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Military recruiters' school efforts criticized

By Patrice Relferford
Star Tribune Staff Writer

The discussion wasn't about patriotism or a lack of it. But in recent months, the Minneapolis public schools have received complaints from students and parents about aggressive military recruitment efforts. Those complaints have led to questions about the district's legal obligation to assist those efforts.

Some Minneapolis students have even received calls from recruiters on their 17th birthdays. For many, those calls were not a welcome surprise.

"I filled out an opt-out form at the beginning of the school year," said Kirsten Kohlhaase, 18. "I still got called."

The school board decided Tuesday to get answers from the district's legal counsel Tuesday.

Kohlhaase, a recent South High School graduate, and other students petitioned the board at the end of last school year to get the word out to parents and students about the opt-out forms.

"Something's wrong many students and parents haven't even heard about it," Kohlhaase said. "We're supposed to have the right to not be approached."

On Tuesday, the school board grappled with what steps, if any, should be taken to let parents know they can opt out of having their student's information given to military recruiters.

Public and private schools that receive federal funding must cooperate with military recruitment efforts under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The law also states that if schools fail to voluntarily turn over information such as students' Social Security numbers, birth dates and ethnicity, they will be visited by a military officer.

"The chief enforcer is that all of the federal funds we receive could be lost," Board Member Judy Iannier said.

Districts are required to make parents and students aware of the opt-out forms. Parents and students must fill out the forms each school year.

It's not as if nothing has been done. Board members said the district sent out notices about the waiver at the beginning of the last school year.

"It's a huge packet of stuff," Board Member Audrey Johnson said. "It can get lost in the shuffle."

Members hope to help parents by posting the forms on the district's website, making them available in school offices and printing them in multiple languages.

While some board members made it clear that the district must follow the law, others worry that once recruiters have a student's information, it's unlikely to be expunged from their records.

"Everyone knows military recruiters are going after students that are poor and students of color. That's many of our students," Board Member Peggy Flanagan said. "When I talk to students, it's what they're passionate about."

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THE REDESIGN

High point: The highest point will be three feet above the existing freeway.

Lane spacing: The carpool bus lane will be extended north to 50th Street.

Bus lane: I-35W won't have a shoulder lane for buses in the work zone, but a bus shoulder lane has been added to west-bound Crosstown from Hwy. 55 to I-35W that could benefit buses from the south on Cedar Avenue during construction.

ROAD from B1

Lane capacity will double

The revised design ordered by state legislators will double the capacity of the common section — to 12 lanes. It will separate the freeways and place them parallel to each other, positioning the lanes of I-35W in the middle, between the Crosstown segments.

According to MnDOT, the work will address problems of the state's most infamous bottleneck and cut crashes by 30 percent.

The design will be put out for contractors' bids next April. Construction is expected to end in December 2009. The estimated cost (which will be more precise when a bid is awarded), is \$240 million, including land purchases.

The revamped design presented the opportunity to keep traffic flowing. Original plans held work to the freeway's existing footprint, requiring sections to be closed while new lanes were being built. The new design extends construction westward to Penn Avenue S., adding land (25 properties) and freeing up space for two temporary bridges to carry traffic while new permanent lanes are built. These and other changes added \$2 million to the project cost.

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West Nile risk high in 2 areas of state

By Maura Lerner
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Minnesota health officials are warning of a possible increased risk of West Nile virus in western and central Minnesota this season.

The mosquitoes that carry the virus have been found in "unusually high numbers" in those parts of the state, the Minnesota Health Department said Tuesday.

Overall, mosquito populations appear to be down this season. But rain and recent hot weather have created ideal conditions for the one species, *Culex tarsalis*, most responsible for transmitting the virus in Minnesota, the department said.

So far, no West Nile virus has been found in mosquitoes tested in Minnesota this year, said Dave Neitzel, who oversees mosquito-borne diseases at the Health Department.

Mosquitoes carrying the potentially fatal virus have been found in abundance in western and central Minnesota.

But in routine sampling around the state, officials have noticed an increase in the *Culex* species. And they're urging people to take precautions, especially in the "open, agricultural areas" of the state where West Nile has hit heavily in the past.

Three people have been hospitalized with West Nile illness in Minnesota this year, and all three are recovering, Neitzel said.

But peak season is ahead.

"We are just entering the late summer period where we would expect to find the virus in mosquitoes," Neitzel said.

In one sampling site, in Murray County, mosquito-control officials have found three times the number of *Culex* mosquitoes as they did in 2003, the peak year for West Nile illness in Minnesota, Neitzel said. "The warmer it is, the more that West Nile virus can multiply and amplify in the mosquito and bird populations," he said.

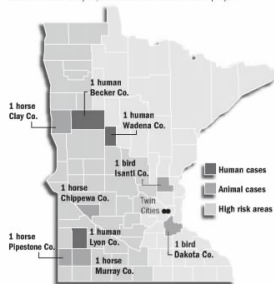
The virus can cause headache, high fever, muscle weakness, stiff neck, convulsions and other symptoms, and can be fatal in its most severe form.

To protect yourself, the department recommends these measures:

- Use mosquito repellent.
- Minimize outdoor activities at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most likely to bite.
- Wear long-sleeve shirts and long pants around mosquitoes.
- Eliminate mosquito breeding grounds (such as tires or buckets that collect standing water) on your property.

Risk areas for West Nile virus

Mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus have been found in high numbers in western and central Minnesota, putting residents there at greater risk this year, the Minnesota Health Department said. There have been no human deaths in Minnesota so far this year, but the virus has sickened three people.



Source: Minnesota Health Department.

breeding grounds (such as tires or buckets that collect standing water) on your property.

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Making science child's play



Shawn McLintire/Star Tribune

The Police Athletic Activities League hosted a Science Alliance Day in Minneapolis on Tuesday. Above, Shauna Simmons, 8, looked into an empty pingpong cannon, which had been used in an air pressure experiment. At right, Michael Olesiak, 6; Noah Simmons, 8, and Tiernan Lenius, 10, were wowed by the Physics Force, a University of Minnesota physics outreach program.



Duluth audit leak investigation is on hold for now

By Pat Doyle
Star Tribune Staff Writer

A call for a criminal investigation of the Duluth mayor for the premature release of a state audit has stalled after a county prosecutor said he lacked authority to conduct a probe and referred the case to the city attorney despite concerns about a possible conflict of interest.

Duluth City Attorney Bryan Brown said Tuesday that he won't consider the case until at least September. While he said it wasn't clear that he would have a conflict in considering action against Mayor Herb Bergson, he acknowledged, "The mayor can fire me."

Bergson said that he believes the case is closed. He denied violating any law in the release of a draft of a legislative audit report on a state- and city-financed program for treating compulsive gamblers.

The controversy involves a report critical of the Duluth-based Minnesota Council on Compulsive Gambling. Legislative Auditor James Nobles said the draft was sent on May 20 to Bergson for his review on condition that he not release it before the legislative auditor's office did. State law makes it a misdemeanor for public officials to unlawfully release draft reports from the legislative auditor's office, which is known for its strict confidentiality policies. The Duluth Tribune published a story on the report May 27, a week before its official release.

Nobles wrote St. Louis County Attorney Alan Mitchell that Bergson had taken responsibility for the News Tribune obtaining a copy of the draft and had apologized to the legislative auditor's office. "Nevertheless, this violation of Minnesota law should not be overlooked, and I request that you investigate it," he said.

and take whatever additional actions you determine appropriate," Nobles wrote.

Nobles said in an interview at the time that he sought an investigation from the county attorney because he wanted to avoid a possible conflict of interest in having the Duluth city attorney investigate the Duluth mayor.

Mitchell replied that the Duluth city attorney, not the county, had jurisdiction in the case and that he was forwarding a copy of the file to him.

Bergson declined Tuesday to comment on whether he admitted releasing the report prematurely, but said, "I can tell you I did not release the material for the purpose of it being used in a news story."

He wouldn't say whether he released it for another reason. The mayor said the city attorney had already reached an opinion. "The law was not violated, both in my opinion and in the city attorney's opinion," he said.

But Brown, the city attorney, stopped short of saying he had made a decision. "The information that I have so far doesn't indicate that any city employee has committed a crime," he said. "There's a big difference between a mistake and a crime."

Brown said there was no need to move quickly to make a final determination on whether to take up the issue, press charges or refer it to another city review.

"A matter of public concern is not necessarily an emergency," he said.

Nobles expressed skepticism about the actions of Duluth officials in the matter. "I think they just sort of thought they'd kind of pass the ball around until everybody forgot about it," he said.

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Review finds more vulnerable state websites

The five websites were quickly fixed after a finding by an outside consultant.

By Pat Doyle
Star Tribune Staff Writer

In the aftermath of reports that four state websites were vulnerable to hackers, a recently completed government review found five more government sites that had "critical vulnerabilities" to data thieves or cyber hijackers.

The state moved quickly this spring to fix the five websites after being told of the problems by a computer consultant hired by the state, according to a government memo released Tuesday. However, state officials can't tell how long the websites were vulnerable before the problems were fixed and can't

rule out that hackers penetrated them.

While there is no evidence that data on the servers identified with critical vulnerabilities had been compromised, there was a danger until these vulnerabilities were corrected, said the memo, written by state chief information officer Keith Payden to officials in Gov. Tim Walle's office.

The review underscores the need for improved security features for state-operated websites, Payden said. But he also said the review proved "somewhat reassuring" in that only five of more than 850 state websites were regarded as having critical vulnerabilities to hackers.

The Pawlenty administration didn't release the report on the review, done by the firm EDS on a \$90,000 contract. Payden said the report is hundreds of pages long and identifies the specific websites that were vulnerable, the kind of data that was exposed and measures taken to correct the problems — information he argued could be helpful to hackers.

Payden said that he, Commissioner of Administration Dana Badgerow and other officials had decided against immediate release of the report, but that they were considering releasing portions of it later if doing so wouldn't jeopardize security.

Two of the five sites regarded as having critical vulnerabilities had data that was accessible to hackers because

it wasn't encrypted. The state won't say what kind of data was accessible, only that it wasn't personal or financial information of state employees or members of the public.

The three other sites considered critical were vulnerable to being hijacked by hackers who could then use those sites to launch attacks on other websites.

Another 297 state websites were considered vulnerable to a lesser degree; someone might have been able to deface a site but not obtain data or hijack the site.

The five sites having critical vulnerabilities are in addition to the websites run by the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Transportation, the Health Professionals Services Program and the Board of Accountancy that

were found earlier this year to have security problems, Payden said.

The legislative auditor drew attention to the Public Safety website in April after the auditor reported that a page used by more than a quarter-million motorists a year to register their vehicles had long been vulnerable to hackers, exposing personal information to the possibility of tampering or theft.

The Star Tribune later learned that a Transportation Department website, which takes license plate and credit card information from motorists seeking passes to drive in freeway lanes, offered applications through an online link that was not secured against hackers.

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