

Senjem: Senate emphasis is education, infrastructure

By Dan Linehan

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MANKATO — Senate Majority Leader Dave Senjem said the Senate's bonding bill will emphasize higher education and state infrastructure more than Gov.

Mark Dayton's plan.

The city of Mankato's \$14.5 million request to renovate and expand its Verizon Wireless Center would seem not to fit in either category. But the city is making a bigger effort to link the civic center with its biggest tenant, Minnesota State University and its hockey teams.

When the Senate Bonding Committee, which Senjem also heads, came to town Tuesday, the city employed this new strategy.

It included moving the women's hockey team downtown, \$5.8

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SENATE: Civic centers may be secondary to infrastructure needs

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million in arena improvements and more prominent branding of the civic center as the home of MSU hockey. (See accompanying story.) After the meeting, Senjem said the state's interest — MSU as a tenant, in other words — would be important when the committee releases its bonding list.

"They've got hockey needs," he said, and fixing their arena would be cheaper than building new.

In past years (and vetoes) the city has focused on a lack of parity — other civic centers have received state money while Mankato's has not — but this time the city is focusing on its economic impact and the MSU connection.

The proposal, kicked off by an MSU employee and held in an MSU ballroom, was attended by perhaps 150 people, including many Mankato business people.

There were several other bonding proposals presented, but most of the crowd left after the civic center presentation.

Even so, civic centers are not likely to be first on Republicans' bonding list.

Infrastructure, especially old roads, bridges and wastewater systems, are likely to come first.

And the Minnesota Senate's bonding bill may end up being smaller than Dayton's. Senjem said a February 2011

forecast showed the state could safely borrow \$915 in the biennium. Last year's bonding bill was \$497 million, which would leave \$417 million for this year's, much smaller than Dayton's \$775 million proposal.

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