



# Minnesota Journal

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A publication of the Citizens League

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Volume 16, Number 6  
June 15, 1999

## Nonpartisan, small unicameral legislature works in Nebraska; questions arise here

*Editor's note: In 1987, the Journal's contributing editor, Ted Kolderie, arranged for Minnesotans interested in the idea of a unicameral legislature to talk with*

*Writing friend from Nebraska, who was familiar as a lobbyist with the nation's only one-house legislature. Kolderie has now updated that discussion after conversations with Richard Brown, deputy clerk in the Nebraska Unicameral, and Richard Herman, who covered the Unicameral for the Lincoln Journal and who chaired the constitutional revision commission from 1995 to 1997. What follows is the updated version, incorporating the ideas of all three sources.*

Nebraska is a fairly normal American state, which simply happens to have this curiosity in its government. The capital is at Lincoln, and

the Capitol—itself a marvelous building—is one of those prairie towers actually completed with two legislative chambers just before the change to a unicameral.

The idea of a one-house legislature was considered in Nebraska, but not adopted, in 1919. It surfaced again in 1934 in the Depression. And when the Legislature failed to address the question the proposal was raised by initiative petition. George Norris was one of its strong proponents. Though by that time in the U.S. Senate, Norris got deeply involved with this “local” issue. He seems to have been interested mainly in the nonpartisan (rather than one-house) idea. He did, though, have—from his days in Nebraska and from his experience in the Senate—a strong aversion to the conference committee, which

reinforced his interest in the one-house feature. The measure appeared on the statewide ballot in the fall of 1934, along with proposals to legalize horse-racing and the sale of beer, and won handily.

A number of its characteristics bear on the institution's performance.

- **It is small, the smallest in America.** The 1934 constitutional amendment set the size as a range, between 30 and 50. For a long time the Unicameral had 43 members. Currently there are 49. That is not very many. A few members serve a long time; some seats turn over rapidly. In '99 there were 10 new members, a 20 percent turnover.

- **Its members are relatively low-paid in comparison to members**

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## Cramer seeks strong partnerships

by Dana Schroeder

When Steve Cramer takes over as executive director of the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA) on June 28, he won't be changing so much the *type* of work he does as the *scale and geographic area* in which he does it.

Cramer has worked at the nonprofit Project for Pride in Living (PPL) for five and a half years, the last two and a half as its executive director. “The focus at PPL is on the core neighborhoods, with a heavy emphasis on housing,” he said in a recent interview.

“The MCDA has a broader mission,” Cramer said “We need to care about the inner-city neighborhoods, but must also be concerned about the riverfront, downtown and the more affluent neighborhoods.” He said the city has come to realize that it won't outcompete with places like Lakeville by making vast quantities of land available for development. “Our advantage is our urbanism,” he said. “We must build on the diversity and ‘urbanness’ of the city.”

Cramer sees the three main issues he will face at MCDA as the agency's

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## '99 property-tax reform: a 'mixed bag'

With all the discussion of sales-tax rebates and income-tax cuts, how did property-tax reform fare during the 1999 legislative session? There is not much positive to report, but there is not anything terrible to report either. It was a mixed bag, but it could have been worse.

A few highlights: Property owners will get some property-tax cuts and

by Lynn Reed

taxpayers will have more information available about what role valuation increases play in their overall property-tax bill. Class rate changes at least did not undo class-compression reforms of the last two sessions for city and county levies, and there was some continued work on clarifying state and local relations, but

more tax shifting will occur from a lower cap on the limited market value provision, and cities and counties will have to live with levy limits at least one more year.

**Some background**

The need for property-tax reform became increasingly apparent throughout the 1980s and 1990s,

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# Beyond money and good intentions: Redesign public services

Over the past semester I had the pleasure of teaching a class for John Brandl, dean of the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute, whose recent book inspired this column title. The course was on redesigning public services so a democratic society can achieve public purposes in effective ways.

Working with this topic was a delight, since it builds on a great body of Citizens League work, such as K-12 school choice and charter school initiatives and the 1992 study on more choices for public officials and citizens in public services. The 1992 report led to the creation of the Board of Government Innovation and Cooperation and the Best Practices Reviews being done by the Office of the Legislative Auditor.

By chance, in the midst of the semester, the Humphrey Institute held a conference on education reform at which Harvard Professor Lisbeth Schorr spoke. Schorr argues in her excellent book, *Common Purpose*, that we can and should do better in addressing complex social problems by getting effective interventions up to scale. Still at the end of her well-written book, one is left wondering why large bureaucracies would turn themselves upside down to provide more effective solutions to significant public challenges in education and other areas.

This was largely the task the class set out to look at—start with an important public purpose, such as education or roads and work through an effective way of aligning and achieving the stated public purposes through incentives for organizations and individuals to take the necessary steps. We began with Osborne and Plastrik's *Banishing Bureaucracy*, which contains a checklist for redesign based in part on earlier work on reinventing government. By the end of the class we developed a 20-step approach to redesigning public purposes. For brevity, these 20 have been condensed into four broad clusters.

**Public purposes and outcomes.** It is a complex task to arrive at a

## Viewpoint

by Lyle Wray

set of agreed-upon outcomes that address public purposes. We have a diverse society with a diffuse power structure. The "front-end" challenge is to identify the public purpose, to analyze the nature of the problem or challenge, to map

analysis of the problem, in identifying outcomes, nor in coming up with clever interventions. The key is aligning incentives so that individuals and organizations will want to achieve those important outcomes, using our best current

*"One is left wondering why large bureaucracies would turn themselves upside down to provide more effective solutions to significant public challenges in education and other areas."*

out the factors producing the problem and to manage a process of arriving at a set of legitimate, specific outcomes. The recent debate on the Profiles of Learning as part of the graduation standards in Minnesota shows how complex and politically charged this venture often is. The dangers here are either fuzzy outcomes or expectations or "mission creep," in which the public program tries to be all things for all people and ends up failing.

**Effective interventions.** Typically, a great deal of attention is paid to clever interventions that appear to address a problem or part of a problem in an effective way. Each year the public sector wins national awards for innovation. For example, there are several programs that basically guarantee that every student will leave the third grade reading at his or her grade level. Yet, in our core cities, half the students fail basic reading tests in the eighth grade. The question to ask, then, is, Why do we not universally apply effective techniques? A key task here is to map out the important milestones we want to achieve and to identify the effective, known interventions that achieve them.

**Aligning organizational and individual incentives with the outcomes.** Ultimately, the guts of redesign does not lie in a careful

knowledge or applying new knowledge. It turns out that this alignment comes down to three main elements: assuring competition, affording citizens and officials a real choice of service, and engaging and empowering the community as an "organic service provider" to meet its needs.

Take the powerful tool of competition. Harvard economist Caroline Minter Hoxby in her recent study "Do private schools provide competition for public schools?" found that "greater private school competitiveness raises the quality of public schools, as measured by the educational attainment, wages and high school graduation rates of public school students." This came despite higher teacher wages, because administrative costs were squeezed down. In the New York City public schools, there are more than 10 times the number of administrators per student as in the private school system.

In my experience, when parents of children with severe disabilities were given the freedom to assemble services as they saw fit, responsiveness of services and outcomes for children improved a great deal. There is a major push around the world to better align incentives to produce better public outcomes. But there is much less of this being done than would

be possible. Why is that?

**Political navigation.** We found considerable barriers to redesign. We need to grapple with how government or a coalition of government, civic and business groups can get the power to realign organizational and individual incentives to better accomplish public purposes in critical areas, such as K-12 education or job training. In our redesign class, we found that, in example after example, getting sufficient momentum to make real change in alignment required a crisis and brave political leadership. Municipal or national near-bankruptcy, burning rivers and collapsing economic bases can be powerful prods for change.

The question for Minnesota, with two percent unemployment and a local government-aid system that basically forestalls any municipal financial collapse, is how to make real progress on redesign here. Compete St. Paul, for example, is running into rough sledding on new approaches to getting a few trees trimmed. Never mind more significant changes in multi-billion dollar programs.

One source of pressure may come from global competitiveness and the pressures it will put on our region in terms of a quality workforce and efficient and effective public services. Then too, a little sunlight, such as the 1999 legislative provision allowing better tracking of where the money goes in the K-12 system can help. Twenty five years after it started on public service redesign, clearly the Citizens League still has a lot of work to do.

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

# Governor, lawmakers win mostly praise for session

## On Balance

*"It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than the creation of a new system."—N. Machiavelli*

**Star Tribune** said (May 10) Gov. Ventura and the Legislature should follow former Finance Commissioner Wayne Simoneau's advice to avoid a fiscal crisis like the state had in 1981 and 1982: do not spend one-time money in permanent ways and demand structural balance through 2004. **St. Cloud Times** urged (May 10) caution in the granting of permanent tax cuts that could result in budget deficits in the future. "We don't want budget deficits four years from now because of tax-cut bidding wars today."

**Mankato Free Press** said (May 13) Minnesota's "tripartisan" government passed its biggest test when leaders of the three parties settled on a budget and tax-cut package. **Duluth News-Tribune** said (May 19), "By session's end it seemed that our early grumbling about the ineffectiveness of the three-party system was likely premature." It said the rebate and tax cuts are likely to spark the state's economy in the late summer when taxpayers rush to spend their windfall. **Rochester Post-Bulletin** (May 15) "the Big Three agreement on Minnesota tax policy appears to be a reasonable compromise." It bemoaned the lack of funding for a proposed expansion of the University of Minnesota in Rochester, the lack of action to repeal the health-care provider tax and the lack of action to reduce the unfair tax burden on commercial-industrial property.

## The Minnesota Journal

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

Annual subscription rate for nonmembers is \$40 issues. Orders may be placed at 612/338- or by mail at the above address.

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

**Red Wing Republican Eagle** said (May 17), "for all the talk of tripartisanship, and Ventura's stated opposition to cutting deals, the final weeks proved business as usual." Most of the strategic deals were made behind closed doors. Democrats and Republicans must accept blame for the 11th-hour negotiations, but "the governor cannot escape this session unscathed." Ventura can be faulted for not getting more involved in setting the agenda early on in the session, the paper said. **West Central Tribune** (Willmar) said (May 13) the compromises "yielded tripartisan victories in a way, with all three parties securing favored elements in the budget bill: Ventura got his light-rail funding, the Senate its tobacco endowment and the House its permanent tax cuts." It criticized the decision to borrow \$400 million to pay for last year's bonding projects, rather than use cash from the budget surplus to pay for the projects as last year's Legislature had decided. **St. Cloud Times** urged (May 13) that legislators look at all taxes—not just income taxes—in figuring the incidence of taxes on taxpayers. "In the end, Minnesotans at all

income levels should be paying about the same percentage of their income in taxes."

**Republican Eagle** credited (May 13) House Republicans for sticking to their principles that all three income-tax brackets should be cut. "It's highly unlikely the Legislature would have forged a tax cut anywhere near this size had Democrats controlled both houses." **St. Paul Pioneer Press** outlined (May 5) four principles for the final fiscal package: Use one-time revenues for one-time purposes, not for permanent tax cuts or program improvements; provide significant, across-the-board cuts in the state's steeply progressive income tax; make prudent use of the revenue from the tobacco settlement; withhold further funding for the proposed light-rail transit line in the Hiawatha Avenue corridor in Minneapolis. Instead, lawmakers "should direct the Metropolitan Council to prepare a transit improvement plan for the entire seven-county metro area and reconsider whether LRT would be a cost-effective component of that plan." **Fergus Falls Daily Journal** said (May 19) lawmakers took the

"popular stance" in returning most of the surplus. "We still don't know how this new tripartisan government will do when it has to make unpopular decisions. Fortunately, this time the popular decisions was also the right one."

**Pioneer Press** called (May 13) the budget deal "disappointing" in three major ways: It leaves little money to continue reforming Minnesota's inequitable property-tax system; it demands little or nothing in the way of accountability and improved results for huge amounts of additional money going into K-12 education; the \$60 it provided to help fund the Hiawatha corridor LRT line "does nothing to improve transit within the remainder of the seven-county metro area." The paper said the budget deal "provides a little something for everyone. But it is hardly a triumph for fiscal responsibility, accountability and sound public policy."

**Duluth News-Tribune** said (May 18) lawmakers left just about every important bill unsettled until the last few days—"the nuts and bolts of state government, all handled in haste through a fog of weariness. It was not a pretty sight." The paper said the Legislature's performance "produced a strong argument for serious consideration of having a unicameral Legislature in Minnesota."

# Cramer

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organizational dynamics, the MCDA/NRP relationship and securing financing for development.

## Insight into MCDA

Cramer said he came close to being named to the MCDA position four years ago, but he says now that it's "a good thing" it didn't work out then. His work at PPL, he said, has made him much better prepared for the position.

His experience as the hands-on administrator of a big organization at PPL will provide a "useful background" at MCDA, Cramer said. And PPL has been a developer and a key constituent of MCDA. "That's given me invaluable expe-

rience in understanding how the agency works and its strengths and weaknesses," he said. "It'll make me a better leader."

Cramer hopes to bring a different focus to the culture of MCDA. "We have to work at being a more effective partner with a wide range of people," he said. "We have to be good at that. There's a temperament about doing partnerships well and we can inculcate that more deeply into the organization, so that it becomes part of the culture of the organization." Those partnerships, he said, range from working with other city departments to working with neighborhood groups.

## Future of NRP

One of the major issues facing the MCDA is its relationship with the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) for the second 10

years of the program, which starts in 2001. NRP is a 20-year, \$400 million neighborhood investment program. City officials have said the program is facing reduced resources and needs to make up for not spending enough on housing in the first decade.

"A lot has worked in NRP," Cramer said, "but some things need retooling." He said neighborhood involvement has been a strength of the program. Less effective has been allocating the funds, raised through tax-increment financing, through 66 different plans.

"It's tough to get at citywide issues, like affordable housing and core community redevelopment," Cramer said. He suggested that gathering the neighborhood planning groups into regional clusters

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Property tax

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after a well-documented couple of decades in which Minnesota moved further and further from an

“How did property-tax reform fare during the 1999 legislative session? It was a mixed bag, but it could have been worse.”

accountable property-tax system. (Documentation is available from the Minnesota Taxpayers Association.) The Latimer Tax Study Commission recommended specific measures of property-tax reform in 1984 that set the stage for further action. Gov. Perpich in 1989 oversaw the enactment of legislation which included at least one major recommendation of the Latimer commission: elimination of the homestead credit. Gov. Carlson brought out a fairly sweeping property-tax reform proposal in the first months of his administration in 1991, but without adequate funds for transition to the more accountable system he proposed, the plan went nowhere that year.

The Minnesota Taxpayers Association published its own proposal in December of 1992, and almost immediately, some legislators began drafting versions of that plan to try to push reform in the 1993 session. MTA evaluated the 1993 session on its property-tax reform efforts, (limited market value, “this old house”, some farm class rate changes), and concluded that they “serve to perpetuate and magnify distortions and inefficiencies of the current system.”

Several property-tax reform pro-

posals were introduced during the 1995 session, but in the end, little progress was made. The House plan was a constitutional amendment to disallow any property taxes to be used for school funding, with no mention of what the replacement revenue was to be, while the

Senate plan was a property-tax freeze, with a sunset of the current property-tax system in the future. MTA’s characterization of the property-tax provisions of the final tax bill was: “This bill is mostly a collection of small steps toward reform or provisions for narrow constituencies—a timid, and many thought largely unnecessary—bill.”

TABLE 1. SHARES OF SELECTED PROPERTY-TAX COMPONENTS, RESIDENTIAL HOMEOWNER VS. BUSINESS PROPERTY CLASSES, PROPERTY TAXES PAYABLE IN 1997 AND 2000 (EST.)

Property Class	Payable 1997 Shares of:				Payable 2000 (before 1999 changes) Shares of:			
	Market Value	Tax Capacity	Net Taxes	Ratio of Tax to Market Value*	Market Value	Tax Capacity	Net Taxes	Ratio of Tax to Market Value*
Homes	56.9%	38.7%	38.9%	0.684	57.4%	44.5%	41.6%	0.725
Businesses	14.3%	31.9%	33.2%	2.322	14.7%	29.8%	32.7%	2.224

Sources: MN DOR Prop. Tax Bulletin No. 26 (1997); House Research Simulation Run 00qv (2000). Calculations by Minnesota Taxpayers Association, 6/99.  
\*A ratio of tax to market value that is less than one shows that a class of property is subsidized relative to its share of market value. Classes with a ratio greater than one pay part of the subsidy for those classes.

Almost immediately after the 1995 session, MTA launched a 50- state property-tax comparison study to document just how Minnesota’s highly classified property-tax system compared to the rest of the country. Published in June of 1996, this study showed that our commercial and industrial property taxes were the highest of any state

in the country and our property taxes on apartments were second highest. At the same time, courtesy of the same system, a \$70,000 home in Minneapolis ranked only 27th highest in the country, nearly 13 percent below the U.S. average. The number one and two rankings received a lot of attention in papers across the state and pressure for true reform was building as the 1997 session approached.

**1997 and 1998 reforms**  
A happy confluence of surplus revenues with a general consensus of the need to do something about the high commercial/industrial and apartment property taxes set the stage for the first meaningful property-tax reform efforts in 30 years during the 1997 session. A continued abundance of state revenues enabled a second round of reform during the 1998 session.

The primary reform accomplished in the 1997 and 1998 sessions was to compress class rates. The final tax bills lowered the class rates for all classes of property except for the first \$72,000 of residential homestead value. In order to do this without raising taxes on homeowners, a new education homestead credit was enacted for owner-occupied homes. The credit was designed to pay the first 32 percent (for taxes payable in 1998) and 66.2 percent (for 1999) of the state-set general education property-tax levy, up to a maximum of \$225 and \$320 for 1998 and 1999 respectively. At the same time, the general education property-tax levy was lowered statewide by some \$90 to \$100 million per year.

Though these reform efforts cost the state’s general fund several hundred million dollars per year, it was the first time in 30 years that

the homeowners’ share of property taxes rose while the business sector’s share declined. As a bonus, nearly every taxpayer in the state saw a decline in their property-tax bill, or at least a significant slowing of past increases. Table 1 shows progress made toward compression of class rates and thus toward a more accountable property-tax system. It compares the shares of market value, tax capacity, and net taxes for homeowner and business property classes in 1997, before any significant reforms, to those projected for 2000, after the changes of the 1997 and 1998 legislative sessions but before the 1999 changes.

Table 1 shows that the 1997 and 1998 legislative changes significantly increased homes’ share of property taxes paid beyond the 0.5 percent increase in homes’ share of market value. After two years of

class rate changes, homes statewide were projected to pay 41.6 percent of all property taxes, up from 38.9 percent in 1997 before the reforms were enacted. The change is even more dramatic for non-school levies, since the share of tax capacity (which increased from 38.7 percent to 44.5 percent for homes) does approximate the share of property taxes for non-school jurisdictions. Business property’s share of net taxes statewide dropped from 33.2 percent to 32.7 percent, even though its market value share increased by 0.4 percentage points, with business property’s tax capacity share dropping from 31.9 percent to 29.8 percent.

**1999 changes**  
In light of the background above, how did property-tax reform fare as a result of the 1999 session? In a word—mixed. Most of the addi-

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Property tax

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al forecasted surplus revenues were used for a sales tax rebate and permanent income tax cuts, so there was not much money left for further property class-rate compression. Nevertheless, there were some important property-tax reform features enacted. Here is a quick evaluation of several of the 1999 property-tax reform changes:

**• Class Rate Compression—**  
Table 2 shows the results of just the class-rate changes projected for property taxes payable in 2000, an extension of Table 1 above.

About the best that can be said of the 1999 class-rate changes is that they did not significantly undo the reforms enacted during the last two

TABLE 2. SHARES OF SELECTED PROPERTY-TAX COMPONENTS, RESIDENTIAL HOMEOWNER VS. BUSINESS PROPERTY CLASSES, PROPERTY TAXES PAYABLE IN 2000 (EST.)

Property Class	Payable 2000 (before 1999 changes) Shares of:				Payable 2000 (after 1999 changes) Shares of:			
	Market Value	Tax Capacity	Net Taxes	Ratio of Tax to Market Value*	Market Value	Tax Capacity	Net Taxes	Ratio of Tax to Market Value*
Homes	57.4%	44.5%	41.6%	0.725	57.4%	44.7%	40.7%	0.709
Businesses	14.7%	29.8%	32.7%	2.224	14.8%	29.9%	33.5%	2.264

Sources: MN DOR Prop. Tax Bulletin No. 26 (1997); House Research Simulation Run 00qv (2000). Calculations by Minnesota Taxpayers Association, 6/99.  
\*A ratio of tax to market value that is less than one shows that a class of property is subsidized relative its share of market value. Classes with a ratio greater than one pay part of the subsidy for those classes.

sessions. Considering the Senate’s position going into conference committee, which would have rolled back much of the reform, the final tax bill should be considered a victory. More money was poured into the education homestead credit (83 percent of the general education levy up to a maximum \$390); the first tier for homes was raised to \$76,000 from \$75,000; and most class rates except for the first tier of homes were lowered. At least the shares of tax capacity (a rough proxy for shares of city and county taxes) for the two main classes of property above did increase more for homes than for business property, which means homeowners will pay a slightly greater share of city and county levies statewide—a positive change from the perspective of accountability.

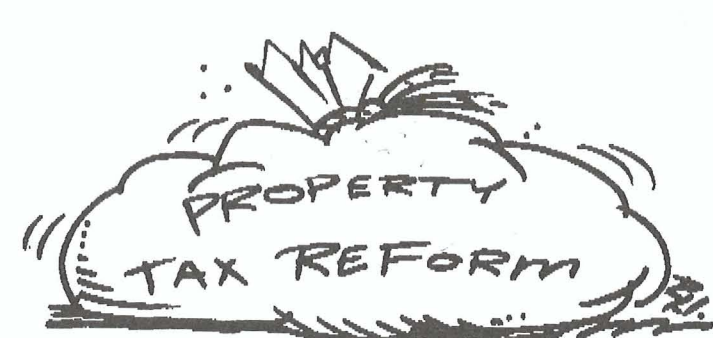
A growing concern with the way class-rate compression has been

achieved in the last three years—through the education homestead credit and lower general education levy—is the mismatch between the increasing reliance on state funding for schools (well over 70 percent now) versus greater flexibility given to local school boards to decide how to spend the money. Funds should be raised by the jurisdiction responsible for the spending, but the trend in Minnesota is just the opposite.

**• Limited Market Value.** There was great pressure this session to enact a sweeping measure that would have capped market value growth at the rate of inflation. MTA opposed this measure as one that would create yet another class of property (fast growth) and further distort and complicate an already complicated system. What legislators did was lower the current limit on market-value increas-

es for residential property (homes, 1-3 unit rental, and cabins) to 8.5 percent per year or 15 percent of the increase, whichever is more. The previous law limited increases to 10 percent per year or 25 percent of the increase. Limited market value at best is a stop-gap measure that buys time until further genuine reform, but it is a measure legislators find difficult to resist.

**• District Court Takeover.** The 1989 Legislature actually began the state takeover of certain district court costs. This kind of measure is part of property-tax reform because it seeks to clarify which level of government should perform what functions. All of District Eight’s costs were assumed by the state as a pilot project beginning January 1, 1990. The 1999 legislature expanded the experiment by providing for the takeover of all costs for Districts 6, 7, and 9 effec-



“A mixed bag!”

tive January 1, 2000. Regardless of the pros and cons of the state’s taking over all district court costs in the state, the fact that attempts are being made to line up funding sources with responsibilities is a step in the right direction. Further work needs to be done to clarify the lines of responsibility among the various levels of government so that funding can be more closely

constant or even cut it some and still get more money through rising valuations. This promotes accountability regarding rising values without the disruption of the inflation cap on value increases mentioned above. It may also reduce suspicions that assessors are deliberately overstating values to increase property taxes.

**• Levy Limits.** Levy limits were extended for cities and counties through taxes payable 2000. Legislators still feel this is necessary to ensure that property-tax cuts will be noticed by taxpayers. Ideally, city and county responsibilities would be clarified and class rates sufficiently compressed so that local government officials can be free to levy whatever they need to fulfill local spending needs.

**• Further Study.** Funding for another Tax Study Commission was considered during the legislative session but did not survive the conference committee to make it into the final bill. However, the Governor has directed the Department of Revenue to do a thorough review of all tax systems in order to recommend specific reforms for the 2001 legislative session. It is clear from the lack of reform in the 1999 bill that there will be plenty of room for recommendations.

Lynn Reed is research director of the Minnesota Taxpayers Association, which can be reached at 651-224-7477.

**• Truth-in-Taxation Changes.** These changes require the county auditor to certify the tax rate derived by dividing the previous year’s levy by the current net tax capacity. Cities and counties wanting to adopt a higher tax rate than this one certified by the auditor must adopt a resolution after holding a public hearing. This is a remarkable addition to the truth-in-taxation process that will force cities and counties to reveal their plans to use rising valuations for extra money. Under the current system, officials can hold a tax rate



# Cramer

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might help. He also noted that the NRP policy board will have to sign off on any changes for the next 10 years. Since the second half of the program does not begin until 2001, there is "plenty of time to get ideas on the table," he said.

Cramer said the NRP process and the \$150 million left to allocate in the second half of the 20-year program are "very precious resources," in part because Congress now has a propensity to make cuts in the Community Development Block Grant program and other development programs. The money, Cramer said, "must be allocated in part according to city priorities. Affordable housing is a priority in the city right now. The NRP funds cannot be 100 percent allocated by the 66 plans."

## Development financing

Cramer said with cuts in federal

funding, the city will have to look for new local sources of development funding.

Tax-increment financing will continue to be a "very important tool" for stand-alone projects. However, he noted, the city can no longer pool its TIF projects to use income from one project to support another.

To help make up the difference, Cramer said, proceeds from the city's recent sale of its share in the Hilton Hotel could be put aside as a development fund. Also, he said, the MCDA has a levy authority in place that has never been used that could serve as another source of development financing.

## LRT development

Cramer believes there is a role for the MCDA in creating a "level of density" around the planned light-rail transit (LRT) line along Hiawatha Avenue. He said MCDA is already involved, with staff assigned to work on development at each LRT station.

"I've always been a backer of LRT," he said. "The potential for development is there. The market will determine if it'll work or not. We can plan and be ready to act."

## Commercial nodes

Cramer said neighborhood commercial nodes are another citywide priority. Commercial development along Lake Street and Franklin, Broadway and Central Avenues has been made a priority by the city council and the mayor.

He said it may not work to expect continuous commercial development all along Lake Street. Instead, he believes the city should encourage strong development at various nodes and expect that development will flow out from there.

Cramer thinks it's tougher to bring about development at the smaller commercial nodes in neighborhoods. "Neighborhoods strengthen nodes and nodes strengthen neighborhoods," he said. "Certain nodes may make it, while others may

need mixed housing worked in with retail development."

"There is a role for public investment, but we can't dictate the winners and losers," he said.

## PPL

Cramer has had a three-month transition period to finish up projects at PPL and to participate in the search process for a new executive director. He expects his successor to be named by the end of June.

"It was a really hard decision to leave PPL," he said, but the MCDA position is a good fit and a good opportunity to return to the public sector.

"PPL will continue to be a really good partner to the city and MCDA," he said. "I'll have a chance to keep working with this organization and others like it."

*Dana Schroeder is editor of the Minnesota Journal.*

# Unicameral

Continued from page 6

**During the '90s changes in the structure have greatly increased the authority of the Speaker,** currently Douglas Kristensen, 44, a lawyer from Minden. The Speaker may now set the agenda and schedule the bills. Each member can pick one bill for priority consideration; each committee can select two; the Speaker can select up to 25. An effective Speaker may be urged to stand for a second two-year term. There is an Executive Board that manages the institution. Its members serve also as the Reference Committee, which assigns bills to committee. Legislators in each of the state's three congressional districts (basically Omaha, Lincoln and the rest of eastern Nebraska, and the western half of Nebraska) select two members for the Executive Board and three members for the Committee on Committees.

**There are no caucuses.** There is a power-struggle at the opening of every session, to establish the committee chairmanships. This establishes, or revises, the hierarchy for two-year period. The Speaker, the chair of the Executive Board and the chairs of the standing committees are chosen by the legislature as a whole by secret ballot of all senators at the beginning of the session. For this process there do appear something like caucuses, but, again, not of political parties or even of eastern-Nebraska and western-Nebraska. It's not seniority, or incumbents vs. new senators, either. In a sense it's a meritocracy. Lobbyists have learned to stay clear of this internal organizing process. Once the chairs are chosen, the Committee on Committees then proceeds to appoint the members of the 14 standing committees. All this is done the first week, often on the second day. And the groupings that form to decide who will run the institution do not last as a basis for the voting during the session on substantive bills. Groups tend to form and re-form from issue to issue.

**Minnesota questions**  
The questions Minnesotans asked in 1987 remain relevant today, given the differences between the two states and the two legislatures.

**How important is the size?** Size is probably the most important element of a workable legislative process. It simplifies the internal communication. Electoral change is reflected quickly. But it affects what the institution can do. It probably is harder to get things done in a legislature of 49 members: A small group can block legislation, if it is very determined.

**The fear here is that if you reduce the size too much, you will shrink too much that pool of**

substantive bills must be heard in committee. A bill goes only to one committee. If a bill would spend state money, the rules require there be attached an appropriations measure that is considered at the same time: e.g., LB57 and 57A(appropriation).

**When it comes time to act on a bill, the committee goes into executive session.** The feeling is that at some point the legislators must be able to talk candidly. The public does not attend; lobbyists do not attend. The press may attend and may report the decision to approve or not, but may not report the individual votes by which that decision was made. Members' votes are now reported when the bill is printed a few days later. A bill coming out of committee goes to the floor as introduced by its author. The first action is then to adopt, or not adopt, amendments proposed by the committee.

**On the floor a bill is considered and may be amended twice.** This procedural check-and-balance is to offset the structural "checks" missing in a one-house legislature. Structurally, Nebraska's legislature is a unicameral; functionally, in a sense, a bicameral. A bill comes up first on General File, where it must receive a majority (25 votes) to advance. If advanced, and after laying over for at least one day, it then comes up on Select File to be considered and amended again. If approved again it will come up, at least one day later, for Final Passage. Seven days must elapse between introduction and Final Passage. This schedule is not often suspended.

# Unicameral unnecessary, League said in '85 report

The Citizens League last looked at how the Legislature worked in a 1985 report, *Power to the Process*. The League committee that produced the report used the 1984 legislative session as a case study of how to improve the decision-making process and procedures of the Minnesota Legislature.

At that time the League did not identify "problems of sufficient magnitude to support a structural change as significant as moving to a unicameral body." And given the "lack of an institutional failure on the scale to warrant wholesale change," the League concluded a unicameral body was unnecessary.—*Phil Jenni, Citizens League finance director.*

**truly activist and high-quality legislators who carry the difficult policy bills.** I think a fairly high proportion is pretty activist, maybe 20 of the 49.

**Are there really no caucuses?**  
This is true. Some "groupings" are created by interests outside the Legislature: Allegiances, as on abortion issues, or on questions of interest to cattlemen, produce voting blocs. But again; on *those* issues. Omaha alone will soon represent a third of the Unicameral.

**Are your legislators successful in dealing with the governor and the bureaucracy or are they reactive to what the executive proposes?** My impression is that most governors do not propose much program. Certainly the governor in Nebraska does not. The last governor really to have a program got thrown out (Norbert Tiemann). The governor's budget is, of course, a program and policy document, but it is introduced with no real expectation that it will be enacted as proposed. The governor's substantive bills are usually treated pretty well; but, again, there are not many of them. As to the agencies, my impression is that the legislators have no difficulty getting them to respond.

**How is there time to draft the bills, if most have to be in by the 10th day?** We have a fairly intensive study process by the standing committees during the interim: hearings, tours, etc. In the fall legislators often come into Lincoln for a few days; see a football game, do some legislative work.

**How large a staff is there?** Not large. Each senator has an administrative and a legislative assistant. Each committee has a clerk and a counsel or research analyst. With

no caucuses there's, of course, no caucus staff. The institutional staff has five divisions: (a) the clerk's people handle the desk, the bill distribution, lobbyist registration, information; (b) eight attorneys draft bills; (c) a research division, with a library, researches legislative issues and impacts; (d) a fiscal section estimates costs and does fiscal notes; (e) an ombudsman, also used by the senators, hears citizen complaints about agencies. The Unicameral has a web site: (www.unicam.state.ne.us).

**Nebraska does have law-making also through the initiative process?** Yes, as well as for amending the constitution. It came in about 1912. You need about 100,000 signatures for the constitution, about 70,000 for a statute. We now have paid circulators. There are three to six measures on the ballot every two years. Some pass; some don't. Term limits approved by the voters have been thrown out by the courts. We also have a referendum process by which voters can remove a law, but it's not much used.

**What does it cost to get elected?**  
Maybe \$25,000, maybe up to \$50,000 in two or three hot races. Money is raised the normal way: We have a lot of PACs (political action committees).

**No other state has gone to a unicameral. How secure is it in Nebraska?** There is no movement to abolish it. Periodically there is a movement to make it partisan, which is never successful. My own sense is simply that it is very difficult any longer to find any real basis for a bicameral institution, now that the courts have thrown out any kind of representation other than population.

# Unicameral

Continued from page 1

of legislatures elsewhere. Norris had hoped they could be paid

## Unicameral push underway in Minnesota

There will be serious discussion in Minnesota this year about converting the Legislature to unicameral form.

A nonprofit organization—Minnesotans for a Single-House Legislature—has been formed, cochaired by two former state senators: George Pillsbury, a Republican, and Gene Merriam, a DFLer. It has a toll-free number (877-41HOUSE) and a web site (www.singlehouse.com). Chuck Slocum, earlier a Republican party state chair, is now organizing the effort, contacting editors, etc. Money is being raised in \$25,000 and \$50,000 chunks, Pillsbury says. Gov. Ventura is expected to support it: Wendy Wustenberg, his director of government relations, visited Nebraska this spring.

The change would require amend-

ing the Minnesota state constitution. Minnesota has no initiative process, so the Legislature must act to put a proposed amendment to the constitution on the ballot. Bills for this have been introduced: HF 159 and SF 43. Principal authors are House Speaker Steve Sviggum and state Sen. Allan Spear. The bills simply strike all references to the House of Representatives in the present constitution. They call for a ballot vote in November 2000, when all Minnesota legislators are standing for election. They provide for 135 districts (the present number of House districts). Following reapportionment in 2001, each would elect one "senator" in 2002. Everything else about how the new one-house legislature would work is left to be set by the restructured legislature itself, in statute or in rule.

This absence of specifics creates a

independent commission. There's likely to be a vote on one or the other in fall 2000.

**It is by conviction a citizen legislature, part-time.** As always, the trade-off involving pay and time

potentially dangerous situation. As the accompanying article makes clear, Nebraska offset the change in the structure of its legislature—the disappearance of the second house—by building new checks-and-balances into its process. It is clear, too, that other features of the Nebraska Unicameral—especially its genuinely nonpartisan character—are so different from present arrangements in Minnesota as to require very careful thinking about how a one-house legislature here would, in fact, work.

So it will be important to have an informed discussion. It is hard to transplant an animal successfully from its own environment to another, very different natural environment. It is equally risky to try to transplant an institution from one political environment to another.—*Ted Kolderie.*

affects who serves. Members of the Unicameral (all "Senators") may have other income. There are 13 women, 11 lawyers. Legislators have four-year terms, half chosen every two years.

**It is nonpartisan—an island of nonpartisanship in a state where the governor and constitutional officers are elected on a party ballot.** Nebraska is a generally Republican state, in which, curiously, Republican governors tend not to be re-elected. In the past decade some trend is visible toward party involvement in legislative campaigns: recruitment, consulting, brochure-design, etc.

**The legislature meets for 90 legislative (not calendar) days in the odd-numbered year and 60 days in the even-numbered year.** Legislators now tend to meet for four-day weeks. Bills carry over, from the long session to the short. Attendance is required and the requirement is observed. The old rule that bills are literally read has been relaxed: Long bills are now "read" only by title unless several members object.

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# Bus route competition lowers fares in Armenian city

**"Competition Reduces Rates on Some Minibus Routes in Yerevan."** So read the headline in the April 26, 1999, Aragil Electronic News Bulletin in the former Soviet republic of Armenia. Originally from the *Armenia Republic* newspaper, the story indicated that as a result of competition, the rates have dropped on certain routes in Armenia's capital city, Yerevan. The transportation costs on several routes have dropped in half, from 100 to 50 drams—which is now equal to the amount that the ordinary and less convenient bus charges. Today, 101 microbus routes are operating in Yerevan, serving virtually every corner of the city.—*Lyle Wray*.

**All those new parking ramps** popping up around downtown Saint Paul have been puzzling a friend, who remembers the policy in Minneapolis to keep new ramps in a belt around the central business district. The city is also trying to add back on-street parking.

"Are city people sure...really sure...downtown streets can handle the traffic those ramps create?" a friend asked a senior person in Saint Paul public works recently.

The city official looked at our friend for a while. "No," he said.—*Ted Kolderie*.

**Rail advocates** have long argued that the Twin Cities region needs to follow the lead of other cities by building LRT. But let's hope we don't follow too closely. The *Seattle Times* reports that the cost for building a light-rail line from Seattle to SeaTac has gone up by "hundreds of millions of dollars." Transit officials there are scrambling to find a way to cut costs to get back down to the project's \$1.8 billion budget. Options being considered include a shorter line and/or fewer stations.—*Phil Jenni*.

**A map in the Pioneer Press** the other day made clear what the "Hiawatha Ave. light-rail" project really is. It's an "internal circulator," a "people-mover" for the Minneapolis/Bloomington convention and visitor business (just in linear form).

It'll pick visitors up at the airport,

## Take Note

*Competition pales against these public affairs nuggets.*

take them to the Convention Center and related hotels downtown, take them out to the Mall of America, take them back to the stores downtown. If a casino ever does get built near the airport, the LRT will serve that, too. It has practically nothing to do with the travel demands of people who live in the metropolitan area.—*T.K.*

**A killer machine:** In the last few years, the snowmobile industry has taken a beating when it comes to vehicular safety. The 1996-97 snowmobile season saw 32 fatalities, and the Legislature responded by increasing regulation on the operation of snowmobiles.

But based on a comparison of total registered vehicles, it might surprise some that all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) have higher accident and death rates than snowmobiles. In 1998, a total of 13 people died on ATVs, with the victims' average age just 24. Six fatalities involved collisions with cars or trucks, five were caused by rollovers and two were caused when operators struck trees. Alcohol was involved in four of the fatalities.

The total number of accidents went down from 171 in 1997 to 154 last year. But according to the Department of Natural Resources, of the 154 ATV-related injuries, only one injured operator had an ATV Safety Certificate.—*Ron Wirtz*.

**A friend in New Jersey**, who agrees that confining young people to "adolescence" needs re-thinking (see May 18 *Minnesota Journal*), points out that in World War II 19-year-olds were flying B-17 bombers. Where do teenagers have equivalent responsibility today?

Someone else suggested a book by a teacher in California, Grace Llewellyn, written in 1991 to show young people there are some routes to advancement besides formal schooling. It's *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*; Lowry House Publishers, Eugene, Ore.—*T.K.*

**When evaluators look at "student**

performance" why do they look only at academic performance? That's like saying the only thing important about a car is its speed. Nobody believes that. Everybody wants other things in a car, too: good design, safety, reliability, economy, capacity. Parents have multiple objectives for their kids and for school, too.—*T.K.*

**Kids today!** They don't respect their teachers, they're unruly and inattentive, they talk back, they walk out of class whenever they feel like it. It's impossible to teach them. A conversation overheard in the teachers' lounge at Andersen School in Minneapolis or Little Canada Elementary or Hutchinson Middle School? Not even close.

The BBC reported (Feb. 11) on a survey of primary- and elementary-school teachers in Japan, in which 44 percent said they had witnessed "collapsed classes." Hiroo Shiga, a 50-year old primary school teacher, said he'd never seen anything as bad during his 30 years of teaching.

Shiga said the vaunted Japanese education system, in which a single teacher instructs a class of 40 to 50 pupils who listen obediently, is no longer viable. Kazuko Narui, a teacher and education consultant, said Japan is changing from a group-oriented society to an individualistic one. "You can't expect teachers who've always taught big groups to suddenly know how to cope with rowdy individuals," she said.—*Janet Dudrow*.

**Starting a charter school** is a real challenge. So people are always astonished by the desire of teachers to go there. Curious about this, National Education Association commissioned a study; and learned that, three to one, teachers would do it again.

A school that will open in Saint Paul next September, the Twin Cities Academy, needed about eight teachers. It got about 200 applications.—*T.K.*

**Trying to put a policy spin**, and a smile, on two trips to the dentist in the past 10 days, I was interested in the following data about edentulism (loss of all natural teeth) from the Center for Disease Control. West Virginia leads (?) the nation with nearly half of its people 65 or older having no remaining natural teeth. On the other end of the scale, only 14 percent of Hawaiians of that age group have lost their toothy smiles. Unfortunately, Minnesota was one of only four states where data were not available. The Dakotas and Iowa ranked 12, 13 and 14 nationally with 30 to 39 percent total tooth loss over 65. Wisconsin must have more dentists. It ranked 42 of the 46 states ranked; joining Hawaii, California, Oregon and Arizona in the less than 20 percent category.—*P.J.*

*"Take Note" contributors this month include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and Janet Dudrow, policy analyst at Dorsey and Whitney.*

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PERIODICALS  
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# Citizens League Matters

June 15, 1999

News for Citizens League Members

## Welcome

### New and returning members

Arnold "Bill" Aberman  
Donna Allan  
Darryl Anderson  
Janet Anderson  
Chuck Ballentine  
Diane Commers  
Todd and Karen Ferrara  
Bryce Hamilton  
Jane Hampton  
John Harrigan  
Rachel M. Hefte  
Mary Hepokoski  
Ted Johnson  
Mary Kennedy  
Joan Lapensky  
R.S. Leddick  
Anne Winslow Lindgren  
Steve Lund  
Mongsher M. Ly  
David Newhall  
Robin Rehm  
Phil Riveness  
Eddie Rogers  
Eric Schubert  
James K. Wittenberg  
Mary Youle

## CITIZENS LEAGUE

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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.

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.

## Mind-Openers conclude another successful season

After seven series, and a total of 25 individual meetings, the League's Mind-Opener breakfast series has concluded its 1998-99 season.

This year's Mind-Openers covered a broad range of topics, including affordable housing, Y2K and the state's budget surplus. Special thanks to the following individuals who shared their time and expertise as speakers:

### Thinking Outside the Box: Innovative Solutions to the Affordable Housing Crisis

**Tom Fulton**, President, Family Housing Fund; **Steve Cramer**, Executive Director, Project for Pride in Living; **Jim Stanton**, Developer and Director, National Association of Homebuilders; **Steve Thomas**, Program Director, Corporation for Supportive Housing.

### MN School Boards: Time for a New Lesson Plan?

**Tom Nelson**, Superintendent, Buffalo Schools; **Jim Walker**, Superintendent, North Branch Schools and **Don Helmstetter**, Superintendent, Spring Lake Park Schools; **Peg Swanson**, MN School Boards Association; **Wendy Wustenberg**, Farmington School Board member; **Sen. Larry Pogemiller** (DFL-Mpls.) Chair, Senate K-12 Budget Division.

### Retooling

#### Economic Development

**Steve Keefe and Gary Cunningham**, Co-chairs, Citizens League committee on the labor shortage; **Jeralyn Jargo**, MnSCU Targetted Industry Partnership; **Susan Haigh**, Ramsey County Board of Commissioners.

### Y2K: Y U Should Care

**Sen. Steve Kelley** (DFL-Hopkins) Co-chair, Year 2000 Legislative Task Force; **Jerry Podkopacz and John Roberts**, Year 2000 Team, Leonard, Street and Deinard; **Eric Utne**, Editor, Utne Reader and the Y2K Citizens Action Guide.

### Spending Smarter

**John Brandl**, Dean, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; **Jim Koppel**, Executive Director, Children's Defense Fund; **Rep. Steve Sviggum** (R-Kenyon), Speaker of the House.

### New Voices, New Visions

**Elwyn Tinklenberg**, Commissioner, MN Department of Transportation; **Christine Jax**, Commissioner, MN Department of Children, Families and Learning; **Jan Malcolm**, Commissioner, MN Department of Health; **Dean Barkley**, Director, MN Planning; **Ted Mondale**, Chair, Metro Council.

### Cyber Transist

**Jane Anderson**, Director, Midwest Institute for Telecommuting Education; **Darryl Anderson**, Telework Coordinator, MN Department of Transportation; **John Sanger**, Director, Tele-commuter Resources.

The League would also like to thank the following members for moderating one or more Mind-Opener meetings:

**Scott Brener**, **Linda Ewen**, **Marie Grimm**, **Peter Hutchinson**, **Shel Lang**, **George Latimer**, **Gene Merriam**, **Tony Morley**, **Pam Neary**, **Matthew Ramadan**, **Christine Roberts**, **Jane Vanderpoel**, and **Griff Wigley**.

Mind-Opener policy meetings, which are typically held on Tuesday mornings from Labor Day to Memorial Day, are a regular feature of League programming. They surface and explore emerging issues, provide depth and understanding to current issues and give citizens a chance to ask questions of public leaders.

If you missed one of these meetings and are interested in hearing what the speaker had to say, audio tapes of most of the meetings are available from the League office. Please call (612)338-0791 for details.

# Summer brings staff changes to the Citizens League

## Goodbye and Good Luck, Ron Wirtz

Always anxious to help with the state's looming labor shortage, dedicated Citizens League staffer Ron Wirtz has pulled off a two-fer, all within a few weeks of each other.

Taking the long-term view, he and his wife, Sarah, produced a bouncing baby boy, Jack Newton Wirtz, who will be ready to enter the labor force around 2020 or so, when some CL staffers will be collecting Social Security benefits, if there are any left to collect by then.

Ron also took the short-term view by filling a position at the riverfront offices of the Federal Reserve Bank. The economists and policy analysts there obviously convinced him their labor shortage was more desperate than that of the hugely overstaffed Citizens League office. His last day at the League will be June 25.

Wirtz leaves the League staff after nearly four years. A native of Wisconsin, he followed his then-fiancee Sarah to the Twin Cities after four

years in the Milwaukee area where he was editor of a community newspaper and taught at Marquette University.

During his tenure he staffed committees that produced these reports: *It Takes a Region to Build Livable Neighborhoods*, co-chaired by Don Fraser and Sally Evert; *A Competitive Place in the Quality Race*, co-chaired by Buzz Cummins and Jane Vanderpoel; *Baby Steps to 2030: A New Wrinkle on Aging*, co-chaired by Katie White and Kent Eklund; and *Help Wanted: More Opportunities Than People*, co-chaired by Gary Cunningham and Steve Keefe. Wirtz is currently staffing the committee on workforce training chaired by Roger Hale.

In addition to his committee work, Wirtz programmed the Mind-Openers for three years and was a regular contributor to the Minnesota Journal.

Good luck Ron. We're going to miss you.

## Hello and Welcome, David Chadwick

David Chadwick joined the Citizens League's staff at the start of June as our newest research associate. He will be replacing Ron Wirtz, who is leaving the League's staff at the end of the month.

Originally from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Chadwick moved to the Twin Cities earlier this year from Washington, D.C. While in Washington, Chadwick worked for **Senator Dianne Feinstein** of California, most recently as a legislative assistant for environmental and agricultural issues.

"After a few years of working and living on Capitol Hill, I decided it was time to return to the Midwest," said Chadwick, who now resides in Minneapolis. "Although I genuinely enjoyed working for the Senate, it was not always the best environment for really reflecting on public issues or thinking ahead of the immediate agenda. From that standpoint, I am really looking forward to being part of the Citizens League's work."

Chadwick is a graduate of Pomona College in Claremont, California, where he studied American politics and public policy. While attending Pomona, Chadwick spent a semester studying the British political party system at Oxford University.

In addition to working for Senator Feinstein, he has had internships with **Senator Tom Daschle** of South Dakota and the Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation group.

At the League, Chadwick will take over the staffing of the workforce committee and help develop and implement the League's 2000 legislative agenda.

Welcome aboard, Dave.

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## Welcome back, Gayle Ruther

Gayle Ruther, former Citizens League receptionist and research secretary, is back at the League. Ruther left the League a year ago to take a job closer to her home in White Bear Lake. But she found that she missed the excitement and stimulation of the League. The League was happy to re-sign her. In fact, we did not fill her position permanently. Several ads turned up no qualified candidates so we opted instead for a series of temporary workers hoping we would identify someone whom we could hire for fulltime work. We are delighted that she's bringing her friendly smile and demeanor back to the League staff

## Citizens League

## News

### www.citizensleague.net

Use of the League web site continues to grow. Average daily hits has doubled since last September, from 288 per day to 566 in April. Total hits for the fiscal year are now well over 100,000. Don't forget that materials from both of the current study committees can be found on the web site. If you don't have time to serve on the committee but are interested in the subject log-on to [www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net).

### Ballots due by June 29

All League members should have received their ballots for the annual election of the Citizens League Board of Directors. Eight of the 10 candidates will be elected to a three-year term beginning this August. Ballots are due at the League office by Tuesday, June 29. An Election Committee eagerly awaits your decision.

### Endowment Fund

In December, the League received a letter from the St. Paul Foundation informing us that income from the League's endowment fund was being increased to \$4,463 "because of substantial contributions made to this fund during the first half of the year." We're happy to report that the income has increased again—to \$5,849. Thank you so much to the 38 people who have contributed to the endowment.