



Spicer man to serve 90 days in jail for sexual assault. **A3.**

Gophers headed to Frozen Four. **B1.**

WILLMAR, MINN.

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Photos by Macy Moore / West Central Tribune

Singers with Sound Image perform during the West Central Connection Chorus Spring Show at the Willmar Education and Arts Center on Saturday in Willmar.

A closer look at Minnesota paid leave proposal

Program would come with big startup costs, generous benefits

By Christopher Magan
St. Paul Pioneer Press

ST. PAUL — Minnesota Democrats' ambitious two-year budget plan — with \$17.9 billion in new spending — includes the creation of a paid family and medical leave program that has hefty startup costs.

The joint budget targets announced by Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party leaders include nearly \$670 million to kick-start the benefit program. But a fiscal analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Budget Office found getting the program up and running could cost as much as \$1.7 billion.

The high costs are largely to allow the state to begin paying benefits around the same time it starts collecting revenue from a new 0.7 percent payroll tax. The tax on wages could be split between workers and employees.

The state Department of Employment and Economic Development would have to hire more than 400 workers by 2026 to administer the program, which proponents say would look a lot like Minnesota's unemployment system. Only about 24 percent of workers currently have access to paid leave and 13 other states have some type of benefit requirement on the books.

Measure draws supporters, opponents

The proposal is controversial with a bevy of supporters and critics. A broad coalition of unions, faith groups and health advocates back the new system while businesses large and small have criticized the measure as an unnecessary mandate and a new tax.

"This program does not create a need for leave; that need already exists," said Sen. Alice Mann, DFL-Edina, the chief sponsor of the bill, during a Thursday committee hearing.

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MUSIC IN THE AIR

West Central Connection Chorus entertains with a cappella favorites

By Macy Moore
West Central Tribune

Willmar

The walls of the Willmar Education and Arts Center echoed with song Saturday

evening as the West Central Connection Chorus held its annual Spring Show before a full crowd of friends, family and music lovers. This year's theme was "Our Favorites," where they

sang favorites from the past five years.

The performance featured the West Central Connection Chorus, along with Sound Image, Kordal Kombat and Coulee Classic.



Left: Members of the audience applaud singers with the West Central Connection Chorus during the Spring Show at the Willmar Education and Arts Center on Saturday in Willmar. Right: Members of the West Central Connection Chorus entertain the large audience of supporters during the Spring Show.



Legislators consider bill requiring ethnic studies

Working group would help develop statewide model curriculum

By Elizabeth Shockman
MPR News

ST. PAUL — When Rep. Samantha Sencer-Mura, DFL-Minneapolis, was in ninth grade, she took a world studies class at her school in Minneapolis. At the end of the year, frustrated that the class had only focused on Europe, she asked her teacher when they'd be studying the rest of the world. The teacher told her that study of other countries, continents or cultures would have to wait until Sencer-Mura got to college.

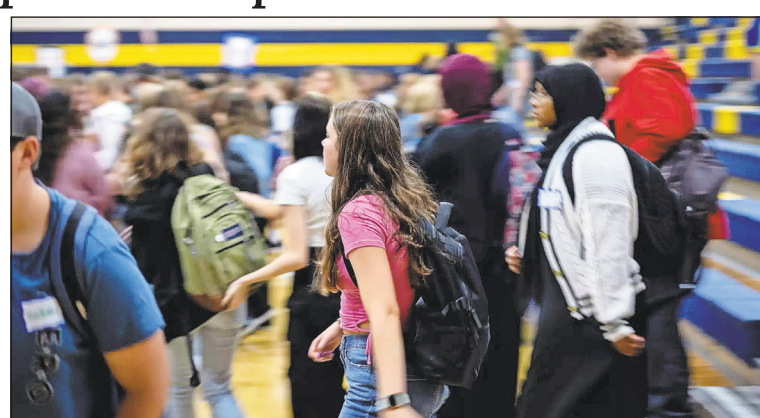
"That experience stayed with me," said Sencer-Mura who identifies as a fourth-generation Japanese American. "All students deserve to see themselves — their own cultures, communities and histories — within their education."

Sencer-Mura is currently sponsoring bill HF1502, meant to make ethnic studies available in all Minnesota high schools.

If passed in its current form, it would require all Minnesota district and charter high schools to offer an ethnic studies course by the 2026-2027 school year that can be counted toward social studies graduation requirements.

It would also establish a 25-member working group composed of teachers, parents, students, school leaders and community members to help the Department of Education develop a statewide model curriculum.

The bill defines ethnic studies as "the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color within and beyond the United States. Ethnic studies analyzes the ways in which race and racism have been and continue to be power-



Ben Hovland / MPR News 2022 file photo

A proposed bill would require all Minnesota district and charter high schools to offer an ethnic studies course by the 2026-27 school year that can be counted toward social studies graduation requirements.

ful social, cultural and political forces, and the connection of race to other groups of stratification, including gender, class, sexuality, religion and legal status."

An amendment to the bill removed the word "critical"

from that definition and makes ethnic studies a requirement that high schools provide, but does not make the class a graduation requirement.

"Students of all racial and ethnic identities benefit from ethnic studies... ethnic stud-

ies invites students to deeply explore the many diverse cultures and histories within our state and country and in doing so, gain a better understanding of themselves and their classmates," Sencer-Mura said.

A 17-year-old Spring Lake Park High School student, Ethan Vue, who is Hmong, spoke to journalists about why he wanted the bill to pass.

"In my U.S. history class, I learned about other communities that shaped our country. I completed the reading, assignments, answered the critical analysis quizzes and presented informative research projects. But then I'm left thinking to myself, when will my history be taught? When will my classmates learn about my community too?" Vue said. "Perhaps learning about our history in school could prevent racist attacks against the Asian American community."

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