

# MINNESOTA Journal

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"With ever increasing advances in energy-efficient technology, conservation efforts can continue to produce savings indefinitely. Moreover, these investments can be online in a matter of months, not years, as is the case with new central station power plants."

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## Technology as a tool for better public service

by David Fisher

Colleges, law schools and state governments have at least one thing in common. As much as they claim not to pay attention to annual rankings or report cards of their performance, they actually do.

Minnesota state government received a report card recently. The Government Performance Project, a biannual collaboration between *Governing* magazine and the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, graded the fifty states on financial management, capital management, human resources, managing for results, and information technology.

Minnesota received a solid "B" in information technology, as well as a solid "B" overall. Now, our commitment is to do better next time by surpassing the leaders in the use of technology in government — Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Utah, Virginia and Washington.

There is an interesting pattern to the rankings. Almost without exception, states that show strength in information technology score at or near the top in overall performance. This is an indication that technology makes positive things happen in all areas of government.

In Minnesota, as elsewhere, electronic government has existed largely in the fulfillment of public expectation. But it must be more than that. Public policy requires that we bring information technology to a far higher level of public relevance — meaningful in the daily lives of citizens, in business to government relationships, and in meeting the functional responsibilities of government. It really is about the accountability of government to its citizens.

Is this the coming of age for e-government? Can technology now play a more significant role in building a digital democracy? As the state's chief information officer and advisor to the gov-

ernor on technology issues, I can offer a qualified "yes." E-government is of age, but progress in real terms is not nearly as fast as we would like.

In Minnesota, we have an abundance of technological strengths. In fact, we have information technology systems to deliver at least some essential services inside government. Entity-wide systems, say *Governing's* editors, are in "good shape."

But *Governing* also found that "while the state [of Minnesota] provides much information online, it's not a national leader in electronic transactions." The magazine also quotes one of the state's technology managers saying, "Mostly, we don't have the support from the legislature we need. The legislature has not made that move to understand that technology is expensive and a new way of doing business."

Not all legislators in Minnesota fail to understand the potential of technology. Some have shown increasing sophistication and support. Still, the fact remains that too few are knowledgeable about what these tools can do, and fewer still understand the need for technology to deliver on important policy initiatives. The discomfort of lawmakers can translate into missed opportunities.

By now probably everyone in Minnesota has heard questions raised about the fitness of our state to compete in the 21st century. However, there has been little discourse on the true role of technology as a tool to achieve better governance, an objective that is tied to how each of us as citizens learns, works, and plays.

As a result of the dense, insider language used to describe technology, and because there is always greater interest in appropriating dollars for "tangible" programs, technology in Minnesota has become the stepchild of other, policy-based, initiatives. One of my key objec-

[www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net)

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## Conservation, renewable sources key to Minnesota's energy supply

by Dee Long

Rolling blackouts, stage three alerts, price spikes and triple digit percentage increases in retail costs of electricity. Are these West Coast phenomena, like orange groves and surfing? Minnesotans enjoy comparatively low electricity rates, our power outages are generally the result of inclement weather, and we have yet to deregulate our electric industry. So can we afford to be complacent about our power needs?

Analysts are warning that the state may need an additional 3,000 megawatts of electric supply, the equivalent of three new coal-fired or nuclear plants, before the end of this decade. (This is about one-fifth of Minnesota's current usage. One megawatt provides enough power to serve about 1000 homes.) If we are to avoid a capacity shortfall, it is critical to adopt an aggressive plan of action now. We can ensure a reliable, affordable and environmentally responsible energy future for Minnesota if we take immediate action to meet our future power needs.

### Efficiency investments are the cheapest and quickest new source of energy

In Minnesota alone, energy efficiency programs have saved over 2000 megawatts in the last decade. According to the Minnesota Department of Commerce, for every \$1 invested in conservation, we've saved \$3 to \$4 in electricity system costs.

But our conservation efforts must be expanded. Energy-efficient building designs and materials, heating and cooling systems, lighting and appliances are available but currently underutilized. Expenditures in conservation improvement programs by Minnesota investor-owned utilities have actually decreased substantially: from \$69 million in 1995 to \$41 million in 1999. With ever-increasing advances in energy-efficient technology, conservation efforts can continue to produce savings indefinitely. Moreover, these investments can be online in a matter of months, not years as is the case with new central station power plants.

### Clean energy sources yield a clean environment

Currently, three quarters of Minnesota's power is produced by the fuel sources with the worst environmental and public health impacts: power plants run on fossil fuels, mainly coal. Despite the fact that locally available resources, including wind, biomass and solar power, create enormous potential for renewable energy, renewable sources currently provide only one percent of Minnesota's energy. In contrast, the European Union gets about six percent of its energy from renewables and plans to double this by 2010. These renewable resources have much lower environmental impacts than conventional fossil and nuclear fuels. Furthermore, renewable sources are homegrown, thus improving the state's balance of trade. Other benefits include additional farm income, increased rural property tax revenues, and creation of local jobs in the rural economy.

Wind power, the leading renewable resource, could contribute an important portion of our new capacity. Minnesota Commerce Commissioner Jim Bernstein agrees that wind could provide 10 to 20 percent of Minnesota's energy needs by the end of this decade. Even assuming needed transmission upgrades, independent analyses by utility engineers suggest that obtaining ten percent of our energy from wind could actually save consumers energy dollars over other options.

### New technologies will build a 21st century system

Most of Minnesota's current energy supply is still generated by 1950's style "Big Smokestack" facilities. By employing modern, efficient generation technologies in place of these outdated plants, the need for the costly and controversial siting and building of large-scale base load facilities can be minimized. A new generation of smaller-scale, clean energy technologies is becoming increasingly available to provide part of the solution to our energy needs.

A modern, diversified system of energy development would incorporate distributed generation, cogeneration systems and

district energy systems. These technologies not only avoid costly investments in the transmission and distribution of electricity, but are far less polluting than the more traditional large-scale plants.

**Distributed generation** refers to the small, non-utility generation of electricity near the customers who will use most of it. Possible distributed generation technologies include micro-turbines, small wind or solar systems, and an emerging fuel cell technology, which should be available before the end of the decade.

**Cogeneration**, or a combined heat and power system, uses a dual production process to harness waste heat from industrial processes to generate electricity. New technological advances give cogeneration great potential for high efficiency generation with greatly reduced pollution.

The cities of St. Paul, Willmar, and Virginia all have **district energy systems**. These systems provide steam or hot water energy for water and space heating and cooling within a specific area and also co-generate electric power.

Energy technologies are a rapidly moving field. For Minnesota to be in a position to take full advantage of these advances, we must eliminate regulatory barriers and provide appropriate incentives for their adoption.

### Business as usual or a 21st century energy future?

We are at a crossroads in determining the direction of our energy future. We can move toward a new system of generation technologies, more reliable, more affordable and more environmentally responsible. Or we can continue to rely on the siting of large generating facilities, using fossil fuels that continue to create environmental and public health damage and economic uncertainties. According to Michael Noble of Minnesotans for an Energy-Efficient Economy, "There is only a crisis if we do nothing." The choice is ours. **MJ**

*Dee Long is director of the Environmental Tax and Incentives Program at Minnesotans for an Energy-Efficient Economy.*

# Viewpoint

From the Executive Director

## Losing energy on conservation?

by Lyle Wray

Several years back, during one of our seemingly six-month winters, my furnace went out. I called my regular furnace repair company and was told that I could get a replacement right away. When I asked about an energy-efficient furnace, I was told that I could get one but I would have to wait a while. Well, as we all know, waiting for a furnace in January is not a particularly appealing option when you live in Minnesota.

The recent headlines about rolling blackouts in California have cast a renewed light on energy issues in this country. And while California can often seem worlds away, energy issues are no small matter for Minnesota, either. (See article on page 2.) For starters, more than 10% of our energy supply is scheduled to go offline permanently in 2007, with the planned shutdown of the Prairie Island nuclear power plant.

To some the answer is simple—deregulation. Yet economist Alfred Kahn, architect of the Carter administration's deregulation of the airline and other industries, recently suggested that electric energy might be one legitimate exception to the deregulation trend. He argued that a vertically integrated and carefully regulated system – from

generation to distribution to consumer service – might be the way to go.

With or without deregulation, Minnesota will clearly have to boost supply, via at least one coal and several natural gas plants, as well as more wind power, in order to compensate for the loss of Prairie Island. This will not be an easy task. Generating and transmitting new sources of energy – from electric to natural gas – routinely raises significant financial, environmental and political issues.

But it is unlikely that boosting supply alone will be enough. The emerging agenda in California, and elsewhere, extends beyond building additional capacity from cleaner sources, to include renewed conservation efforts. In fact, California is already ahead of most states in the area of conservation. Minnesota needs to step up efforts on conservation, and we need to do it now.

Many of us remember the energy conservation campaigns of the Ford and Carter administrations. Unfortunately, as my efforts to obtain an energy-efficient furnace demonstrate, many of the practices developed in that crisis era failed to permanently take hold and there has been an abundance of backsliding on conservation ever since.

For example, according to ON Semiconductor, leaks from dormant home electronics account for as much as 25 percent of the average electric bill. Electronics in an average home – such as TVs, VCRs and stereos – drain over 100 watts of energy – even when they're turned off. The waste in dollars alone is estimated at \$3.5 billion a year, yet consumers remain unaware. Shouldn't our purchasing decisions be as informed about energy use as they are about screen size and sound quality?

Corporate research and development has created vastly more efficient home light bulbs. But they cost more in the short-term, and there is little effort to push the consumer over that up-front cost

**"Average Americans are driving escalating energy consumption with little apparent appetite for new sources, additional transmission capacity or conservation."**

with incentives to conserve. Increasingly popular lines of passenger trucks and sport utility vehicles remain exempt from fuel economy standards imposed on all other passenger vehicles.

Twenty-five years ago, when the line at the gasoline pump extended around the block, the bogeyman was OPEC. Today it is us. Average Americans (and "above-average" Minnesotans) are driving escalating energy consumption with little apparent appetite for new sources, additional transmission capacity or conservation.

By pointing out the risks of a poorly designed strategy, the crisis in California has caused many states to have second thoughts over their rush to deregulate electric energy. Meanwhile consumers have become more interested in reliability than rock bottom prices. The slower, more deliberate pace resulting from these second thoughts could be a good thing. But we cannot procrastinate long. We must overcome our short-term resistance and face the difficult choices and unavoidable trade-offs. We have to come up with a new mix of energy sources that are cleaner and more sustainable. Add to that a healthy dose of renewed vigor for conservation in both commercial and home applications, and the next time you need a new furnace you just might be able to get an energy-efficient one before frostbite sets in. **MJ**

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

### The Minnesota Journal

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tives is to change this trend and to upgrade the dialogue about the promise of technology.

The environment is right for further innovation and progress in e-government. In Minnesota, 50 percent of homes are connected to the worldwide web now, and we will be approaching 70 percent by year-end. More than 80 percent of these households conduct business – including the buying and selling of good and services – over the Internet. Minnesota is also following a national trend in the rapid rise of Internet access among rural households, nearly doubling from 22.2 percent to 38.9 percent in the last two years. What we know from all this is that broadband digital communications – and the Internet – will change every aspect of government. Communities will be even more demanding of how they get services from the government.

As for new patterns and the ubiquity of the Internet, I like to tell the story of the time I accompanied Gov. Ventura on one of his bus trips to rural Minnesota. Everyone in town generally shows up at these appearances to see, hear and touch the Governor. On a bright, winter afternoon, a tall farmer, sporting denim coveralls and what I thought was a skeptical stare, sauntered out of the crowd towards me. I hadn't a clue as to his interest. When he got nearer, he met my eyes, leaned back with his thumbs hooked behind his lapels, and uttered simply, "Nice website."

This one incident made its own statement about where we are and where we are headed. Today, more people, comfortable with the Internet, are asking government to offer convenience and cost-savings via the web. While we used to stand in line for licenses and other services, now we want to go online. Legislators must recognize that the forces of commerce and the demands of their constituents call for greater reliance on these tools to get things done – anytime, anywhere.

There is another force hindering this effort, and that is the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of government that is at once proprietary and inflexible. Government presently lacks the speed necessary to successfully implement e-government. Even for such straightforward matters as licensing an automobile, selling a house, or registering

the birth of a child, a number of different agencies must be involved requiring a number of different forms. And, rather than communicating with each other, each of these agencies expects users to communicate with them in turn.

The Minnesota Office of Technology (OT), a unit of the Department of Administration, now has a one-stop licensing initiative to provide each agency with a core enterprise-wide communications infrastructure. A winning example of its application is the recently introduced passenger vehicle license tab renewal process. Using a credit or debit card, citizens can now renew their vehicle license from the comfort of their home, business or school; anytime of the day or night; any day of the week. Partnering with the departments of Finance and Public Safety, OT created a platform that paves the way for similar on-line transactions across all agencies, including the departments of Finance, Natural Resources, Revenue, Trade and Economic Development, and Transportation.

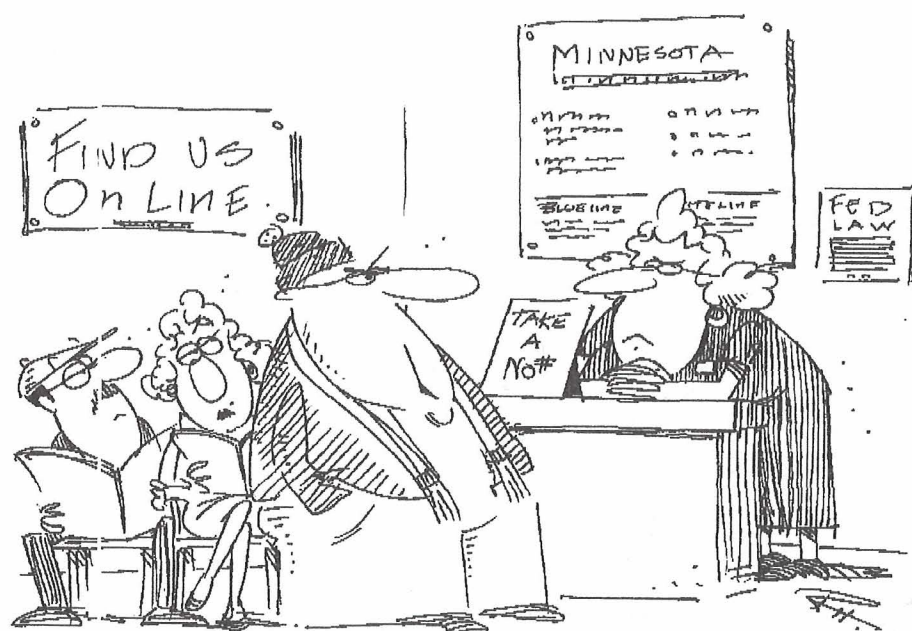
An initiative I am championing this legislative session is called the Technology Enterprise Fund (TEF). It is designed to fund three specific areas of technology development: pilot projects for electronic government services, interagency capabilities for data exchange, and statewide telecommunication networks in remote areas.

Funding would be derived from various revenue sources, including the creation of multiple funding streams from new dollar initiatives such as sales revenue from state information technology resources, as well as from general funds appropriated by the Legislature. The TEF would be administered with the assistance of a board comprised of members from both the public sector, including the Legislature, and the private sector. Once implemented, TEF would help accelerate our development of electronic government services, thereby promoting citizen access and satisfaction.

Already 72 percent of Minnesotans say they would be likely or very likely to use government services online. Currently 15 percent of Minnesotans say they take advantage of online government services. These numbers will continue to rise. A fully realized e-government is not a case of "if," but of "when."

The State of Minnesota is prepared to offer citizens what they want and deserve. The expertise and the technology are there, and we are gaining on our objective. That's the good news on Minnesota's e-government front. Now we must intensify the effort. **MJ**

*David Fisher is Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Administration.*



"I know you're on-line!...And I'm not taking a number... for heaven's sake, Agnes...I'm here to take you to lunch!"

# OnBalance

Views From Around the State

*Minnesota editorial writers engage in their own version of March Madness.*

The **Star Tribune** (March 2) sees reason for caution in the latest economic forecast. "Legislators should not put off problems this session under the assumption that they can be addressed with next year's surplus. But neither should legislators put every last forecasted dollar into increased spending and tax cuts – for the last forecasted dollar could well be one Minnesota never sees." "Both tax cuts and spending increases can proceed under this forecast. But the governor and legislators would be wise to opt for one-time rather than permanent actions where that is possible and reasonable."

The **Bemidji Pioneer** (March 2) also urges caution in future budget commitments. "Lawmakers should exhibit caution in tax cuts and spending. There is room to do both, but there is a great opportunity to make investments in infrastructure that may not be possible in future budgets. Especially important are one-time funding opportunities in education and transportation." "Minnesotans have welcomed checks for returned tax dollars, but many now wonder if it isn't the time to make key investments before the pot runs dry."

However, the **St. Cloud Times** (Feb. 28) argues, "A shrinking surplus is no excuse to give up on a potentially historic legislative session." "Lawmakers and Ventura should stand strong in the face of this economic news and remain committed to addressing the many fiscal challenges unveiled since early January."

The **Rochester Post Bulletin** (March 5) sees "compelling reasons for fully funding the CriMNet system. The criminal justice system costs \$2 billion a year in Minnesota and \$50 million per year is spent on dealing with repeat offenders. CriMNet is needed for a more efficient, as well as a fairer, system." "It is absolutely essential to make criminal records available where they can be used. If we want to fight

crime, we cannot do so with faulty, fragmented records. Full funding is a small price to pay for public safety and the fair administration of justice."

The **St. Cloud Times** (March 5) also supports a \$41.5 million appropriation for Phase II of CriMNet, but is urging legislators to "proceed cautiously." Acknowledging that CriMNet has potential, the Times believes lawmakers will eventually "have to decide if it's worth the \$260 million price tag. For now, though, there isn't enough evidence to make that long-term decision. The short-term answer, although pricey, is to spend another \$41.5 million and closely evaluate results before appropriating money for CriMNet's remaining phases."

The **Duluth News Tribune** (Feb. 24) has no such reservations. "As in other parts of his budget, Gov. Jesse Ventura has underfunded this effort. It will be up to the Minnesota Legislature to give it the priority it deserves." "Appropriate the \$41.5 million for Phase Two of the CriMNet project and get on with it."

"Criminals will continue to be one step ahead of law enforcement until authorities achieve easy access to a shared data base. The proposed CriMNet is an important first step," according to the **Red Wing Republican Eagle** (Feb. 26). "Lawmakers will be fielding many requests this session for individuals and groups who believe their cause is worthy of getting a slice of the state's projected surplus. This one, however, should be near the top of the list." "Public safety is one of the basic responsibilities of government."

The **Duluth News Tribune** (Feb. 20) sees an interesting red flag in the 2000 Census results and subsequent redistricting. "While Minnesota will hold onto its eight congressional seats, every other state in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River

basin will lose seats in Congress beginning in 2002." Noting Americans' penchant for moving water around and the fact that the water-importing states of the Southwest will gain seven Congressional seats, the paper predicts, "this loss of nine congressional seats could have a huge impact on those of us who depend on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system for our drinking water, industrial uses and shipping."

The **Red Wing Republican Eagle** (Feb. 22) is urging Minnesota to "get nuclear energy on [the] table." "Minnesota faces a shortage of electricity even with continued operation of Prairie Island. Close that plant, and the state will face a crisis," the paper predicts. "Instead of ignoring nuclear power, everyone should be finding ways to incorporate nuclear generation. Nuclear power ... is reliable, affordable and clean."

The **Pioneer Press** (Feb. 26) supports the recent report issued by Achieve, a national education group hired last year at the request of the Legislature to give an independent analysis of the Profile of Learning program. "Perhaps the most powerful recommendation from the academic panel is to establish a statewide deadline for adoption of all 24 standards." Permitting districts "to set their own number of standards, led to inequities in graduation requirements."

The **Mankato Free Press** (Feb. 12) thinks "legislators and schools need to continue looking for better ways to grade schools — individually and statewide — on how well they are doing at educating children." That's why the **Free Press** urges legislators to seriously consider a bill authored by Tim Pawlenty, R-Eagan, under which "the state would hire Standard and Poors to track where exactly public education dollars go and the corresponding return in student achievement." **MJ**



## Seamless citizen access to St. Paul city services

*The following is an excerpt from the remarks of St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman at the Feb. 22 Citizens League Mind-Opener. A full transcript of Mayor Coleman's remarks is available online at [www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net).*

Why are we even talking about e-government today? Why is it important? Bottom line is that I'm in the customer service business. Government is in the customer service business and it is a competitive business. People can choose to live anywhere, to grow jobs anywhere, to raise their families anywhere; and technology makes it even easier. You can telecommute and do your job from anywhere now. So I'm in a competitive business and I want people to choose St. Paul.

Technology and e-government is one of those things we have to do to meet citizen expectations. We're living at a time when people have what I call an "ATM time frame." If it takes you more than a minute to get your money back, you're mad at your bank. You have that expectation of service. And if citizens have it with their bank, they are going to have that expectation with their government. It's not acceptable to wait on the phone; it's not acceptable to wait a couple of weeks. Technology has created a whole different mindset.

What's the definition of e-government? Very simply, e-government is the use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, businesses, parents and employees. E-government is related to, but not synonymous with e-commerce. The benefit of e-commerce is that as we get used to doing things online, we're going to have a greater ease with it and greater expectations. I want to keep coming back to expectations. People will expect to be able to get their services online. If you can book an airline ticket online, and even pick your seat, all from home; you are going to expect to get your dog license without having to go down to city hall.

I saw an announcement last week that Internet usage has surpassed 56 percent of the population. This is a good thing. I suspect that in an urban center it is less than that, and I am very sensitive to the whole issue of the digital divide. That is a very critical issue. We have to make sure that access to the web and use of e-government does not separate people by race, or eco-

nomics, or neighborhood. We really have to address that. We can do it in some ways by making web access available in public institutions, in libraries or even fire stations around the city. As well as by working with the school district.

Our website debuted in 1994, the first year I was in office. We were posting council agendas, and even some video files long before a lot of places were even thinking about the web. But obviously there have been a lot of changes over the years. Our site has evolved into 2500 static pages, which is both good news and bad news. The question is, do people really use all that or are we overloading? Is there too much information out there?

It's great to say, I've got 2500 pages, but if folks can't figure out how to get to any of them, you've got a problem. People want it to be easy, if it is too complicated or takes too much time, you're in trouble.

The technological infrastructure that we're talking about today will be as important to our economic success as our physical infrastructure. Our ability to use the web, to have access, for people to be able to communicate, will be as important as the good job that public works does in plowing the streets. That's an expectation. People will use that web, just as they use the street – to do commerce, to connect with people, to interact. We have to understand that, have a vision and make it happen.

We are now putting everything on the web – that's the goal – all documents, all transactions, all licenses, all permits, and all types of community resources. We're working with a firm in Lowertown called GovDocs to put over a 100 documents online – loan/grant applications, special announcements, city council agendas, minutes, information on city parks and recreation.

What citizens can do is setup a personal profile, and say, 'I'm a block leader and I want to know about block permits, city council agendas, and the library newsletter.' Once you set up your profile, the information just comes to you automatically.

We did an announcement last week that homeowners and contractors can apply for permits online, about 25 of them. You can fill in the application online, put the payment on your credit card, and you get your permit back.

We do about 30,000 licenses out of our city licensing office. Now about 30 percent can be applied for online. I know this will have a significant impact on the quality of services. We were at an electrical contractor's office the other day and right there they filled out the information, put in a credit card number, and got the permit back. They said this would have taken them two weeks and a couple of trips downtown and now they've got it in five minutes. That's progress; that's change. That's moving into the 21st century.

It's fascinating because we're now able to tell what items people are looking for. The number one is city council minutes, and the third was city council agendas. What was second in between the two, was dog licenses – much more important, you know. We've got to get to people's real needs. In a couple of weeks, you'll be able to get your dog license online, your alarm permit online. We're going to keep moving for-

**"Citizens don't care that it's county courts—not the city—that handle parking tickets. One click should send you where you need to go."**

ward, and this summer you're going to be able to make your reservation at a municipal golf course online. We're looking at those things that the city delivers, and saying we're going to make it easy for you.

We're also marketing. You've got to communicate with people about what's online: online postcards from St. Paul, online surveys and polls. One of the things that we'd like to do is to use technology to hear from people, to listen to people. Technology is giving us the opportunity to create the New Hampshire-type town hall. Where citizens can come together and be heard. One of the biggest complaints citizens have is that nobody listens to them. Technology is going to allow us to listen. We're going to be able to put issues online and get reactions. I believe that is a very, very good thing.

Government has to figure out a way to

*Access continued on page 7*

## Access *continued from page 6*

work together. We're doing this in the city of St. Paul, but we've got figure out a way to work with Ramsey County, with the school districts. People pay their tax dollars but they don't break it down. Citizens don't care that it's county courts – not the city – that handle parking tickets. One click should send you where you need to go. It should say, "pay your parking ticket here." People shouldn't have to worry about the organizational separation.

So units of government have to come together and technology offers the opportunity to provide seamless service more easily than we've ever been able to before.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I think e-government provides us with the opportunity to build stronger citizens.

Democracy is about the ability of citizens to make decisions. And in order to make decisions, citizens really should be informed. That may be a little idealistic, but they really should be. One of the wonderful opportunities we have today, is to give people additional information, to give them access to resources, to give them the ability to connect with each other. We can use our website as a way to facilitate that, maybe by setting up community chats about a particular issue, or giving citizens the opportunity to talk to the mayor. So you'll see us doing more to ultimately change the relationship between government and citizens.

So I'll end on this note: I am a great believer that the great strength of our city lays not in the power of that magnificent river, and not in the institutions of government. It ultimately lies in the capacity to touch the heart and soul and the creative energy of the people in this community. That's what moves us forward. Cities' growth and development is going to be directly related to our ability to tap in to the talent and energy of everybody in our community. The more we can do to make sure folks aren't left behind; the stronger we're going to be. The more we can do to give people a sense that their voice is heard, that they can make difference, the stronger we're going to be.

Technology today, and governments doing the things we're doing to reach out, to connect, to make it easier; will make St. Paul a better place. That's the path that we're on and it is the path to a better future. **MJ**

## Connecting citizens to solve problems

*The following is an excerpt of remarks by online strategist Steven Clift at the March 1 Citizens League Mind-Opener. The full transcript of Mr. Clift's remarks is available online at [www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net).*

In 1998, I was invited to speak at a conference in Iowa. I was driving down there in this old car that I had, and my car blew up. I got picked up by a tow-truck and driven to a gas station and I noticed there in the station this computer in the garage. It was kind of greasy, with fingerprints all over it and it had Internet Explorer on it. So I had to ask, "Why do you have the web inside the garage?" The guy says, "Oh, my brother runs the Internet provider in this town. Do you want to use it?" I said sure. So we got online and I was able to send the folks in Iowa an email saying I'd been delayed, but I was going to rent a car and I'd be down.

The guy at the station was about my age, but with one less front tooth—nice guy, really nice guy—salt of the earth kind of guy. He asks me what I do, and I say I talk about the Internet and politics and citizenship. And he said, "Well, I'm running for president. I'm going to put up a web page and ...."

That was sort of the myth of the Internet. That you can use this technology to get more involved, to have a voice, more than ever before. And in many ways it still is a myth. But the fact that normal people have come to look at the Internet as an opportunity to be involved says that maybe there's something special here.

When I first got involved with e-democracy, I thought well it's just the letter "e" in front of the word democracy – pick whatever definition you like. To some people it's direct democracy or voting from home. Others think it is about raising campaign money online.

Now, I think it's really important to try to define a purpose for using the Internet in politics. Why would citizens want to come together to do this? I really do believe it is to fundamentally improve our lives, to improve the democratic life of our communities, our state and our nation. We need to use the Internet not just to yell and scream but to try to solve problems. I really want to build an environment online, here in Minnesota and beyond, for community action among free individuals. Where we participate on our time, from our homes and in meaningful way.

Our site is e-democracy.org. If you go there today, on the Minneapolis Community Forum people are talking about a candidate quiz. Someone put up a message asking about contract talks, and R.T. Rybeck, one of the mayoral candidates in Minneapolis, has responded already and given his position. People are talking about skating on Minneapolis ice, election tidbits, ruts in the street, MnDOT and Hwy 62 – "the conspiracy." So it is things that have to do with daily public affairs.

One of the more interesting things e-democracy is experimenting with this legislative session is a thing called Session Topics. Session Topics is a moderated email list and website on specific legislative issues. We have education, taxes, transportation and transit, privacy, redistricting and election reform. These groups have between 60 and 120 people, and at least a third of these people are actual legislators and their staff. We're trying to connect the lists into real politics, by saying, "How are decisions made now? How is power established? And how can we stick an online exchange right in the middle of that?"

I think there are ways you can do things around elections and other special events, but we really need to use the Internet in everyday public policy development, amongst those that show up. There's nothing wrong with that. We want it to be open, we want it to be accessible, we want to deal with the digital divide, but we want to build the infrastructure now. If we wait until everyone gets online by then the Internet will just be about shopping and entertainment. The e-citizens won't exist.

I do believe that interactivity, more so than anything else I've experienced online, is the most democratizing. It opens things up. It's useful to gain more access to information; it's useful to do advocacy. But if all the Internet is used for is to generate more email to Senator Kelly, more protest, without having the citizens face one another—we're really going to do a disservice to representative democracy and we're not taking advantage of the Internet's potential.



# TakeNote

## Policy Tidbits

*A fact here and some speculation there, and pretty soon the white space is only in our heads.*

**The US could eliminate** 40 percent of projected energy demand over the next decade by installing more energy efficient lighting in commercial buildings, adopting more efficient home air conditioners, using improved lighting designs in new and renovated buildings, tuning up and repairing existing home air conditioners, upgrading commercial heating equipment and air conditioners and optimizing existing commercial building management (*Business Week*, March 5, 2001, p. 46).  
— Lyle Wray

**Government-to-business services** on the web grew rapidly in the last year, according to a survey of government web sites by Forrester Research. But the survey also showed there is a long way to go. Only 11 percent of the surveyed sites allowed businesses to pay fines or sales taxes online, but that's up from 9 and 2 percent, respectively, last year. At the other end of the spectrum, the percentage of sites offering license applications increased from 36 percent to 56 percent and the percent offering building-permit applications increased from 13 percent to 38 percent. — Phil Jenni

**The Citizens League** is often (o.k., constantly) talking about property taxes. And while much of the nonprofit community is up in arms about Governor Ventura's proposal to allow cities to collect a payment-in-lieu of property taxes, we at the Citizens League recognize that we already pay property taxes — via our office rent.

For those of you who have never been to the League's office, we are located in a small suite on the 5th floor of the Thresher Square building. This seven-story building, located at the corner of Chicago Ave. and 3rd St. near the Metrodome, has an estimated market value of \$2.8 million. Taxes payable for the year 2000 totaled \$143,871. How much of that went to pay for the city services, such as police and fire protection and snow plowing, which make this a safe and accessible place to work? Not one dollar. How much went to pay for our share of the services provided by Hennepin County? Not one dollar. Of this building's \$144,000 property tax bill, roughly \$106,000 went to the tax increment financing district, \$33,000 went to the fiscal disparities pool and a mere \$4,000 went to the voter approved levy for the Minneapolis Public Schools. — Kris Lyndon Wilson

**In a recent** American Enterprise Institute forum on "The Permanent Campaign," Norman Ornstein reported on his own back-of-the-envelope research on the influence of opinion polling in presidential campaigns. He did a Nexus search of all newspapers and magazines, using the joint search terms "polls" and "American elections," and taking the first three days in August in the election years 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996 and 2000. In 1980 there were 28 joint mentions of those terms. By 1992 there were about 100 mentions.

The 2000 search caused Ornstein's computer to freeze because it couldn't count high enough. He had to search each day separately and found more than 1,600 joint mentions of "polls" and "American elections" for the three-day period. "It had become clear that polls are the driving focus of analysis of discourse in the print press," Ornstein said.  
— Janet Dudrow

**Speaking of political campaigns**, during the 2000 election season, broadcast TV aired a record number of ads, but provided viewers with an average of just 45 seconds a night of candidates discussing issues. According to a survey of the Annenberg School of Communications at USC, about a third of the 74 TV stations in the country's top markets made voluntary commitments to air five minutes of candidate-centered discussions each night. Just one station met that standard. WCCO was one of 23 stations that made the commitment, but its average of 1:36 minutes per night ranked 18th out of the 23 and 20th out of the entire group of 74. — P.J.

**East coast cities** are often hailed for their public transportation systems. But while these systems might be admirable to middle class travelers they don't seem to do much for poor people in inner-city neighborhoods. In Boston only 32 percent of employers with a high number of entry-level jobs are located within a quarter of a mile of public transit. And it takes a Boston welfare recipient at least an hour to reach only 14 percent of the employers in high-growth areas. To reach just half of the employers takes more than 2 hours, according to a 1998 study by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Many cities have addressed this so-called reverse commute problem by extending transit lines to neighborhoods and/or job clusters that were previously unserved. But these efforts have had mixed results at best.

Some officials across the country now believe that fixed-route systems will not help a large proportion of the welfare population. Commute times for car and van pools on the other hand compare favorably to the car. A Chicago study found that a one-hour car commute translated to a 70 minute van pool ride compared to a two or three hour transit ride. Established in 1991, the Chicago Pace van pool service now operates 325 vans and recovers 100 percent of its operating cost, while offering faster, more reliable and more flexible service than the fixed-route system. Perhaps there is a larger lesson here for the public transportation system. — P.J.

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

The Minnesota Journal  
Citizens League  
708 S. Third Street, Suite 500  
Minneapolis, MN 55415

PERIODICALS  
POSTAGE PAID  
AT MINNEAPOLIS  
MINNESOTA

## Welcome New and returning members

Charles Ballentine  
Jill Barclift  
Reggie Birts  
Louise Brown  
Thomas Clarke  
Karen Cole  
Carolyn Curti  
Steve Foldes  
Bob Hawbaker  
Linda Hopkins  
Claudia Johnston-Madison  
and John Madison  
Matt Kane  
Joanna Lees  
Shawn E. Lewis  
Ernest Lloyd  
Kate Magrew  
Tracey Muhich  
anne Olson  
Cherie Perlmutter  
Jeff Pope  
Helen Roberts  
Jeff Sigurdson  
V. J. Smith  
Zach Stabenow  
Jacquelyn C. Stewart  
Lynda Thorfinnson  
John Turnipseed  
Laurel Waldoch  
Katie Walker  
Julia Wallace  
Samuel White  
Joseph Wood

## CITIZENS LEAGUE

708 South 3rd St. Suite 500  
Minneapolis, MN 55415  
612-338-0791 Fax 612-337-5919  
[www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net)

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

Citizens League is an open membership organization. Suggested dues are \$50 for individuals and \$75 for families.

## Mental health committees complete their task

The Children's Mental Health Committee concluded its contract study for the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Health (MDH) in late January. The committee report, entitled *Meeting Every Child's Mental Health Needs: A Public Priority*, calls for a public health approach to children's mental health, with a focus on prevention and early intervention efforts.

The committee, co-chaired by Marcia Avner and Keith Halleland, met 13 times between October and January. A total of 22 individuals took an active part in the work of the committee. In addition to the chairs, they were:

Brad Brown	Judy McDonald
Lou Burdick	Todd Otis
John Colonna	Beverly Propes
Bright Dornblaser	Dennis Schapiro
Susan Fisher	Ann Cullen Smith
Emma Foss	Joy Sorenson Navarre
BraVada Garrett-	Robert Stepaniak
Akinsanya	Mary Tambornino
Virginia Greenman	Parker Trostel
Kay Gudmestad	Jack Wallinga
Roger Israel	

The Adult Mental Health and Employment Committee, which was also commissioned by DHS and MDH, concluded its work in late December. The committee's report, entitled *Mental Health and Employment: An Issue for One in Five Employees*, identifies successful strategies for addressing the mental health challenges of those working and for accommodating those with serious mental health problems who want to work.

The committee was co-chaired by Mike Christenson and Jan Smaby. A total of 19 individuals took an active part in the work of the committee. In addition to the chairs, they were:

Doug Berg	Steve Miles
Linda Ewen	Allan "Pat" Mulligan
Karen Ferrara	Nancy Schouweiler
Sharon Foss	David Sommer
Mary Ruth Harsha	Terry VanderEyck
Carolyn Jones	Shane Weinand
Fred Knox	Jonette Zuercher
Kelly Matter	
Mary McLeod	
Hillary Mercer	

Citizens League committees rely on testimony from the people who are experts in the field of study. Thank you to the following people who provided information to the mental health studies:

### Children's mental health resource speakers:

Don Allen, DHS, Children's Mental Health Division  
Jannina Aristy, DHS, Children's Mental Health Division  
Boyd Brown, Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health & Mental Retardation  
Dr. William Dikel, Consultant  
Dr. Norena Hale, Office of Special Ed, MN Dept of Children, Families & Learning  
Lois Harrison, DHS, Children's Mental Health Division  
Joel Hettler, Ramsey County, Children's Mental Health Department  
Kathy Kosnoff, Disability Law Center  
Vicki Kunerth, DHS  
Dr. James Moore, Southdale Pediatrics  
Judy Parr, Wilder Foundation  
Tonja Rolfson, DHS, Children's Mental Health Division  
Jose Santos, Director, La Familia Guidance Center  
Rob Sawyer, Olmsted County, Division of Children and Family Services  
Mary Jo Verschay, Ramsey County, Children's Mental Health Collaborative  
Jill Weise, DHS, Children's Mental Health Division

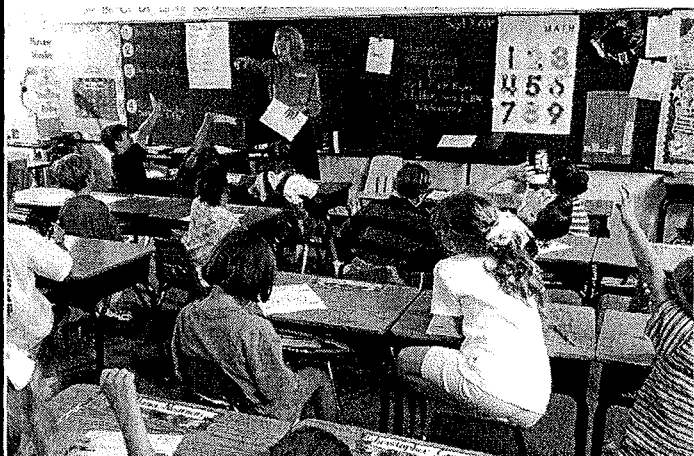
### Mental health and employment resource speakers:

Chris Bell, Attorney, Jackson Lewis Schnitzler & Krupman  
Sandi Brown, DHS  
Julie Brunner, MDH  
Clair Courtney, MN Department of Economic Security  
Sheila Hanschen, Mental health services consumer  
John Le Breche, Mental health services consumer  
Jan Malcolm, Commissioner, MDH  
Sandra Meicher, Executive Director, Mental Health Association of MN  
Jim Ramnaraine, Hennepin County Human Resources Department  
Susan Segal, Attorney, Jackson Lewis Schnitzler & Krupman

Thank you resource speakers  
and committee members!

## MIND-OPENER POLICY FORUM

### K-12 Education Reform in Minnesota



#### Are good intentions and more money enough?

The next Citizens League Mind-Opener series will focus on K-12 education issues, with special attention to accountability, system reform, and the future of charter schools.

As committee deadlines approach, Representative Alice Seagren (R-Bloomington), chair of the House K-12 Education Finance Committee, and Senator Sandra Pappas (DFL-St. Paul), chair of the Senate Education Committee, will provide legislative updates from their respective chambers. Joe Graba will also speak about a new endeavor called the "New Schools Project."

Tentatively scheduled for April 10, 17 and 24, each meeting will run from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the University Club, 420 Summit Avenue, St. Paul. The cost is \$15 for League members and \$20 for nonmembers and includes a buffet lunch.

Watch your mail or the League website  
([www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net))  
for additional information.

## Citizens League in the news

Signs of spring remain elusive and the weather continues to be unseasonably cold, but one of the surest indicators of the change in seasons is the heating up of Minnesota's policy discussions. So it's no surprise that the Citizens League has been in the news quite a bit in the last month.

In February Minnesota Public Radio sponsored an on-line forum on the University of Minnesota. League Executive Director Lyle Wray contributed one of six opinion pieces that set the tone for the subsequent discussion, which was expertly moderated by active League member Griff Wigley. The League's recent report on graduate and professional programs at the University, produced by a committee co-chaired by Jane Vanderpoel and Buzz Cummins, played a prominent role in the discussion. In addition, earlier League work on the state budget project led by Chuck Neerland and Becky Malkerson, stimulated a broader discussion of funding for all of higher education. You can find the forum on MPR's website at [www.mpr.org](http://www.mpr.org); click on the link toward the bottom of the home page called "A Universal Vision."

On Sunday, February 25, the *Pioneer Press* devoted its editorial page coverage to controversy surrounding higher education funding. A guest editorial by Lyle Wray was the featured opinion piece.

Ted Kolderie also contributed to the *Pioneer Press* editorial page on Thursday, March 8. The article was adapted from a piece that first appeared in the *Minnesota Journal* in August, 2000. Both articles can be found in the archives section of the *Pioneer Press*' website at [www.pioneerplanet.com](http://www.pioneerplanet.com).

Gary Cunningham, co-chair of the current study on school completion, represented the League at a March 2 press conference announcing a legislative bill to create a new state board to oversee charter schools. Sen. Sandy Pappas and Rep. Alice Seagren introduced the proposal. The press conference was covered by major print and electronic media outlets.

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### Members: Do you know where your Public Affairs Directory is?

The Citizens League Public Affairs Directory (PAD) is a must for anyone interested in the who and where of public policy in the metropolitan region. The PAD contains the names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers and email addresses of public officials in government, education, communications and public affairs. All for the low price of \$15 (plus \$1.50 for postage and handling). Order your copy today at [www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net) or call 612-338-0791.

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