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Details to achieve Health Right goals still to be set

The magic words were "cost containment." In 1992, after five years of debating how to expand access to health care in the state, Minnesota legislators began talking about cost-containment goals in the same breath. By the end of the session, they passed the Health Right bill with Governor Arnold Carlson's approval.

Health Right has been widely reported as landmark, comprehensive legislation. It launches numerous programs, task forces, studies, and rural health initia-

tives. It limits certain underwriting practices by health insurers and includes a modest amount of medical malpractice reform. However, a review of the bill shows that while it is ambitious in *what* it seeks to achieve, most of the details on *how* to do so remain to be worked out, a few steps at a time.

The debates leading to Health Right began six years ago. In 1987, the Legislature created the

by Allan Baumgarten

Children's Health Plan (CHP), a small-scale, targeted program of subsidized insurance that now serves about 27,000 children from low-income families. CHP is one of several reasons why the percentage of people with health insurance in Minnesota is among the highest in all states; about 93 percent of people under 65 have coverage here.

In 1989, the Legislature rejected a proposal for a universal access

health plan, but created the Minnesota Health Care Access Commission to study how to improve access. The Legislature enacted a bill in 1991 that incorporated many of the commission's recommendations, which Governor Carlson vetoed.

Later that year, the HMO Council, the Insurance Federation of Minnesota, and the Carlson administration offered new legislative proposals. The Carlson pro-

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St. Cloud-area group starts Citizens League

by Susan Halena

Leigh Lenzmeier was watching a St. Cloud-area citizen planning group called Community 2000 gradually lose momentum in early 1991, and he dreaded its demise. Since it had started in late 1988, he had seen citizens carefully outline issues and needs in one of the fastest-growing areas of Minnesota. As Community 2000 president, he could let the core group of seven or eight drop its work, or he could hope to breathe new life into the organization.

New life has come, and its name is the Community 2000/Citizens League of Central Minnesota.

Since an organizational meeting in late March, paid individual memberships have grown to 32, and Lenzmeier expects it to double by the end of the year. The group has bylaws, committees, and officers. Soon it will tackle a budget, devise a one-year plan, apply for foundation grants and launch recruitment efforts—despite the distractions of summer.

"I'm happy that we were able to turn things around," said Lenzmeier, who replaced his role as Community 2000 president with the job of Citizens League vice-

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Turn op-ed pages into public affairs 'newsletter'

by Ted Kolderie and Dave Nimmer

In the debate the press is having with itself and with others about how to cover public affairs—as issues or as personalities, as ideas or as entertainment—the old tradition seems to be giving way fast.

"If It's Not Sex, Drugs or Rock 'n' Roll, It's Not News" was the headline on John Kostouros' column in the May *Law & Politics*, taking off from Jon Katz' piece in *Rolling Stone*. Television drives the agenda now, he says. And TV is not about ideas.

"Complicated news edged out of media by simple stories" was the

head on a *Pioneer Press* article out of its Washington bureau. Complex issues are driven out by the trend toward "high concept" stories. "That's a Hollywood term to describe an idea so simple it can be pitched in a few sentences and promoted in 15 seconds," Marc Gunther wrote. Congressmen bouncing checks is high concept; the savings and loan scandal is not. The Rodney King case is high concept; why cities can't manage their police is not.

Newspapers are trying to hold readership in their effort to com-

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Find electronic technology's niche in public dialogue

It's well known that citizens are increasingly disengaged from formal institutions such as political parties. Yet, as the Kettering Foundation and others have noted, citizens are hungry for meaningful dialogue around important issues that will somehow make a difference. This context suggests several questions: what is the appropriate place of emerging electronic technology—beyond television and radio—in the process of public dialogue on important issues of substance? What are the appropriate ways to engage citizens in public policy dialogue and policy innovation in the 1990s?

Technology and the chemistry of dialogue. For the past 20 years many have hoped that electronic media—from interactive television, satellite conferences, computer systems, to 900-number telephone polls—would reinvigorate citizen engagement in public dialogue. There is currently a great deal of talk about electronic town-hall meetings as part of the process of communicating with the public about important issues. The governor of Oregon recently held television conferences with many thousands of citizens around that state. At a recent local "We the People" meeting several hundred people participated in an evening of instant electronic voting on a variety of issues, followed by a live television conference with presidential candidates. Computer software is available to help refine policy options and to map complex problems. Many organizations nationally hold on-line electronic

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Viewpoint

by Lyle Wray

conferences on selected topics that can go on for weeks or months, involving participants from around the country and the globe. There is every indication, too, that telecommunication and networking technology will continue to develop rapidly in the future.

For all the electronic tools, many feel that well-grounded opinions are formed most effectively in face-to-face dialogue where there is enough time to go well beyond "sound bites" to examine and struggle with a variety of perspectives to arrive at approaches to social challenges. We need to learn more, but it seems that electronic technology can best be used to extend these dialogues or to communicate the results of them, but not to substitute for them.

While technology may play a role in helping to organize face-to-face dialogues of citizens on important issues, provide background information for meetings, communicate the results of meetings, and perhaps more effectively mediate larger public meetings, there will be a growing need to have places at which citizens can come together and struggle through complex issues in a public dialogue. We need to identify the right niche for electronic technology to sup-

port, but not supplant, the important chemistry of face-to-face public dialogue.

Information rich and poor. The gulf between "information-rich" and "information-poor" citizens is in danger of widening. Private for-profit information services are expanding in many areas of activity. Those who have access to computer systems and the funds to pay for information can enjoy considerably more convenient and timely access to information that meets their needs and be linked through electronic mail to a vast network of individuals and organizations. The information gap between those who have electronic mail and on-line system access and those who do not is likely to widen dramatically in the coming decade.

Some would point to an expanded future role for the public library system as an information gateway. As information-age institutions, public libraries could work to assure equitable information access for making personal decisions. Libraries could also make available facilities for citizens to participate in the formation of public decisions, perhaps through technologically sophisticated community meeting rooms.

Linking face-to-face public dialogue with social change. How can

we link the chemistry of face-to-face dialogue on important public policy questions with broader change strategies affecting our social institutions? It is possible to reach out to engage citizens around public issues in face-to-face dialogue issues and engage and re-engage folks around issues. The study circle model in Sweden, for example, has almost a quarter of the adult population involved. Groups may use a variety of tools to support dialogue: issue kits of briefing materials and instructions, on-line computer conferences, electronic bulletin boards, and electronically mediated meetings.

It seems likely, though, that citizens will stay involved over the long term only if the public policy conversations result in some noticeable difference. One strategy might be to link face-to-face meetings with efforts to synthesize results of smaller meetings, hold larger meetings to move the consideration of an issue forward, and mount an effective implementation effort for innovative public policy ideas at the legislative or other arena.

As we look to the future for engaging citizens in public questions, maintaining and expanding forums for public dialogue and determining the niche of emerging electronic technologies will be significant challenges.

Lyle Wray is executive director of the Citizens League.

Study OKs medical waste treatments

From Non-Burn Technologies for the Treatment of Infectious and Pathological Waste and Siting Considerations, *Minnesota Healthcare Partners, Inc., May 1992.*

In 1989, the Council of Hospital Corporations commissioned a study to explore what options existed for hospitals in managing their medical waste...Original plans called for area hospitals to shut down their outdated incinerators and to underwrite the construction of one larger medical waste incinerator...Early attempts to site the incinerator...met considerable opposition...Minnesota Healthcare Partners (MHP) hospitals formally agreed to

sponsor a first-of-its-kind feasibility study of non-burn technologies and siting...

The Study Group agreed that steam decontamination and microwaving were acceptable technologies for MHP to site and that microwaving could have an advantage since it did not change the physical properties of the plastic in the residue, thereby allowing for better recycling. Participants indicated that more data was needed on the impact of steam decontamination on plastics recycling. (Infectious wastes require separate handling.)

Assuming that the MHP hospitals followed the Study's recommen-

dation in selecting one of the two acceptable non-burn treatment alternatives, the Study Group also agreed that there would be no need for the MHP hospitals to complete either an environmental assessment worksheet or an environmental impact statement if either technology is sited consistently with the siting criteria approved by the Study Group.

All of the non-burn alternatives studied produced a decontaminated and shredded residue...Ultimately, the Study Group did not reach a consensus on a recommended method for the disposal for the decontaminated and shredded residue...

Editors oppose four-year 'U' campus at Crookston

On Balance

"Without criticism and reliable and intelligent reporting, the government cannot govern."
—W. Lippman

Bemidji Pioneer said (May 6) expanding the University of Minnesota's Crookston campus to a four-year institution would "upset the delicate balance of higher education in institutions in northwest Minnesota." **Minneapolis Star Tribune** said (June 1) the Crookston proposal "doesn't make sense" and urged regents to reject the plan. **St. Cloud Times** called (May 14) the plan a "risky experiment" and said the state cannot afford substantial increases in funding for higher education.

Duluth News-Tribune said (June 3) Minnesota Auditor Mark Dayton "went too far" in his suggestion to place the state loan to Northwest Airlines in an escrow account. **International Falls Journal** said (June 3) the recommendation is needed to "provide some measure of security for the state." **St. Paul Pioneer Press** called (June 5) the airline's recent financial developments "troubling" and said the airline should use "greater candor and cooperation" with the state.

Star Tribune said (May 21) Gov. Carlson should insist that the Metropolitan Airports Commission find ways to involve minority contractors and workers in Northwest Airlines' maintenance base construction in Duluth.

Mankato Free Press said (June 6) it is counterproductive to view state businesses as a "cash cow for every new program and social ill that needs funding." **Worthington Daily Globe** said (May 28) to draw back businesses that have left Minnesota, the state will have to decrease its sales tax.

Duluth News-Tribune applauded (May 4) legislators for removing

levy limits on local governments but cautioned lawmakers against approving new programs for which local governments must pay.

St. Cloud Times said (May 28) state parks have to share in the state's financial belt-tightening and not get overly concerned about "manicured grass or foregoing an extra coat of paint one year."

Rochester Post-Bulletin said (May 16) year-round school can be part of the answer to school-capacity problems. **West Central Tribune** suggested (June 2) a longer school year as a solution to the problem created when large numbers of students travel to study around the world, putting on hold the regular classroom instruction for students left behind.

Princeton Union Eagle said (June 4) political action committees should be abolished. **Red Wing Republican Eagle** said (May 5) "money does buy clout" at the Legislature and urged citizens to push for campaign finance reforms in 1993.

Republican Eagle called (May 27) "distressing" the growing role of lobbying the Legislature on behalf of public bodies. **Bemidji Pioneer** said (May 20) the large number of public-sector lobbying entities is "troubling." **Duluth News-Tribune** said the "government-lobbying-government syn-

drome" doesn't make sense.

Marshall Independent said (May 7) "the only way for the citizenry to recapture its own government may be to relentlessly beat it and the special interests it serves with politically blunt instruments like term limits." **Duluth News-Tribune** said (May 16) it's "encouraging" to see challengers for the seats held by long-time legislators from the Duluth area. **International Falls Journal** said (May 26) the local DFL's dual endorsement of two legislators running for the same seat is "akin to letting them vote themselves into office."

St. Cloud Times urged (June 4) legislators to move the date of the statewide primary election up to a June date and combine it with the presidential primary.

West Central Tribune called (May 11) the Health Right legislation a "first step on the road to major reform" of the health-care system.

Fargo Forum said (May 29) more money is needed to control milfoil infestation of Minnesota's lakes and suggested higher boat fees and a special lake-use fee to generate funds. **West Central Tribune** agreed (June 1).

Hibbing Tribune said (May 29) mixing casino gambling with the Canterbury Downs horse racing track "is a bad marriage." **Red**

Wing Republican Eagle said (May 20) "if society is intent on riding the gambling craze" it has an obligation to offer help to people with gambling addictions.

Free Press said (May 28) Minnesota should review its strict regulation of biotechnology that will "leave behind" the state's farm and food-processing industries. **St. Cloud Times** said (May 25) the new biotechnology rules "offer limited potential for ensuring ecological safety."

Star Tribune said (June 2) the University of Minnesota should take steps to safeguard the objectivity of the research coming from its labs.

On the path

From Dr. Allan N. Johnson, president of the Council of Hospital Corporations, in a statement printed in the Council's newsletter Insights, May 1992.

Health Right is a beginning, not an end, and no matter how much we would have preferred going down a different path, we're on this one...

The more providers are willing to do outside or with the blessing of the bureaucracy, the less public elected and appointed officials will feel they have to do. Competition, which drove provider organizations apart, is over. What we must now do is awaken to the collaboration age and decide that it is better that we determine how to do this instead of government telling us how.

Corrections

In the April 14, 1992, article "Charter school groups meet school board opposition" the Crosby-Ironton superintendent was identified incorrectly. His name is Bruce Grosland.

Article "Two Medicaid HMOs post large '91 surpluses" in the May 12, 1992, issue contained an error on page 6. The percentage changes in premium revenue for Group Health and

Medica Choice, shown in the table and described in the third column of text, were incorrect. As shown in the accompanying corrected table, the change for Group Health was 16.5 percent, and the change for Medica Choice was 11.2 percent. The state average change was 14.1 percent.

We apologize for the errors.

HMO PREMIUM REVENUE (Commercial Plans Only)

	Premium Revenue Per Member Month	Change from 1990
HMO		
Blue Plus	\$87.62	18.3%
First Plan	97.19	19.7%
Group Health	95.65	16.5%
Central MN Group Health	97.11	13.4%
Mayo	110.93	10.1%
MedCenters	101.51	15.2%
Medica Choice	104.67	11.2%
Medica Primary	97.48	12.9%
Metropolitan	89.47	-19.8%
NWNL	86.61	14.3%
STATE AVERAGE	\$99.22	14.1%

Foster citizen discourse, use mediating institutions

Edited excerpts of remarks by John Brandl, vice-president, Citizens League, and professor, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, to the Citizens League on May 19.

My understanding of the Citizens League mission is as follows: that we are a forum, that we encourage citizens through discourse to develop and recommend improvements in public policy.

We come together not as special pleaders but trying to seek the public interest in respectful dialogue. My discipline, economics, has some odd assumptions about it, and one is that we all come into public life with formed ideas, formed preferences, formed attitudes, and then we just bounce off one another.

I think our notion here is a different one, that in this polity of discourse, we come together and change one another as we engage in the discourse. And we're not just discussing. We want to discuss, arrive at some kind of con-

sensus about change, and then advocate it.

How do we involve more people, how do we draw in more volunteers to the CL effort and, more generally, into this effort of public discourse? How do we do that, and how do we facilitate it once it happens?

There is a certain "allergy" to use of some of the contemporary technologies and there need not be: issue kits can help study groups at home; electronic bulletin boards can permit people hooked up by a modem to communicate with one another to send ideas into a group. I think there would still be a place for our traditional study groups, because we have to aggregate the ideas that are coming out of all the individual groups out there.

We have, for at least a decade, since our "Issues of the '80s" report celebrated privatization. Privatization doesn't quite get at the problem of society I'm talking about here. As an economist and

a respecter of markets I know that privatizing some activities of government is going to be a more efficient way of doing things. It is not sufficient.

There are a variety of communal activities of the society—child-rearing, art museums, neighborhood safety, care of the infirm, maybe schooling. We've found bureaucratizing those activities has not led to satisfactory results.

It's not to say that government doesn't have a responsibility. But we've always expected that some other institutions—what some people call mediating institutions, mediating structures—institutions between the individual and government—would be carrying out those activities. And now in many cases they're not. Neighborhoods aren't as tight. You might not know the person living next door. Families have a more difficult time raising children. We're backing away from meeting those responsibilities through these mediating structures and we're blaming the government.

In these mediating structures we not only work out some of those accommodations, we also carry out some of those communal functions that the society needs. It is where we give our ultimate loyalties and where we get that ultimate sustenance. And because of that they often times can draw out of us more of our energies.

I remain a Democrat and whether you're a Democrat or Republican, you're in the Citizens League because you know we have communal responsibilities for which government is going to have an important function. But more and more it seems to me we ought to be looking to government to meet its responsibilities through these mediating institutions. They can be not only producers of public services, they can be schools of public spiritedness. They can be where we learn to be public actors.

Other views

Performance budgeting

In the Apr. 14 issue of the *Minnesota Journal*, Lyle Wray talked about the need for government to do a better job of defining, measuring, and assessing its performance. Among other suggestions, he said the state should "move toward performance budgeting."

I agree. In fact, this year I introduced a bill that would establish a performance budget for state programs. Under my proposal, every program and activity in the state budget would have a general goal statement and specific performance objectives, indicators, and criteria by which they can be assessed each budget period.

While I was able to move the bill through the Senate, because of scheduling problems it did not receive a hearing in the House. Nevertheless, during the session I was able to get a significant number of legislators, as well as executive officials, to focus on the need for a budget process that yields more information about results. In fact, I plan to continue my efforts to get the commis-

sioner of finance to set up a performance budgeting system, which he can—and should—do without a legislative requirement.

The public purse is indeed being stretched very thin. We must find the tools to ensure that we are getting maximum efficiency and effectiveness from every public expenditure we make. Performance budgeting will not be magic, but it will help us focus more sharply on the key question in government today: "What are we getting for our money?" Therefore, I intend to pursue making it a reality in state government.

Phil Riveness, Minnesota Senator (DFL-Bloomington), Vice-Chair, Legislative Audit Commission.

Emily charter school

Crosby-Ironton Superintendent Bruce Grosland neglected to mention several important figures when he was quoted in the article on charter schools (*Minnesota Journal*, Apr. 14, 1992). He said it would cost the Crosby-Ironton School District \$160,000 if there were a charter school in Emily and the current 55 students chose to enroll there, which they would.

Superintendent Grosland neglect-

ed to mention that the district would also be relieved of some expenses. For example, teacher salaries and benefits, curriculum materials and supplies, meals, and other miscellaneous costs for these children would be paid by the charter school.

Sparsity aid of approximately \$70,000 was given up with the closing of the Emily School, which angered state Reps. Kris Hasskamp and Tony Kinkel, who had both worked hard to change legislation to allow Crosby-Ironton to keep sparsity aid. Also, Superintendent Grosland has already received affidavits from parents of 46 children (grades K to 11) who will not attend in the Crosby-Ironton district unless there is a school in Emily. So he is not losing \$160,000, since he never had it anyway.

In a year when over \$307,000 in cost reductions were made at Crosby-Ironton, purportedly \$72,128 from closing the Emily School, Grosland's statement of financial impact is grievously incorrect. For extremely low cost, the Crosby-Ironton school board could have added an important component to the national education system, a test bed for im-

proving education in a nation comes in 13th and 15th in math and science, respectively, among the developed countries in the world.

I take offense at Grosland's statement regarding the quality of education in Emily: "We'd be skeptical of the quality of education. It's hard for me to grasp that what occurs up there could be better." A very high percentage of Emily School graduates are honor students in the Crosby-Ironton junior and senior high schools. In the past four years alone, Emily has provided two valedictorians and two salutatorians in Crosby-Ironton's graduating classes, and there have been many others through the years.

Finally, Superintendent Grosland concedes, "It would be fascinating if the Legislature would take 25 districts and take away the mandates. You bet it could be less expensive." The Legislature has done just that, Superintendent, for eight districts: it's called sponsorship of a charter school.

Lorraine Gaulke, Emily, Minn.; Chair, Temporary Board of Directors, Emily Elementary Charter School.

Health Right

Continued from Page 1

positional called for a program of subsidized insurance building on Children's Health Plan.

Health Right bears a striking resemblance to the Carlson plan. In a series of steps starting this fall, eligibility for the Children's Health Plan will be extended to other low-income persons. By 1994, persons with income of up to 275 percent of the federal poverty guideline—\$38,363 for a family of four in 1992—will be eligible to purchase the plan. Their premium contribution and the state subsidy will be set on a sliding scale. A family of four with income just above the Medicaid eligibility level will pay \$16 of the monthly premium of \$382.

Health Right will cover only one-fourth of the estimated 370,000 Minnesotans who are uninsured. By 1997, it is estimated that about 158,000 persons will be enrolled in the Health Right plan. According to preliminary projections by Department of Human Services researchers, only about 90,000 of them will be people left the ranks of the uninsured. The others will come from other group or individual insurance arrangements.

The law both encourages enrollment and limits it. For example, some families have not enrolled their children in CHP because some counties, including Hennepin, require applicants for CHP to complete the Medicaid application. To address these con-

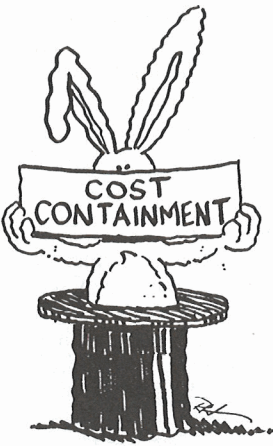
cerns, the bill directs the commissioner of human services to streamline the application and eligibility determination processes for Medicaid and Health Right.

To curb enrollment, the bill creates a six-month state residency requirement to enter the program. It also imposes a waiting period on persons who want to leave their employer-provided health insurance to enter the Health Right plan. That period may be increased if the state finds it is short of funds to operate the program.

Health Right assumes that the new plan will incorporate the cost-containment features of health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and other managed health-care plans. It directs the commissioner of human services to develop a plan for putting all Medicaid and Health Right enrollees in managed-care plans.

Will HMOs come forward to enroll low-income families? HMOs were vigorous supporters of Health Right, but in the past they've been less than eager to expand their Medicaid enrollment. (See article in the May 12, 1992, *Minnesota Journal*.) David Strand, senior vice president of Medica, the largest HMO in the state, told an audience of health-care lawyers that yes, HMOs would come forward. And, if they didn't, he said, "then we deserve anything the Legislature does to us."

For the first three years, the bill is funded primarily by taxes on revenues of health-care providers and increases in the cigarette tax. In



Health Right's magic words.

addition, a gross premium tax on HMOs and Blue Cross and Blue Shield begins in 1996. In 1997, the taxes are expected to raise \$237.1 million.

The cost-containment provisions of the bill are largely unspecified, but potentially far-reaching. A 25-member commission is created and charged with recommending a plan for slowing the growth of health-care spending in the state. The goal is to reduce the growth rate by 10 percent each year. Thus, if the current rate of growth was 10 percent, the commission is expected to recommend options that would reduce that growth rate to nine percent the next year, and so on for five years. However, there is no guarantee that the commission will reach agreement on effective cost-containment measures or that those measures can be implemented successfully.

The bill does not create any prospective "certificate of need" review of major expenditures. It does require that major expenditures (over \$500,000) for equipment, buildings, or to start new specialized services be reported to the commissioner of health. The commissioner will retrospectively review those expenditures. She may determine that certain providers are noncooperative because they use methods that are not clinically effective or cost effective or do not pursue collaborative arrangements with other providers. The commissioner can subject such providers to a prospective review of their major expenditures for up to five years and can prohibit those expenditures.

The new law creates a series of data collection and analysis initiatives. A new unit in the Depart-

ment of Health will create practice parameters to guide health-care providers and analyze and disseminate comparative information to the public about health treatment and outcomes for certain conditions. With these broad duties, only \$500,000 has been appropriated to fund this part of the bill. Health plan companies that are involved in developing practice parameters say that they budget as much as \$1 million for each one. To help with implementation of Health Right, the state has applied for a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant for state efforts to reduce financial barriers to access.

The medical care article of the 1992 workers' compensation bill provides some clues (or possible early indicators) of what might result from the cost-containment sections of Health Right. The commissioner of labor and industry has emergency rulemaking power to expand the use of managed health-care techniques, to adopt a fee schedule that enhances payment for primary-care services and to promulgate treatment standards for the most common work-related injuries.

The new law allows providers to apply to the commissioner of health for immunity from antitrust prosecution—both state and federal—for shared service arrangements intended to "result in lower health-care costs, or greater access to or quality of health care, than would occur in the competitive marketplace." Antitrust enforcement by federal and state authorities, an oxymoron in the 1980s, has resurfaced with some vigor in the health-care area.

In Minnesota, Attorney General Humphrey's office has investigated provider arrangements in several parts of the state and the proposed merger of several Twin Cities hospitals. That office has said that it will carefully watch the process developed to consider applications for immunity to make sure that it is sound and will offer comments on the applications.

Enactment of Health Right was a crucial first step in an ambitious process that will demonstrate how much one state can do to improve access to health care and contain costs.

Allan Baumgarten is associate director of the Citizens League.

Key Health Right Dates

Oct. 1, 1992: Eligibility for outpatient coverage extended to families of enrolled children; hospital and provider reimbursement from public assistance plans increased.

Jan. 1, 1993: Eligibility for outpatient coverage extended to other low-income families with children; two percent gross revenues tax on hospitals takes effect.

Jan. 15, 1993: Health Care Commission submits plan to contain and reduce growth in health-care spending.

July 1, 1993: Regional coordinating boards expire; gender elimi-

nated as a permitted factor in setting insurance premium rates; insurers must offer small-employer plans; Health Right coverage expanded to include limited inpatient hospital benefit.

Jan. 1, 1994: Gross revenues tax on other providers takes effect.

July 1, 1994: Eligibility for plan extended to other low-income households without children.

Jan. 1, 1996: One percent premium tax imposed on HMOs and nonprofit health service corporations, namely Blue Cross and Blue Shield and Delta Dental.

St. Cloud

Continued from Page 1

president. Becoming a Citizens League "gave us a vision of what we could become," he explained, pointing out the key role the Twin Cities Citizens League has played in shaping public policy in the metro area and statewide.

The Twin Cities group has been St. Cloud's resource and model. About a year ago, a Twin Cities League staff member visited St. Cloud to explain how a Citizens League could be developed.

The idea of a St. Cloud League—the fourth such group to be formed in Greater Minnesota—came from the Community 2000 team that studied intergovernmental cooperation. It's one of several Community 2000 recommendations that has been implemented, according to League President Roger Neils, who sat on the intergovernmental cooperation team.

Neils and others say the need for a League stems largely from two factors: growth in the St. Cloud area and the unusually high number of governmental jurisdictions within that growing area.

Between 1980 and 1990 the area's population surged by nearly 30 percent. Growth affected not only St. Cloud, but the four municipalities that surround it, several heavily developed townships that share its borders,

and the rest of the three counties in which the city lies—Stearns, Benton, and Sherburne. By 1990 the population of St. Cloud alone hit 48,812; combined with the surrounding "suburban" cities and townships, the figure reached 87,304.

Demands for transportation, sewer, water, and other services grew, and governmental bodies providing services in the area sometimes found they had conflicting goals. Lenzmeier, who became a Stearns County com-

missioner last fall, puts it this way: "It's always been a challenge to get those units of government on the same sheet of music."

"It's always been a challenge to get those units of government on the same sheet of music."

—Leigh Lenzmeier, Stearns County commissioner

missioner last fall, puts it this way: "It's always been a challenge to get those units of government on the same sheet of music."

St. Cloud Mayor Chuck Winkelman welcomes the citizen involvement and "area-wide view" that the Citizens League will provide. "I hope it will help in the collaboration of government—city, county, township, and also the school district," Winkelman said. City govern-

ment has always been influenced by citizens; now there will be a more structured system for those voices, he added.

The League will benefit townships as well, as long as recommendations are rooted in a balanced study of all facts, said Arnold Bechtold, who recently ended 23 years of service on the board governing the increasingly residential Le Sauk Township. A decision is expected by the end of this year on the proposed merger of Le Sauk Township and

neighboring Sartell—a city on St. Cloud's fringe. Citizens League leaders say those merger talks came about partly because of Community 2000 work.

Former state Sen. Jim Pehler, acquisitions librarian and assistant professor at St. Cloud State University, calls the Citizens League "a means of better coordination of growth and a good debating forum" for issues that affect the multi-jurisdictional St. Cloud area.

"I was looking for a vehicle I could become involved with that would allow for good discussion and debate with the hopeful final resolution of being implemented," Pehler said.

Pehler, who will head a strategic planning team looking at three-to-five-year projections and long-term goals, said he appreciates bylaws that allow elected officials on steering and executive committees, but not on study committees, where there could be actual or seeming dominance by certain governmental agencies.

In the near future, the Central Minnesota League discussions are likely to focus on two key topics: cultural diversity and sewer/water concerns. Neils said he expects the issues to be fairly well-defined and ready for study by early July.

Harold Wick, general manager of Northern States Power Company's Northwest Region, headquartered in St. Cloud, takes another approach. NSP's \$500 sustaining membership in the Citizens League stems from "a fundamental belief that our company as a public utility can't be any stronger than the area it serves."

"To help ensure a strong, vital community, you've got to include, involve, and actively engage your citizens in the community and in the decision of the community," said Wick, once president of Community 2000. "It's an analogy to what goes on within a business organization when you tap the creativity of workers, focus on quality and empowerment. The same thing goes on within a community when you tap them, include them, involve them, and expect something from them. There's a tremendous payoff for the area."

The League's geographical area, according to secretary/treasurer Sara Grachek, covers five counties: Stearns, Benton, Sherburne, Wright, and Morrison. So far, members come mainly from the first three counties. Eventually, the organization could grow to represent more than a five-county area, Grachek said.

Even though the Citizens League of Central Minnesota is in its infancy, members are optimistic about its potential. "It's a fledgling organization that will grow strong very quickly," Otterson said.

Susan Halena is a free-lance writer who lives near St. Cloud. She has been a reporter and editor for newspapers in Fergus Falls, Rochester, and St. Cloud.

News

Continued from Page 1

pete for advertising dollars. Surveys have persuaded owners and editors that readers are not interested in serious coverage of complicated stories. So the coverage of ideas going into and through the policy process is "out." What's "in" is quite different. How to feel about this?

Editors argue aggressively not just that the new news is necessary for the newspaper's survival but that it's good journalism. At the annual Frank Premack Memorial April 13 the executive editor of the *Star Tribune*, Tim McGuire, was clearly impressed with the Jon Katz piece ("Rock, Rap and Movies Bring You the News").

"More than any other part of the paper the editorial page retains the old values of serious interest in state and local public policy."

Katz and McGuire are probably right. A lot of "news" is being made by the shifting tastes of consumers (especially the values of young people). It is expressed in what entrepreneurs and retailers and entertainers do. It is appearing in the media targeted at the people making "the news": the movies, TV, the tabloids written and edited to share their values—"covering with attitude," McGuire called it.

So there's a case for moving away from covering traditional institutions, especially government, which is anyway reactive and seldom good at issue raising.

We'll give the editors, too, the argument that government is not so central as politicians have wanted us to think. The notion that passing a bill can stop crime, prevent famine, or make people healthy is not real and giving up that premise is not bad.

However. Problems are real. Change is necessary. There are alternatives. The choices are not simple. There is a price to be paid

for not acting. Politics and government remain a central mechanism for making these decisions. It is not a game, not a show.

Political people do not always rush to hard decisions. They are more likely to act, and to act early and well, if the public understands the problems, the need for action, the alternatives and the price for not acting. Decisions require consent. Consent requires understanding. The media shape that understanding. One of the concerns, which deserves more discussion than it's getting, is that the media is increasingly explaining how services help you and how paying for them hurts you—shaping stories about government as an advice column, reinforcing a view of government as "them," in which the larger community and the longer-term interest are hard to find.



A place for public affairs.

The newspaper is in its revolution now—broadening usefully its concept of news and trying to give it more "value" for the general reader. While continuing this, it could at the same time move to "the other end" with a kind of shop for the specialists who want—and need—detail and complexity.

The logical place to write about talk (which is what covering public affairs really involves) is probably on what's now called the "editorial/opinion" page.

It's possible the destiny of those pages is to offer opinions about "high-concept" stories: What do we think about Gov. Clinton smoking pot? If so, goodbye serious policy discussion. But more than any other part of the paper the editorial page retains the old values of serious interest in state and local public policy and in printing the ideas and arguments about what might and should be done.

It could broaden from that into a kind of newsletter inside the paper—explaining and reporting what's happening in the public-policy discussion. A beat, in truth.

There is precedent for this. Not everybody goes hunting and fishing, but the paper keeps a specialist to write for those who do, and a regular section it calls "Outdoors" (or something like that). The public affairs "newsletter" wouldn't have to be on a cover. It

can be inside. Make us find it. Just have it somewhere.

Sometimes the editorial pages do this. For example, the existence of the dissent by almost half of the members of the commission studying public services in Ramsey County—their proposal for contracting rather than for consolidation—first became known when Ron Clark printed it on the editorial page of the *Pioneer Press*.

This might even be smart marketing. The newspaper may be at some risk of ending up "in-between": not really able to "cover with attitude" like the tabloids, yet not going deep enough to provide specialists with much they really need to know. We were always puzzled by the papers' effort with a fax service: skimming the headlines a couple of hours ahead of the TV and radio news. Isn't it possible the market for information-by-fax is, instead, the readers interested in the specialized developments that today aren't making the new news?

Ted Kolderie is contributing editor of the *Minnesota Journal*. Dave Nimmer is an instructor in the Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of St. Thomas. In 1989 the *Journal* carried articles by Nimmer (June 27) and Kolderie (Oct. 24) that attempted to start a discussion about the role of the media in the public-policy process.



Just getting started!

Property value in tax-increment districts increases

The amount of property value in tax-increment financing (TIF) districts continued to increase in 1991. Last year the value of TIF districts was \$205 million, the equivalent of 6.24 percent of the state's total tax base. In 1990 the value captured in TIF districts was 5.91 percent of the state's total taxable property value.

TIF is a financing tool that allows cities to set aside the property tax revenues collected on certain developing or redeveloped property to help pay for some costs of the development, such as road improvements. The amount of value captured statewide for TIF purposes in 1991 is 9.9 percent more than in 1990.

—Jody A. Hauer

As state regulators study the proposal to merge Group Health and MedCenters, the state's second and third largest health maintenance organizations (HMOs), one likely impact is emerging. Group Health has decided that it will no longer send specialty referrals to the University of Minnesota Hospital and Clinic. Instead, it will send those referrals first to the Park Nicollet Medical Center and, if necessary, on to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. Park Nicollet and Mayo are partners with the two HMOs in a recently-announced institute for health-care outcomes measurement.—Allan Baumgarten.

It's common in the discussion about transit to hear folks put down carpooling. The census has found, however, that more than three times as many Minnesotans carpool to work as use public transit. (*Star Tribune*, May 29).

Carpooling is down from a decade ago (as ridership is for the bus) because all transit is going through a bad patch. The post-1945 baby boom is now employed: two adults working at different jobs in different places, who have to drive; and proportionately fewer young people and old people who can't drive.

But it's useful to reflect that the largest transit system we have operates at virtually no public cost.—Ted Kolderie.

After seven months of negotiations, the Minnesota Department of Administration and MCI Telecommunications Corp. have fi-

nally reached agreement on a contract for the state's new telecommunications system, known as STARS. (See the January 21, 1992, issue of the *Minnesota Journal*.) MCI will provide voice, data, and video services to the state and other public sector users of the network.

MCI is also working with the state on pilot projects to provide two-way video conferencing. Links are now being developed from the Twin Cities to Duluth and Rochester.—A.B.

For years geographers have told us that about two-thirds of the growth is in the western half of the metropolitan area. Steve Alderson, a transportation analyst with the Metropolitan Council, took another look at that recently and came out with a somewhat different conclusion.

If you draw the line north-south through what is really the center of the region—downtown Minneapolis—rather than along the border between Minneapolis and Saint Paul, where it's usually drawn, Alderson says you see that:

- Most of the households live east of the line up I-35W and I-94 through central Minneapolis, and the growth in households is just as rapid to the east.

- With jobs it's different. While jobs on the east side grew by about a quarter, 1970 to 1990 jobs on the west side almost doubled, and the west side is now where most of the jobs are.

Not surprisingly, this is producing congestion on the freeways. Housing normally precedes commercial development, though, so in time the imbalance may correct itself. Stay loose.—T.K.

The group seeking a charter school in Emily became the first to gain and then lose local school district sponsorship for its charter—all in less than two weeks time. On May 20 the Remer-Longville school board, just to the north of Emily, voted 4-3 to sponsor a K-

Take Note

Increments of wisdom guaranteed to add to your knowledge base.

4 charter school in Emily. However, according to Lorraine Gaulke, chair of the Emily charter group, concerns developed over whether Remer-Longville might bear some financial liability for the charter school. On June 1 the Remer-Longville board voted 4-2 to reverse its earlier decision.

The vote was the latest in a series of disappointments for the Emily group, which has been rejected for sponsorship by its home district of Crosby-Ironton and several other districts. But Gaulke said the group has not lost hope. "At some point we will have a school in Emily," she said.

As a first step, Emily parents are setting up a "home-schooled coop" kindergarten to serve 17 children this fall, staffed by a certified kindergarten teacher. Funded by community donations, it will not charge tuition.

The Emily school building closed at the end of May. Ownership will be transferred from the Crosby-Ironton district to the City of Emily on Dec. 31.—Dana Schroeder

Willmar voters will likely vote this fall on whether to build a new city airport or expand the existing one at its current site. A group of residents opposed to the city council's decision last month to remodel and expand Willmar Municipal Airport presented a petition with enough signatures to force the referendum. Many of

those who signed the petition prefer an option whereby a new airport would be built away from the heavily populated areas of Willmar. If the city council does not rescind its vote on the matter, voters will make the decision in November.—J.A.H.

Because of budget uncertainties, the Minneapolis Public Library has withdrawn as a user of the Readmobile, as of next January. Through a unique arrangement, the Cowles Foundation funded acquisition of a bookmobile last year to serve preschoolers in suburban Hennepin County and Minneapolis. The foundation insisted that the Hennepin County and Minneapolis Public Libraries cooperate on the project.

Hennepin County used the Readmobile four days a week, sending it to family child-care centers and nursery schools. Minneapolis Public Library used it one day a week, at an annual cost of about \$11,000 for staff.—A.B.

More on the small schools vs. large schools issue: In response to a question at a recent Citizens League breakfast, Humphrey Institute Professor John Brandl said, "I think we made a mistake 30 years ago, when we started building schools that might have 500 or 800 or 1,000 kids in a class. Economies of scale stop far short of that, and we diminish kids when we make them anonymous in the school, and when we permit fewer of them to be engaged in the school activities, when the schools are so large. I am for facilitating neighborhood schools; in fact, doing so through choice when we can."—D.S.

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