State should move focus of education policy from school districts to schools

by Ted Kolderie

Schools. Think schools when you think about education issues in the '97 legislative session.

Schools are where the kids are. Schools are where the teachers are. Schools are where the parents mainly relate to. If learning happens, it’s in the schools. Schools tend to be about kids.

Districts are where the big salaries are. Where the professional careers—and the political careers—are. Districts are where the politics and the bureaucracy, governors and legislators, the contracts get awarded, and where the pay gets set. Districts are where people go to fight about ideology and power and control.

Until fairly recently policy focused mainly on districts. The Constitution may talk about the state providing “public schools,” but over the years the reality came to be The District. The district is the legal entity; schools, owned by the district, have no legal existence. So districts are assured their existence, their students and their revenues, whether or not the students learn.

Over the years the state tried a variety of things. Money. Mandates. Removing mandates (waivers). Enabling authority. Training. Research, showing “good practice.” But results have been small. Districts are assured their existence, their students and their revenues, whether or not the students learn.

Open spaces play an important role in the ecological health of our urban areas. They serve to protect the integrity of natural systems and mitigate the effects of human activity associated with urban areas. Open spaces address these issues by allowing water to flow and percolate, filtering pollutants and lessening runoff intensity. They purify the air of pollutants and noise and provide the habitat requirements of animals and plants. Equally important, they provide the opportunity for spiritual rejuvenation for people.

Benton County courts facility decision raises issues of government efficiency

by Dana Schroeder

A decision over whether and where to build a new court services building in central Minnesota’s Benton County raises questions about the best way to deliver services in a growing area saddled with government borders and structures created a century ago. The county board was to hold a meeting Jan. 13 to get public input on plans to build a $2.5 million courts facility in the county seat. The board is likely to make a decision on the facility either at that meeting or later in January.

Benton County, which, along with Stearns and Sherburne Counties, contains part of the city of St. Cloud, had a 1995 population of 33,362, up nearly 11 percent from 1990. Foley, located near the middle of the county, had a 1995 population of 2,011, up eight percent from 1990. But the county’s population is heavily concentrated 15 miles west of Foley—in Sauk Rapids, east St. Cloud, Sartell and along U.S. Highway 10 to Rice. Between 1990 and 1995, Sauk Rapids grew by 18 percent, to a population of 9,216, and is expected to top 10,000 by the year 2000.

The controversy over the courts building harks back to Benton County’s decision about four years ago to build a new jail in Foley. Although it supported the decision editorially at the time, a Dec. 1, 1996, editorial in the St. Cloud Times said in hindsight the jail decision was a mistake, shaped by tradition.

In our rush to develop cities and with our incomplete understanding of how all these natural systems work, we construct barriers that disrupt the cycles of these natural systems. Our pavement prevents the rain from infiltrating the ground; instead it runs into our streams, eroding the banks along the way, causing or compounding floods.

Land use and water quality are very closely tied together. Urbanization can, on a large scale, alter the natural watershed system, which can...
Public leadership must come from three key sectors

As Minnesota goes through major social and economic transitions, we need public leadership to meet new challenges. Strong public leadership does not necessarily imply stronger government. In fact, we may want less of it in some areas. We need to talk about public leadership as leadership for the general public good that can come from all three key sectors: government, business and the civic, or nonprofit, sector.

Each of these three sectors must contribute, working, on and solving public problems. But there are strong forces of erosion in each of these sectors that may work to keep the ability to lead in the public domain.

Government

The public sector has been weakened by financial constraints, which may worsen at “higher” levels of government. There is a perception that many personal, familial and financial sacrifices have been made to elected officials, and that those people need to be involved in their own business, focusing on other priorities. There is a perception that there are fewer good jobs, that the cost of living has increased and that the cost of providing services has escalated. There is a strong perception that there is a mismatch between the need for services and the funds that are available from the government. The government sector further perceives that there are “more people wanting to be on the fence and less on the bus” and that there are fewer votes for good government. The business sector perceives that there are fewer opportunities for young people in nonprofit or public service positions.

Business

A central economic question is whether the leadership in business and the nonprofit sector can deal with the real concerns about jobs in this state. The two most important economic questions are: “What is the value of the Minnesota economy?” and “What is the nature of the work that needs to be done?” The second question is particularly important in this state. We need new jobs and new ways of doing business to meet the real concerns about jobs in this state.

The Met Council is trying to bring about change in the business community. The Met Council is trying to bring about change in the business community. The Met Council is trying to bring about change in the business community.

Nonprofit sector

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Open space
Continued from page 1
Reed, Carlson and Sen. Ember 1997, revealed: "school boards and superintendents need to be in the policy business...Principals and teachers can run the schools." In May '95, when Sen. Gene Mientkewicz was up for re-election, they pleaded with legislators to not make it real: "We’re not ready.

There is a powerful desire to hold onto central control. "If we let other people make decisions, some of those decisions will be wrong, and how can we permit that?" an superintendent asked at a meeting on site management, recently. Others interpret the appointment as trying to put public education in the hands of 'the system' that is supposed to be in charge of educating students, and that is not always the case. It is a desire to maintain control, to maintain the traditional system of education, to maintain the status quo.

If public education is to survive, boards and superintendents need to be in the policy business, not in the business of running schools. The goal is to establish a school system that is truly democratic, that is truly accountable to the people who it serves, not to the politicians who control the purse strings. This is a challenge that must be faced by all educators, not just those in Minnesota, but across the country.

The future of public education in Minnesota is uncertain, but it is clear that the traditional system is in need of reform. The challenge is to create a system that is truly democratic, that is truly accountable to the people who it serves, and that is capable of meeting the needs of all students.
Metro Council growth plan is "solid middle ground"

Continued from page 6

The city council voted to accept the 1992 Metro Council growth plan at its first meeting of the year. The plan is a document that was developed over the past several years by a committee of experts from various fields. The council's decision is seen as a step forward in the city's efforts to manage growth and plan for the future.

"The Council may have, today, all the tools it really needs with which to partner in growing our community," the city manager said. "We need to make the most of the opportunities that are available to us."

Benton Co.

Continued from page 6

The county has a new jail building that is currently under construction. The building is expected to be completed in the next few months.

A special feature of the new jail is the inclusion of a mental health unit, which will provide care for inmates with mental health issues. The unit is designed to provide a safe and secure environment for inmates and staff.

The county has also announced plans to expand its jail facilities in the future, in order to accommodate increased inmate populations. The expansion is expected to begin within the next year.

The county is also working on a comprehensive plan to address issues related to county government and county services. The plan includes recommendations for improvements in areas such as technology, communication, and management.

"We believe that it is important for us to work together to ensure that our county government is efficient and effective," the county manager said. "By doing so, we can ensure that we are serving our constituents in the best possible way."
Minnesota melting pot? In 1995, the state's 0.93 growth rate was slightly higher than the national average of 0.91. Neighboring states saw considerably slower growth levels, including Wisconsin (0.74 percent), Iowa (0.31 percent), South Dakota (0.4 percent) and North Dakota (0.32 percent). In fact, since 1990, Minnesota's cumulative growth rate of 6.45 percent is the strongest of any Northeastern or Midwestern state.

Admittedly, much of this growth is due to a healthy birth rate. However, Minnesota Planning noted that for the first time since early this century, migration has contributed significantly and steadily to the state's population—about 100,000 people in all since 1990, one-third of them from other countries. —Ron Wirtz.

Recent charges by Minneapolis officials of "raiding" in Lawson Software's apparent decision to move from Minneapolis to St. Paul echo debates that have taken place across the country about "smokestack chasing" among states. In an article in the Nov. 1996 issue of Governing, Charles Mahtesian commented, "Governors really do hate smokestack chasing. The only trouble is, they can't stop doing it."

Ditto, apparently, for mayors: Minneapolis Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton reportedly told Lawson that Minneapolis could improve on any financial incentives offered by St. Paul.

What to do to stop the border wars? Addressing the competition among states, a report two years ago by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis urged Congress to exercise its regulatory authority over interstate commerce to end the businesses-relying on economies of scale in adjacent states. In May the Republican-controlled Ohio Senate called on Congress to eliminate federally funded programs currently used to lure businesses from other states. And Maryland recently enacted a job-creation tax credit bill but directed the governor to negotiate an agreement with his counterparts in surrounding states that would kill the subsidy by July 1998.

On the local level? Perhaps Mahtesian's suggestion (actually aimed at states, but applicable to municipalities) for mandating full public disclosure of development incentives and tax expenditures might stir up enough public interest to put some brakes on the nab-a-business competition. —Dana Schroeder.

With the changes in the welfare law, requiring work, some hard thinking is under way about getting central-city residents access to jobs. But it's tough to get lots of new jobs into the city. And tough to get lots of low-income housing in the suburbs. "An insoluble problem," somebody concluded in a meeting in Saint Paul recently.

Nonsense. Central-city investment and suburban low-income housing may (or may not) be "insoluble problems." But setting up a fleet of vehicles to get central-city residents out to jobs in the suburbs is no way to address the problem. —Ted Kolderie.

The number of occupations that require practitioners to be licensed jumped dramatically in Minnesota between 1968 and 1990, according to a new study by Humphrey Institute Professor Morris Kleiner and student Mitchell Gordon (CURA Reporter, Dec. 1996). But despite practitioners' claims that licensing protects consumers and improves the quality of services, the main beneficiaries of such regulations are the practitioners themselves, Kleiner and Gordon say.

Their review of the national research discovered that states with rigid occupational licensing requirements are also the most likely to have higher prices for the licensed services. Not surprisingly, practitioners in these states had incomes that were 10 to 20 percent higher than in less-regulated states.

The national research shows no net benefit to consumers, though. While the quality of service might improve—as measured in, say, a visit to an optometrist's office—higher prices prompt consumers to use less of the service, such as by putting off that eye exam for a year. Kleiner and Gordon speculate that growth in occupational licensing occurs because practitioners have much to gain by licensing, so they're motivated to organize and lobby for such regulations. Meanwhile, the cost to any individual consumer is small enough that it's not likely to be noticed.

Kleiner's colleague John Brandt once referred to this process as "fishing out benefits to the organized grateful, while spreading the costs around among the oblivious." —Janet Dudrow.

A widening hole in the doughnut: While decaying conditions in Minneapolis and St. Paul grab most of the headlines, it appears that some first-ring suburbs are on the same crash course. A recent report by the Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development shows that numerous measures of community health have declined in first-ring suburbs.

For instance, since 1970, first-ring suburbs in Hennepin County have lost about 35,000 people. Meanwhile, from 1980 to 1990 poverty increased (from 3.8 to 5.1 percent), and the percentage of students receiving free and reduced school lunch almost doubled. The real kicker, however, might be that median household income has dropped in real terms by more than six percent since 1980 and residential property values have dropped almost four percent in the last 10 years. —R.W.

For the first time in recent memory, the Minnesota Chamber has weighed in on the K-12 education debate, adding an education reinitiative to its 1997 legislative agenda consistent with Gov. Arne Carlson's proposals. It calls for uniform guidelines for statewide testing, reforming teacher certification requirements, implementing merit pay for teachers and schools, expanding the role of charter schools, expanding public school choice, providing funds directly to K-12 students to enable them to attend the public or private school of their choice and expanding school-to-work opportunities. —D.S.

Many Minnesota policy wonks have become familiar over the years with the concept of "pupil units" used to compute state education aid. Not to be outdone, the state Pollution Control Agency, in a new draft pollution-elimination policy, has created a weighting system for animals, presumably reflecting differences in various animals'... ahem... waste production: one steer equals one "animal unit;" one finishing hog, 0.4; one dairy cow, 1.4.

We could only imagine the emm... cal research the unfortunate policy analyst had to conduct in order to whip up those weighting factors. We also couldn't help noticing how eerily similar the figures were to the pupil-weighting factors in the school-aid formula: each kindergartner is 0.53 pupil units, each first through sixth grader is 1.06 and each seventh through 12th grader is 1.3. —J.D.

Contributors to "Take Note" include Citizens League and Minnesota Journal staff members.
Welcome New Members

Duane Arndt
Sara Barrow
Sharon Sayles Belton
Cindy Bigger
Robert T. Bruton
Paula Decosse
Walt Fehst
Ted Ferrara
David Foster
Matthew J. Grabowski
Tom Henderson
Margaret Hutcheson
Thomas W. Junnila
Karen Knutson
Gary Laurent
Melissa Loughlin
Brian P. Matakis
Bruce A. Peterson
Stephen Rathke
Sarah Stoesz
David Strand
Steve Suckow
Josh C. Zepnick
Holly Ziemer

Thank you recruiters:

Mike Christenson, Jim Dorsey, Dave Hutcheson.

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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. Suggested dues for membership are $50 for individuals and $75 for families. For more information, please call 338-0791.

Building Livable Communities Committee tops off

What makes a community a home? A Citizens League study committee has painted a picture of a "livable city" and outlined principles to help guide the growing Twin Cities region toward that ideal.

The Building Livable Communities committee, co-chaired by Don Fraser and Sally Evert, finished its report on January 2 after 51 meetings and 15 months of work. The League's Board of Directors will discuss the report on January 15.

The Twin Cities metropolitan region has grown rapidly—both in population and size—since 1970. But there is even more explosive growth ahead. According to the Metropolitan Council, the seven-county region will add 330,000 households by the year 2020. More new households will be added in the next 25 years than were added in the last 25.

The League Board of Directors asked the study committee to identify the public policies behind current development patterns, and to look at how urban, suburban and exurban communities have been affected. The committee debated whether the policies that have shaped the Twin Cities' urban landscape should continue. And if not, what policy changes are needed to guide future growth of the metropolitan area.

During the final months of deliberations, the committee's findings and conclusions were shared with a variety of individuals and organizations. The League asked for reactions to the committee's work, and invited ideas about how to solve some of the problems relating to urban growth.

Approximately 36 people representing a broad cross-section of organizations participated in five outreach Speak Ups! Several organizations helped the League convene these Speak Ups! (Acknowledgement on this list does not imply the endorsement of the final report or its recommendations.):

Builders Association of the Twin Cities
Minneapolis Consortium of Non-Profit Developers
Habitat for Humanity
Norwest Bank
People of Phillips

The Citizens League also conducted four Speak Ups! in June 1996 to give members a chance to critique the committee's findings and conclusions.

Approximately 45 Citizens League members participated in these meetings. The League gratefully thanks the hosts and moderators for facilitating these discussions with Citizens League members:

Hosts
Kent Eklund
Scheff Lang
John Richter
Ann C. Smith

Moderators
Sally Evert
Dan Hunt
Linda Ewen
Fred Hoisington

In addition to co-chairs Sally Evert and Don Fraser, active members of the committee included:

John Adams
Russ Adams
Alan Anderson
Patrick Boylan
Scott Carlson
Walter Carpenter
Erv Chorn
Pat Cragoe
Bob de la Vega
Dan Dobbert
Ken Dols
Linda Ewen
Hugh Faville
Sandy Hale
Michael Hohmann
Fred Hoisington
Dan Hunt
Dave Hutcheson
Jim Jorgenson
Gary Joselyn
Margaret Kirkpatrick
John Knutson
Paul Kuettel
A. Scheffer Lang
Adeel Lari
Raeder Larson
Charles Lutz
Dick Little
Mark Lystig
Sue Matthews
MaryAnn McCoy
Thomas Moore
Jim Myott
Bruce Nawrocki

Non-Profit Developers
Habitat for Humanity
Norwest Bank
People of Phillips
Mind-Openers focus on prospects for property tax reform

A projected surplus, a non-election year, pledges of less partisan bickering, a Governor who is not running for re-election—to many observers these conditions describe an ideal climate for a major overhaul of the state's property tax system.

Yet despite what appears to be a favorable climate, prospects for reform seem to be running into legislative storm clouds. Part of the discouraging word comes from wide disagreement about what "reform" means.

The Mind-Opener series will look at the meaning of reform and consider the prospects for change. The three breakfast meetings will look at various interpretations of reform. The series will conclude with a special afternoon panel discussion, moderated by George Latimer, which features major legislative players discussing the opportunities for reform and the political obstacles that must be overcome.

Please note the different times and days for this series. Cost for members is $10 and $15 for non-members. All the meetings are at the University Club, 420 Summit Avenue, St. Paul. To register or for more information, please call 338-0791.

Resource speakers impart their knowledge to study committee

Any successful Citizens League study committee depends on the cooperation of those people in the community who have special expertise on a subject. In fact, one of the great attractions of the League study committee process for many of the participants is the graduate school quality of the "instruction" provided by resource guests. The Building Livable Communities Committee was the recipient of the wisdom of 45 metropolitan leaders. Resource speakers were:

John Adams: professor of geography, planning and public affairs, University of Minnesota.
Michael Anderson: executive director, Metropolitan Interfaith Coalition for Affordable Housing.
Joanne Barron: senior planner, Metropolitan Council and director of the Livable Communities Demonstration Account.
Clint Blais: president/partner, Halverson and Blais Group.
Helen Boyer: director, Environmental Services Division, Metropolitan Council.
Karen Christofferson: director of municipal affairs, Builders Association of the Twin Cities.
Dan Comejo: development director, City of Robbinsdale.
Pat Dalton: legislative analyst, House Research.
Jon Elam: administrator, City of Maple Grove.
Paul Farmer: director of planning, City of Minneapolis.
Terry Forbord: vice president of land development, Lundgren Bros. Construction.
Hal Fleshey: policy analyst, Metropolitan Council and director of Tax Base Renatilization Program.
Hans Hagen: president, Hans Hagen Homes.
Beth Halvorson: executive director, Regional Public Policy, U.S. West.
James Hellter: executive director, Washington County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.
Dan Herbst: president and owner, Penton Land Company.
Jim Hetland: inaugural chair, Metropolitan Council, former Citizens League president.
Steve Hinz: legislative analyst, House Research.
Carl Holmstrom: former superintendent, St. Louis Park Schools; board member for the Children First Initiative.
Curt Johnson: chair, Metropolitan Council.
Sharon Johnson: executive director, Community Action for Suburban Hennepin.
Tene Jones: director, Minneapolis Way To Grow.
Larry Laukka: president and owner, Laukka-Jarvis Inc.
Gary Laurent: former mayor, City of Shakopee; president, Laurent Builders, Inc.
John Kari: senior planner, Metropolitan Council.
David Long: senior planner, Metropolitan Council; director of Local Housing Incentives Program.
Judith Martin: professor of geography, University of Minnesota.
Jeanne Massey: director, South Hennepin Regional Planning Agency.
Bob Mazanec: planning analyst, Metropolitan Council.
Matthew McMurtry: senior research analyst, Minnesota Office of the State Demographer.
Senator Ted Mondale: DFL-St. Louis Park.
William Morris: program director, Design Center for American Urban Landscape, University of Minnesota.
Michael Munson: senior planner, Metropolitan Council.
Carl Ohm: planning analyst, Metropolitan Council.
Matthew Ramadan: executive director, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council.
Rip Rapsop: senior fellow, Design Center for American Urban Landscape, University of Minnesota; project director for the Community Connections Project.
Peggy Reichert: director of community development, City of Eagan.
Hazel Reinhardt: president, Hazel Reinhardt Consulting; founder of the Minnesota Office of the State Demographer.
Steve Schachtman: president, Steven Scott Management.
John Shardlow: president, Dahlgren Shardlow and Ulban.
Bruce Steuernagell: research director, JOBS NOW Coalition.
Todd Stutz: president, Minnesota Division of Rottlund Homes.
Doug Tenpas: former mayor, City of Eden Prairie; partner, Tetrad Group.
Lyle Wray: executive director, Citizens League.

Tuesday, January 21
7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

Dan Salomone, executive director, Minnesota Taxpayers Association, will provide an overview of the property tax system and past reform efforts.

Thursday, January 23
7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

Bill Blazar, senior vice president, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, will discuss the need for tax reform and a Chamber proposal.

Tuesday, January 28
7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

Mel Duncan, executive director, Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action, will outline certain principles that should be embodied in property tax reform.

Tuesday, February 4
5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Sen. William Belanger, Jr. (Republican - Bloomington)
Sen. Steve Novak (DFL - New Brighton)
Rep. Bill Macklin (Republican - Lakeville)
Rep. Dee Long (DFL - Minneapolis)

Congratulations, Call

League Board member Cal Clark received the Distinguished Service Award from Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska. In accepting the honor, Clark challenged Chadron students with Winston Churchill's advice, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." His words ring especially true as we move towards an endowment drive, considering what he preaches.

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