paul. A top priority for the future is keeping the St. Paul Companies' growth in Saint Paul...

Second, we must address effectively the challenges of the Y2K Millennium Bug. We are already doing so... in an aggressive and confident fashion...

Third, we will continue to move

forward in pushing an education agenda which recognizes that children remain our top priority.

Charter Schools will be at the forefront of this agenda. I will work closely with Patricia Harvey, our new superintendent, to ensure that every school in the City of Saint Paul has the highest standards...and those that don't measure up to our expectations should either be closed or dramatically revamped...

Charter schools as an option for every child and parent should be an option that is not only talked about, but made a reality.

Fourth, we will continue our campaign to relink this entire city to our greatest resource, the Mississippi River...

Fifth, we will embark aggressively upon a changing way of doing business in Saint Paul city government. We are moving ahead and will continue to do so with Compete Saint Paul, the initiative to bring down the cost and improve the quality of City services through competition.

Sixth, we are going to deal with housing in our city...

[O]ur first priority must be to preserve and maintain the affordable

housing that we have...[S]ome portion of new housing built in the city should be made available for people of modest means...I will recommend that we modify our comprehensive housing plan to reflect the 60 percent [of median income] level [as the standard used to define low income]...

Seventh, we will do what we can to keep Minnesota Twins baseball in Minnesota...

I intend to see what Saint Paul can do to bring the Minnesota Twins to our City...

# Chair vows more effective, efficient, connected Council

*From "Maintaining Our Competitive Advantage in the 21st Century," State of the Region Address, Ted Mondale, Chair, Metropolitan Council, on Mar. 29.*

We have some tough issues to work on. In these good times, too many people are left out of the prosperity, and we face deep disparities in income and opportunity with complex and interrelated causes.

We face serious shortages of affordable housing, especially in places where entry-level jobs are being created. While educational performance continues to improve, 8th graders in the central cities are not doing nearly as well on standardized tests. We don't have the job training we need so that workers in the middle of their careers can continually improve and upgrade their skills. All these weaknesses matter, and we must deal with them if our region is to win the competition for new economic growth.

We also should not be complacent about our position in the global economy. While things are pretty good for us today, there are early warning signs that our competitive edge may be eroding...

Earlier this month the Twin Cities International Roundtable presented the results of over 75 interviews with our top business executives.

These leaders all say the same thing: the Twin Cities is still competitive, but we may be slipping. One key reason is fragmentation of efforts, with over 200 political jurisdictions and 80 separate economic development programs. Other threats to our competitive position are our shortage of skilled workers. The business community also tells us the adversarial relationship between business, government and the media thwarts our best efforts to present a compelling picture of the Twin Cities as a world-class region and they all agree that there is no regional vision or strategy for maintaining our competitive edge. This must change...

So what exactly will we do to become a more vital competitor in the global economy?

One, we will build an educational system, including job training and retraining, that produces the highly trained, skilled workers the global economy demands...

In addition to K-12 education, we will work with business to create job training alliances, and we fight the fragmentation and duplication in the region's job training efforts.

Two, we will complete the infrastructure to efficiently connect our people, products and information with the world. This means a flexible approach to transit, starting with

an expanded bus system and including light rail, commuter rail and rapid-transit busways. We also will expand the existing airport into a world-class facility with low-cost gates and an open door to new competition.

Three, we will protect and improve that intangible called quality of life, which allows the Twin Cities region to compete with Seattle, Austin, Texas and the Silicon Valley as the place the most talented people and entrepreneurs want to live and work.

One of the biggest threats to our quality of life is sprawl...

The question is not whether or not we will grow — we will. It is *how* we grow that matters...

Now that we recognize we can't build our way out of congestion, we will get on to the business of creating transit and transportation alternatives. We will develop housing and shopping around transit lines. We will redevelop older neighborhoods, like the Phalen Corridor in St. Paul...We will implement fresh ideas for renovating World War II-era housing, like we have in my home town of St. Louis Park, so these *houses* become *homes* to a new generation of families.

We will create alternatives for empty nesters who want to move

back into the city and we will offer choices for retired people who want to continue living in the suburbs near family and friends.

And most of all, we will get over that old idea that "so-called" affordable housing should be in one part of town, for "those people," while the rest of us live somewhere else.

Our common purpose is to make this a world class place to live, work and do business. The question the Met Council must ask is what is our unique role in fulfilling this common purpose?...

Our first and most important role is to lead on regional issues. We agree that we need a revitalized, recreated Met Council. We have over 30 years experience drawing up plans, but now we need to prove that we also have the determination and vision to implement them.

The next infusion of new leadership will come when Gov. Ventura announces the new Met Council next month. For the first time since the Council's genesis in 1967, every member of the Metropolitan Council is up for reappointment. Over 193 citizens submitted resumes...

The second important role for the Met Council is as a convener, bringing together public and private sector players to hash out tough

Continued on page 6

## Another view: Housing goals beat inaction

"Take Note" recently [Feb. 16 *Minnesota Journal*] cited a Center for Urban Studies report stating the "status quo," presumably the marketplace, would produce better (affordable housing) results than the Livable Communities legislation. The fact is, the Twin Cities region continues to lose ground under either scenario—because the cost of housing is increasing at rates that far outpace inflation. To argue, however, that doing nothing (status quo), as opposed to doing something (Livable Communities), doesn't make sense.

Under today's healthy economic conditions, the marketplace reduces the number of affordable housing units in the region every day. Liv-

able communities keeps us in the game.

One hundred one metro-area communities are participating in Livable Communities—with affordable housing goals based on their projected future growth. In fact, thousands of affordable units have been built in the region over the past two years—with the help of limited public resources that leveraged private investment and private developer construction.

Most of the region's growth to 2010, 80 percent, will occur in the developing suburbs participating in Livable Communities. If those communities achieve their goals, nearly half the new units built will

be affordable for ownership and nearly 10 percent will be affordable rental units.

Does that address all the region's affordable housing needs? No. But it's a whole lot better than "status quo."

*Jim Solem, Regional Administrator, Metropolitan Council*

### Editor's note

*The "On Balance" summary of editorial opinions from newspapers around the state will not appear this month due to space limitations.*



visible organization in the Twin Cities than it was four years ago,” he said. “In part, that’s because it runs things that matter to people. Transit is visible, wastewater treatment is less so—you only notice that if something goes wrong. And we inserted ourselves into the land use and growth issue more than anybody had done in the past. That not only raises recognition, but it generates controversy.”

“I left the organization a more controversial one than I found it,” Johnson said.

**Restructured Council**  
One of the reasons for the controversy was that Johnson arrived at the Council just as newly legislated mandates for its restructuring were taking effect. One of the most important changes was giving the Council direct responsibility for transit and sewer operations, which had previously been handled by separate metro organizations.

Johnson said the Council was able to “dramatically decrease” the number of wastewater treatment employees, while increasing the level of environmental compliance.

He said the transit system was “wobbly” and sinking in ridership when the Council took over. “We determined strategically what we had to do,” he said. But the resistance of the organized workers led to a strike in the fall of 1995.

“It was the sound of a system hitting bottom,” Johnson said. “It bounced hard. But from that point I think the rebuilding process has been nearly continuous.”

“Now whatever number you want to look at from the transit system is going in the right direction,” he said. “We’re one of the few transit systems in the United States where ridership numbers are going up, where the fleet replacement ratios are accelerating, where there’s a very serious plan to build more serious transit infrastructure for the future. I think we set the transit operations on a course that will pay off in the long run.”

Did the move to take over these metro operations get in the way of

the Council’s traditional planning role, as some observers feared?

“I would say there were times when that warning needed to be remembered,” he said. “But I think on the whole we sustained the balance.”

Johnson said he learned that if “you put people who have responsibility to put service on the street everyday alongside someone who is trying to take the longer view, to do the planning, to think way ahead, the interaction turns out to be an enormous strategic advantage.”

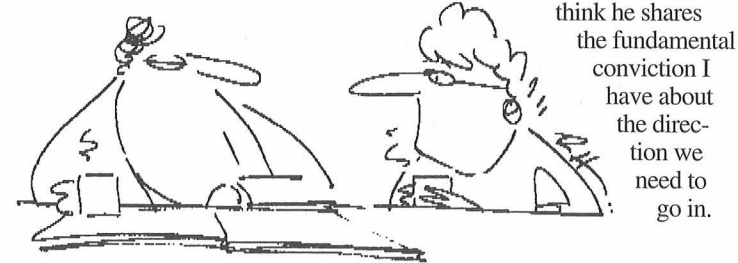
Johnson said the restructuring mandate to hire a regional administrator (Jim Solem) was “absolutely critical” to the Council’s success. The separation of management and policy, he said, “turns out to have been wise.”

**Transit**  
Four years ago, Johnson said that advocates of light-rail transit should *not* be “very optimistic.” Yet during his term as Council chair, he came out in favor of building a light-rail line in the Hiawatha corridor to the airport and the Mall of America.

What changed his mind?

“I came to a very radical conclusion,” he said, “that we were never going to improve transit service by ideologically clinging to the efficiency argument. I was clinging to the reasoning that you could get a lot more improvement in the system spending it on bigger, better buses and more frequent service than if you spent all that money on more expensive rail. And it’s true. You can.”

“But unless we introduced a rail component and unless we swept the rail advocates into the transit tent—along with the bus advocates—we were never going to have a powerful enough constituency to change anything,” he said.



“...Remember the mild-mannered Met Council that we’d never heard of? Now it’s like it’s gone into a phone booth, put on its cape and come leaping out to tackle buses, sewage, sprawl, housing... gosh, maybe even truth, justice and the American way!”

**Schools**  
In the 1995 interview, Johnson endorsed the neighborhood elementary school as a key to restoring effective neighborhoods. He hoped entering the school desegregation debate would take the Council back to some of its “historic richness” in providing leadership on tough issues.

In reality, Johnson said he was only able to work informally on education issues. “I used whatever opportunities I could find to talk about it, to insist that nothing else we were going to do to revitalize the older parts of the region was going to make any difference, if we failed to create good quality school opportunities for the people who lived there.”

“If I’ve evolved at all in my own thinking about it in the four years, I went beyond radical,” he said, “to desperate. I’m willing to do *anything* that works. I’m for vouchers, I’m for putting more money into the schools we’ve got—whatever works.”

**Housing**  
Johnson was convinced that through the Livable Communities Act, “we had one of the nation’s most systematic programs to take on affordable housing.” He said the limited resources proved powerful in getting communities to volunteer to work more affordable units into new construction. “But it wasn’t enough to fill the gap and we were losing the battle,” he said.

He asked the staff to show him how much incentives to fill the gap in affordable housing would cost. “Let’s find some strategies that, if the Legislature would agree, would actually work,” he said. “It’s a lot of money, but it’s not out of reach.”

**Ted Mondale**  
Johnson is enthusiastic about Ted Mondale taking over as Met Council chair. “I feel like it’s in good hands,” he said. “I think he shares the fundamental conviction I have about the direction we need to go in.”

He, like me, has a bias for action.”

“His exceptional political skills may be exactly what the Council needs at this point to get legislative permission to do a number of these things,” Johnson said. “He understands issues. And he has that wonderfully energetic impatience you associate with younger people. Most of the time that’ll serve him well.”

**Public leadership**  
Johnson left the Citizens League seven years ago and spent three years working in Gov. Arne Carlson’s office and four years as Met Council chair. He said he “felt the heat” as a public leader, even though he wasn’t elected.

“I got a taste of what we have done to public officials by casting them in this stereotype that assumes bad intent,” Johnson said.

“But I also got insight into some of the deadening things we do from the government side,” he said. “We need to liberate ourselves from the notion that the public hearing is the principal way to communicate with the public about policy change. By the time you get to the public hearing, you’re performing a ritual.”

“You need to have ways to creatively engage the public so they’re part owners of the result before you get to the end of something,” he said.

**Future plans**  
Johnson said he hopes he’s “earned the opportunity to spend the rest of my career commenting on what other people do.”

He and Neal Peirce started a small business a few years ago to do writing on contract for newspapers around the country.

This fall, for example, they’re doing a long series for the *San Diego* magazine on growth and development issues, land use and transportation, changing demographics and a binational strategy for the region, which has the highest-volume border crossing in the world.

Johnson will also be making speeches, moderating meetings and writing occasional pieces for magazines.

Dana Schroeder is editor of the Minnesota Journal.

## Charters

Continued from page 1

“Observations about the high-stakes accountability that charters face and the notion that a poorly performing public school could be forced to close.

Despite the reservations, a growing number of charter schools are being approved and allowed to open—with a variety of school district, university and other sponsors. Nationwide, the charter movement has grown from one school in 1992—City Academy in St. Paul—to more than 1,200 schools and an estimated 300,000 students in 1999.

Minnesota currently has 37 operating charter schools—double the number that were open just two years ago. Four others have been approved for start-up in 1999 or 2000 and 16 more charter applications are now pending before the state Board of Education. Two applications are appeals to the state board after they were turned down by local districts, but the other 14 have prior approval from a school district, college or university sponsor. They include the state’s first public-school conversion—an elementary school in the Faribault School District.

Barring unforeseen glitches, Minnesota could have as many as 60 charters open—or approved to open—by this fall. And, according to the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, an estimated 20 to 30 other charter proposals are now in various stages of development.

As the number of charter schools has grown, so have the number and diversity of sponsors. If all the pending applications are approved by the state board, Minnesota will soon have at least 29 charter school sponsors, including 20 school districts, eight colleges and universities and the state board of education (see accompanying chart).

More than a quarter of Minnesota’s charters have been authorized by one sponsor—the St. Paul Board of Education. By far the most active postsecondary sponsor has been Central Lakes College-Brainerd. Two currently authorized charters were approved on appeal by the

state Board of Education, when they failed to garner enough votes for local district sponsorship—making the state board the sponsor. Two similar appeals are now pending before the state board.

**Importance of oversight**  
There’s no question that charters are not yet a fully accepted education-improvement strategy in Minnesota. A group of experienced educators and community leaders continue to have their charter ideas rejected by the Mankato School District. The LeCrescent School Board recently voted to rescind a previously approved application for a Montessori charter school that had been in various stages of negotiation for more than three years.

It also took a group of parents and teachers in Wyoming two years to get the two votes on the Forest Lake School Board it needed to appeal the local board’s rejection of a charter proposal to the state Board of Education. And the Minneapolis School Board initially rejected all four charter proposals presented to it earlier this year. (One of those proposals was subsequently approved after being revised and a second was able to find a university sponsor.)

While reservations remain, at least several school-district sponsors are taking steps to move the discussion about charters to a new level—beyond *whether* they should exist to *what kind of oversight* they should be given once approved.

At the same time, a number of other states have moved ahead of Minnesota in strengthening the capacity of charter sponsors. They offer some helpful lessons. Nearly two hundred people from sponsoring agencies, charter schools and charter-support organizations recently held an all-day national conference in Denver to learn more about the innovative oversight roles being played by a variety of sponsors. Among the sponsors featured were the Chicago School District, Massachusetts Board of Education, Central Michigan University and a specialized Public Charter School Board that has been created in Washington, D.C.

One model of particular interest to Minnesota charters is being developed by the Colorado League of Charter Schools, in partnership with

MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP			
Sponsor	Schools operating in 1998-99	Schools approved or pending before state board to open in 1999 or 2000*	Total*
<b>School Districts</b>			
Anoka-Hennepin	1	—	1
Chaska	1	—	1
Chisago Lakes	1	—	1
Duluth	1	—	1
Forest Lake	1	—	1
Faribault	—	1	1
LeSueur-Henderson	1	—	1
Minneapolis	5	2	7
Mountain Iron	1	—	1
Northfield	1	—	1
New Ulm	—	2	2
Osseo	1	—	1
Redwood Falls	1	—	1
Rockford	1	—	1
St. Paul	11	4	15
St. Cloud	1	—	1
St. Louis County	1	—	1
Stillwater	1	—	1
Winona	1	—	1
Yellow Medicine East	1	—	1
<b>Subtotal: School Districts</b>	32	9	41
<b>Postsecondary Schools</b>			
Alexandria Technical College	—	1	1
Augsburg College	—	1	1
Bethel College	—	1	1
Central Lakes College-Brainerd	2	3	5
Concordia University	1	—	1
Inver Hills Community College	1	—	1
Metro State University	—	1	1
St. Mary's University	—	1	1
<b>Subtotal: Postsecondary</b>	4	8	12
<b>State Board of Education (following appeal)</b>	1	3	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	37	20	57

\* Includes four schools already approved by state board and 16 schools with proposals now pending before the state board.  
SOURCES: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning; Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)

its state Department of Education and several school-district sponsors. The Colorado model creates an ongoing process throughout the three- to five-year term of a charter that includes both self-evaluation by the charter school and external evaluation by a team of district officials, leaders of other charters and post-secondary educators.

According to Northfield Superintendent Charles Kyte, his district is developing a similar process in partnership with the Village School of Northfield, now in its second year of operation.

Kyte freely admits his attitude toward charters has evolved, noting he recommended that his board reject a charter proposal made shortly after passage of Minnesota’s charter law in 1991. “This has been a journey for me,” Kyte said recently. “Although the board agreed with my recommendation against the first proposal, I’ve talked to a lot of people and learned a lot more about charters in

the years since.”

Now, two years after approving the Village School, Kyte and his staff are working in partnership with the charter’s leaders to design a collaborative oversight process. This process will begin with a self-assessment by the school and also include an outside evaluation. Both sets of reviews are designed to provide a balanced, objective report that Kyte can use to make a recommendation to his board on whether to renew the charter, a decision the board must make during the 1999-2000 school year.

The St. Paul School District is also developing a more formal oversight process, in consultation with its growing number of charters, according to Deputy Superintendent Cy Yusten.

“Until recently, we’ve had relatively little contact with our charters,” Yusten said. “Except for an annual report, most of the information

Continued on page 6



Charters

Continued from page 5

they generate on finances, enrollment and teacher certification goes directly to the state.”

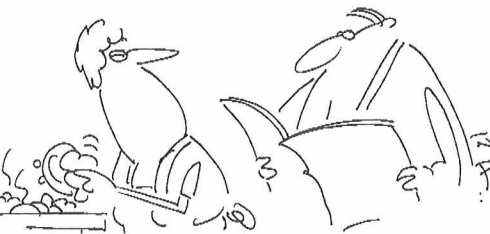
To provide more useful information for decisions on renewing charters, Yusten said the district will now be using an evaluation process developed by the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota. This process identifies eight “domains”

around which information can be collected and evaluated. These “domains” measure academic goals as well as other goals—like attendance and student and parent satisfaction levels—that can contribute to improved academic achievement.

Yusten said the St. Paul School Board has endorsed use of the new process for those charters that come up for renewal next year. “The board also asked,” Yusten said, “that we consider using this same kind of process to evaluate our district schools.”

Action needed

Experience in other states—and the positive steps being taken in St. Paul and Northfield—suggest at least three areas in which Minnesotans should work to move our state’s involvement in charter schools to a new and increasingly constructive level:



“...It says here the St. Paul school board has sponsored more charter schools than anyone else in the state...Maybe it’s just another sign of our uniqueness—just like our creative street system!”

Region

Continued from page 3

regional issues... I want the Met Council to be a leader...by working with the [International] Roundtable, the University of Minnesota,...the Department of Trade and Economic Development and others to forge a regional strategy for economic growth.

As a start, the Met Council will refocus our regional indicators so they can provide real benchmarks for measuring our progress competing as a world-class region.

There will always be tension and conflict as we try to strike the right balance between regional vision and local autonomy, but that’s our job.

To do this, the Met Council will work closely with local communities, offering incentives rather than penalties and expertise and resources rather than rigidity and mandates. But there will be consequences and accountability for communities whose local zoning and land-use policies cost the state and region money and detract from the whole.

The Met Council has a third

● **Legislative fixes.** School districts will—and should—continue to be the dominant source of sponsorship for charters. But, to ensure prompt and fair consideration of proposals, the Legislature should approve pending legislation that continues to increase the number and diversity of sponsors, eases appeals to the state board, provides explicit funding for the cost of oversight and sets deadlines for local board consideration and action.

● **Oversight and renewal process.** All district and other sponsors should be encouraged to build on what’s being done in St. Paul and Northfield, as well as in other states like Colorado, Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. Explicit accountability procedures should be in place at the time charters are granted. Sponsors should use them to provide a basis both for ongoing oversight and eventual charter renewal. Early experience elsewhere suggests that a combination of internal and external assessments and site visits may work best.

**Outreach and technical assistance for sponsors.** State, district and other sponsors should work with state charter leaders to develop materials, training and technical assistance on charter school oversight for both existing and prospective sponsors. The state Department of Children, Families and Learning and Minnesota Association of Charter Schools should provide leadership to this effort, supported by the organizations that represent school boards, school administrators and public and private colleges and universities. If done right, this kind of collaborative undertaking could ultimately help create new models for more effective oversight of not just charter schools, but traditional district public schools, as well.

*Jon Schroeder is director of Charter Friends National Network, a project of the Center for Policy Studies, in cooperation with Hamline University. Further information on the project is available online at [www.charterfriends.org](http://www.charterfriends.org).*

all its residents choices and opportunities for where and how they will live and pursue happiness.

As an example, this summer the Met Council will release a Cost of Sprawl Study that will measure the complex impacts and costs of growth and sprawl. Our goal is to frame this issue with reliable data so we can make decisions with hard facts rather than intuition and emotion.

As we pursue our mission, the Met Council will do business differently. We will be more effective, more efficient and more connected to communities...

With mutual aid, fire departments respond free of charge to assist other departments with added personnel and equipment. Mutual aid is an efficient way for fire departments to prepare for large-scale emergencies without having all the required equipment or firefighters.

Because local governments provide fire services, most fire departments finance their operations with property taxes and other city or township general-fund revenues. But, in

1997, 54 percent also received revenues from services they provided via contracts with other jurisdictions and 42 percent from fees they charged for certain services. Unlike most other local government services, over a third of fire departments finance some of their operations with charitable gambling proceeds and contributions from groups like Lions Clubs. About half the fire departments reported receiving these nontraditional

Continued on page 7

Fire

Continued from page 6

sources of revenues for capital purchases of fire engines, ladder trucks, tankers and other apparatus.

Performance comparisons

For fire departments in larger cities (primarily with populations of at least 8,000), the study found little difference on several indicators of performance among full-time, combination, and paid on-call departments. For instance, although the typical response times reported by full-time and combination departments were lower than for the larger on-call departments in 1997, high shares of all three types were at or below an eight-minute threshold for the initial attack team to arrive after receiving the call—an important rule of thumb, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Similarly, roughly equal shares of all three types of departments reported implementing recommended health and safety practices for their firefighters and providing training for the services they were expected to perform. High percentages of all departments had “incident-management systems” that assigned roles and responsibilities for responding to emergencies. Most also had preventive maintenance programs to keep their vehicles and equipment in working condition.

At the same time, full-time departments were more likely than others to provide more comprehensive services and advance planning. They were more likely to conduct long-range strategic planning based on fire risks in their communities and offer comprehensive public fire-safety education. They also contained higher percentages of structure fires to the room of the fire’s origin, an important measure

of fire-fighting effectiveness. Larger shares of both full-time and combination fire departments had comprehensive fire-code enforcement and preincident plans with information needed to prepare in advance for fires in high-risk areas.

On the other hand, the paid on-call fire departments in larger cities had far lower expenditures per capita than full-time or combination departments. Per capita expenditures in 1997 ranged from a median \$15 for on-call departments to \$45 for combination and \$76 for full-time departments.

Although the study was unable to collect sufficient data to make comparisons on all these performance measures of departments in smaller cities—which are largely staffed by volunteers—the report does include some limited data on smaller departments.

Risk assessment

The Legislative Auditor recommends that fire departments write long-range plans for meeting emergency needs in their response areas, in light of their expected personnel and financial resources. The plans should be based on local fire risks and other emergency hazards.

They should include contingency plans for the fire departments to fall back on in the event of natural disasters or other problems that incapacitate normal functions. Nearly a third of the fire departments in larger communities reported that they had written long-range strategic plans, including contingency plans, based on community risk analyses.

As an example, in the early 1990s the Gonvick Fire Department in Clearwater County completed a needs assessment for prehospital medical care in its response area. After determining that victims had to wait too long for ambulances to arrive from hospitals 20 and 30



“They’re not only crack professional firefighters, they’re also volunteers and part-timers!”

miles away, the fire department modified a used ambulance and specially trained its firefighters. Now it offers emergency medical services to accident victims and others while they await ambulances for transport to hospitals.

Cost-effectiveness

The Auditor also recommends that fire departments use resources cost-effectively. This includes taking full advantage of mutual-aid arrangements, relying on cooperative purchasing and exploring alternative service delivery. Although all but two percent of fire departments had mutual-aid arrangements, fire departments use mutual aid for purposes other than fire suppression. For instance, about 30 percent of fire departments reported that they used mutual aid for joint efforts in public education and 13 percent for cooperative purchases of equipment and supplies.

The fire departments in St. Louis Park, Hopkins and Golden Valley have an “automatic” aid arrangement. When fires occur in either Golden Valley or Hopkins during work-day hours, the St. Louis Park Fire Department—a combination department with its strongest staffing complement available during the day—is automatically dispatched. The Golden Valley and Hopkins fire departments have part-time, on-call firefighters; their greatest turnout occurs at night and on weekends. When fires occur in St. Louis Park at these times, firefighters from either Golden Valley or Hopkins automatically respond.

Other recommendations

The Legislative Auditor also recommends that fire departments:

● Focus on fire prevention, including fire-safety awareness programs and fire code enforcement. Although more than 90 percent of fire departments reported they had a public education program on fire

safety, only about two percent had a comprehensive one, with programs based on local fire risks, messages targeted to different age groups, collaborations with teachers and others and ongoing monitoring of the programs’ effectiveness.

● Prepare a competent work force and support safe operations. This includes recruiting and retaining firefighters, particularly in departments with on-call or volunteer members. It also means following standard operating guidelines for firefighters’ duties, training them specifically for the activities they will be expected to perform, equipping them with adequate protective gear and establishing and following safety protocols during responses, such as a rapid intervention plan to rescue injured members.

● Plan for responses to emergencies by preparing “preincident plans,” with information on building layouts, utility shut-offs and fuel loads in wildland areas. This also includes consistently following incident-management systems; salvage, overhaul and mop-up activities following fire suppression; and procedures for investigating fires. Further, it requires preventive maintenance to keep fire trucks, hoses, ladders and other equipment in good operating condition.

The report includes examples of Minnesota fire departments of all sizes already using these best practices. The Auditor urges fire departments to consider and adopt best practices to improve their services, recognizing that how they are implemented may vary with the type and size of fire department.

*Jody A. Hauer coordinates best practices reviews in the Legislative Auditor’s Office. Copies of Fire Services: A Best Practices Review are available at <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/pe9907.htm> or by calling 651/296-4708.*

Fire

Continued from page 1

Financing, mutual aid

Even though full-time fire departments were few in number, they served about 28 percent of Minnesota’s population in 1997. This is because full-time departments are found primarily, though not exclusively, in larger cities.

Most public fire services are provided locally, at the city and township levels of government. The Forestry Division of the Department of Natural Resources, however, is responsible for controlling and preventing wildland fires on grassland, brush, cropland or forest areas.

Nearly all Minnesota fire departments rely on mutual-aid agreements for additional resources during extraordinary emergencies.



# Metro bus ridership up; service, discounts grow, too

While everyone is busy arguing over the potential of light-rail transit to solve our traffic woes, the metro bus system has quietly been picking up the transit pace. In 1998, Metro Transit's ridership grew by 6.4 percent, to more than 66 million rides, the best ridership increase in 20 years. At a recent Citizens League breakfast, Met Council Chair Ted Mondale also noted that monthly transit ridership hit seven million in March.

Part of the ridership increases come from increased funding, which has helped expand service by about four percent, including 24-hour service on key routes and new express service from Woodbury to Minneapolis. Metro Transit has expanded the special ridership programs with employers as well. Metropass, for example, allows employers to offer deep discounts for annual bus passes to employees. After joining the program, bus ridership among employees at American Express Financial Advisors rose from 2,500 to 3,800.—Ron Wirtz.

If you want to get quickly to the heart of the issues about light-rail transit, ask somebody around the Metropolitan Council whether the express bus service on I-94 would stay or would be taken off if LRT were built in that freeway.

If the answer is that the "flyer" service would be dropped, ask how making everybody stop at every stop would improve service for riders. If the answer is that the one-stop (at Snelling Ave.) "flyer" service would remain, ask what then would be the point of the LRT.—Ted Kolderie.

**Get in line** (and bring the formula). In 1998, child care advocates convinced the Legislature to expand funding for the Basic Sliding Fee program, which subsidizes child care for nonwelfare families. The Legislature put up enough money to immediately admit families on the waiting list into the program.

But according to Diane Carr of the United Way of Minneapolis, demand for the program "has skyrocketed," but additional public funding has not followed. As a result, today there are over 7,000 families statewide waiting to get into the program. In Hennepin

County, 2,300 families receive the sliding childcare subsidy, while 2,400 are on the waiting list, which grows by 100 families a week.

Included in the Basic Sliding Fee program is a "stay-at-home" cash subsidy for a family caring for an infant less than one year old at home. A family of three can receive \$310 per month—the amount that would otherwise go to the daycare provider. But a total of just 24 parents have applied for the subsidy. The program has been given little publicity and bureaucratic rule-making can make it difficult for families to receive the cash benefit.

For example, a family must be admitted into the Basic Sliding Fee program in order to be eligible for the "stay-at-home" child care subsidy. Once admitted, families have the choice of getting reduced-fee child care or taking the cash subsidy for caring for the child at home. But the waiting list for the program is over one year in Ramsey and Hennepin counties. By the time a family is admitted to the program, the child is too old for the family to be eligible for the "stay-at-home" subsidy.—R.W.

**All aboard the tax gravy train.** In the rural-versus-urban debate, often the urban area is vilified for getting more than its share of government attention, services and resources. But on a "dollar-out, dollar-in" basis, it's the nonmetro counties that are the winners, according to an analysis by Minnesota Planning for tax years 1994 and 1995. Communities and people in most nonmetro counties received back significantly more (in the form of direct aids and grants) than they contribute in income taxes, compared with their metro counterparts.

Consider first that about 20 cents comes off the top of every tax dollar for state highways, higher education appropriations, prisons, state parks and state government. After figuring this in, 65 of 87 counties still managed to get at least \$1 back in aids and grants for every dollar of income tax contributed, and 46

counties received \$1.40 or more.

Of the nine counties that received less than 80 cents in aid for every income-tax dollar contributed by residents, six were metro counties—led by Hennepin, which received a paltry 49 cents back (Anoka received 86 cents). Maybe not surprisingly, seven of the top eight counties in per-capita income-tax contributions were metro counties, again led by Hennepin at \$1,060.—R.W.

**"We're going to take education off the property tax,"** Gov. Ventura's director of state planning, Dean Barkley, said at a Citizens League breakfast on March 30.

"What's wrong with property as a base for supporting the schools?" someone asked.

Some districts, being wealthier, can raise more and more easily, Barkley said.

But the excess levies represent maybe five percent of the property-tax revenue, the questioner said. Ninety-five percent of it is levied statewide at a uniform rate. So: What's wrong with the property tax?

"That's what the study will ask," Barkley responded: "Whether there's anything wrong with it or not."—T.K.

**I speak Midwestern.** According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Hennepin County ranked

second nationally in the number of people employed in the catalog and mail-order business in 1996 (behind Franklin County, Ohio). Statewide, almost 14,000 were employed in the industry, while the next closest neighbor was Wisconsin, at about 6,000.

According to one state source, companies are setting up phone-order shops in the state for a couple of reasons. First, the state is located in the geographic middle (from a time-zone standpoint), which helps when doing business with both coasts. The second attraction comes under the "trained workforce" category: apparently, businesses are drawn to the lack of accent (or, at least, the understandability) of "Minnesota English," which makes sales transactions easier for the buyer.—R.W.

**In many cities** people accept at face value the assertion that of course the school system is operated in the interests of the students. Milwaukee, by contrast, learned the hard way to be more questioning about the interests of students and the interests of adults.

The recent campaign for control of the board of education was fought everybody understood, on the question that Howard Fuller, the former superintendent has been pressing: "Who is this system for?"

On April 6, Fuller's reform coalition won all five seats up for election. Look for the new Milwaukee board now to move aggressively to charter schools and to make existing schools more charter-like.—T.K.

*"Take Note" contributors this month include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members.*

## Take Note

*Catch up on these policy tidbits while riding.  
Not recommended while driving.*

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708 S. Third St.  
Minneapolis, MN 55415

PERIODICALS  
POSTAGE PAID  
AT MINNEAPOLIS  
MINNESOTA



# Citizens League Matters

April 20, 1999

News for Citizens League Members

## Welcome

### New and returning members

Kelly Altmeyer  
Julie Bunn  
Deborah Burke  
Anita Duckor  
David Ewald  
Tina Flint Smith  
Robert J. Gumnit  
Melissa Hortman  
Diana Huseth  
Peggy Ingison  
Laura Jaeger  
JoAnne Johnson  
Nikki Newman  
Ardis M. Niemann Noonan  
Betsy O'Berry  
Kathy Quandt  
Janet Robert  
Nancy Schouweiler  
Christopher Shaheen  
Amy R. Simonson

## CITIZENS LEAGUE

708 South 3rd St. Suite 500  
Minneapolis, MN 55415  
612-338-0791 Fax 612-337-5919  
info@citizensleague.net  
www.citizensleague.net

*The Citizens League promotes the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption.*

The Citizens League is an open membership organization. Suggested dues for membership are \$50 for individuals and \$75 for families. Please call 612-338-0791 for more information about membership.

## League annual meeting features Tim Penny

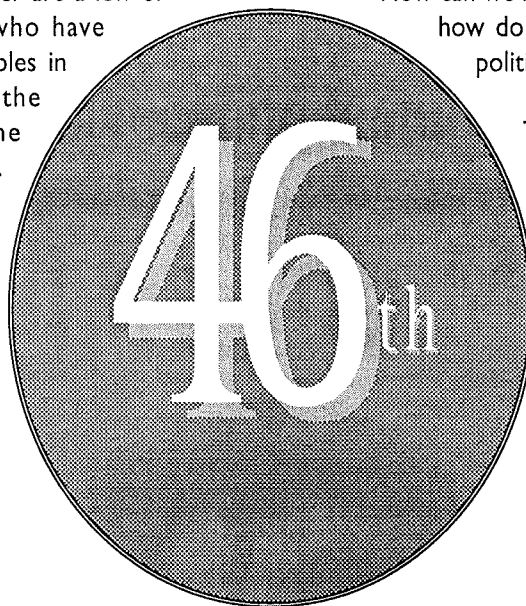
Every year the Citizens League sponsors a lot of policy meetings on taxes, education, transportation, etc. But once a year we like to take a step back and explore larger trends in public life. Robert Putnam, Alan Erhenhalt, Haynes Johnson and David Broder are a few of the national figures who have joined other local notables in helping us sort out the state of things at the League's annual meeting.

This year, it's hard to talk about what's happening in public life without touching on the Ventura factor. While many think the November election has been thoroughly analyzed and debated by now—what more can be said?—it's a topic so large that we've asked noted Minnesota political analyst Tim Penny to talk about its implications for the state and the League.

Minnesotans have historically exhibited an independent streak. While that might partially explain what happened last November there are some stronger undercurrents that Tim Penny will put into perspec-

tive. For instance: What are the emerging policy opportunities that result from the changed political landscape and our ongoing economic prosperity? What are the implications for youth involvement in politics and public life?

How can we keep them engaged? And how do we restore trust in the political process?



## ANNUAL MEETING

*featuring*

**Tim Penny**

**Tuesday, May 4, 1999**

**4:30 - 7:00 p.m.**

**Lutheran Brotherhood Auditorium  
625 Fourth Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55402**

The evening will begin with refreshments and socializing in the lobby of the Lutheran Brotherhood building. Current League president George Latimer will begin the formalities at 5:15 p.m. by reviewing the League's accomplishments during the last year. Executive Director Lyle Wray will follow with a brief overview of the League's current work. Then it's on to Tim Penny. After his presentation, League members are invited to join in a discussion, led by George Latimer, of what Penny's comments mean for the League and its future.

For reservations or information, please contact the League at 612-338-0791.

## Cyber Transit: The Potential of Telecommuting

When someone says they telecommute, most people picture someone working at home via computer, and think "oh, what a great benefit." And while telecommuting does include telework, it is more than that. It is also tele-medicine, tele-justice, e-commerce, and distance learning. It is using telecommunications to provide access to employment, shopping and services, while eliminating the physical trip.

This series is designed to shift thinking away from telecommuting as a great employment benefit for a lucky few, toward a vision of telecommuting as a potential solution to several important public problems, such as the labor shortage and road congestion. Our speakers will examine how telecommuting can be used to address these issues and what steps need to be taken in order to expand the use of telecommuting in Minnesota.

**Tuesday, May 4, 1999**

**Jane Anderson**

*Director, Midwest Institute for Telecommuting Education*

**Tuesday, May 11, 1999**

**Darryl Anderson**

*Telework Coordinator, Minn. Dept. of Transportation*

**Tuesday, May 18, 1999**

**John Sanger**

*Director, Tele-Commuter Resources*

Ms. Anderson will discuss how employers can use telecommuting to address the region's labor shortage. Darryl Anderson will outline telecommuting's positive impact on the state's transportation system. Mr. Sanger will suggest steps that must be taken in order for Minnesota to benefit from increased telecommuting.

**All meetings will run from 7:30 - 8:30 a.m. at the Holiday Inn Metrodome, 1500 Washington Ave. S., Minneapolis.** Cost is \$10 for Citizens League members, \$15 for non-members and includes a continental breakfast. Registrations can be made by calling (612)338-0791 or emailing [info@citizensleague.net](mailto:info@citizensleague.net).

## Public affairs *news and information*

### Humphrey Institute introduces master's degree program for professionals

Aimed at working professionals who want to broaden their knowledge of public affairs and leadership, the Humphrey Institute's executive master of public affairs degree is for people who have at least 10 years of career service.

Participants will develop their own programs based on areas in which they need skills and knowledge to either further their career or to switch careers. Classes will be offered evenings; part-time students should be able to finish in two years. For more information contact Sharon Anderson at 612-625-8367 or [sanderson@hhh.umn.edu](mailto:sanderson@hhh.umn.edu).

### Stakeholder dialogue—Civility in the marketplace: Problems and solutions

Stephen Carter, author and Yale law professor, is the featured speaker at the University of St. Thomas' ninth annual stakeholder dialogue on Tuesday, April 27 from 7:15 to 9:15 p.m.. Mr. Carter will talk about the disintegration of civility and adverse affect of this trend on society. Rev. Dennis Dease, President of St. Thomas and B. Kristine Johnson, Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer of Medtronic, Inc. will provide reactions to Mr. Carter. The program is free and open to the public but reservations are requested. For more information call 651-962-4211.

### Media Matters to the Twin Cities...But Why?

The *Twin Cities Project on the Media and the Public* will host a forum on the media's effect

on how we think of our region. Steven Brill, founder of *Brill's Content* will be the featured speaker. The forum, co-sponsored by the Citizens League, will be Monday, May 10 from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. at the Conference Center on the 4th level of the Mall of America. The meeting is free and open to the public. To register or for more information contact 612-371-9391.

### How to make a difference: a citizen's guide to state government

The 1999 citizen lobbyist handbook from the **League of Women Voters of Minnesota** is a must for those who want to be effective lobbyists. The spiral bound handbook is full of practical advice on how to write effective letters to legislators, protocol for testifying before a committee and tips on lobbying in person. Cost is \$10. Order by calling 651-224-5445 or go to their website at: <http://tcfreenet.org/ip/pol/lwvmmn>

### Panel to develop community approach to health-care resource issues

Medical Alley is currently seeking nominations for an expert panel that will create a credible process that guides the adoption and use of healthcare procedures and products to determine appropriate care. The panel, to be comprised of 15-25 people representing stakeholder groups from consumers to civic groups to healthcare professionals, will examine the efficacy of various medical services and products. For more information or to make recommendations, please call Tom Meskan at 612-542-3077.