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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 9, 2004

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GOVERNOR PAWLENTY RECEIVES CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

~Troubling trends signal need for change, Governor says~

Saint Paul – Governor Tim Pawlenty today received a report from the Citizens League that makes the case for higher education reform to meet the challenges posed by changes in Minnesota’s economic, demographic and state budget climate. The higher education review and report was requested by the Governor earlier this year and includes broad recommendations to position Minnesota more competitively for the 21st Century.

“I am grateful for the hard work and commitment by the Citizens League committee,” said Governor Pawlenty said. “The facts point to a higher education infrastructure that has problems given the growing state budget pressures. Minnesota’s future depends upon a strong, efficient and accessible system of higher education. It’s clear from the report that strategic changes are essential to maintaining Minnesota’s edge.”

Over a period of six months and 12 meetings, a 33-member committee, co-chaired by Rondi Erickson of Duluth and Vance Opperman of Minnetonka, heard testimony and reviewed information from a wide range of organizations that have a stake in the future of higher education. It has been more than a decade since a statewide review of Minnesota’s higher education system has been conducted.

“For the last half century, Minnesota’s economy has relied on a significant competitive advantage in education, but there is trouble on the horizon,” said Opperman. “Our current success in higher education is not sustainable without significant adjustments in our approach.”

“Long-term trends indicate severe challenges in the not-to-distant future. Minnesota must find more innovative ways to address the achievement gap,” said Erickson. “A strong economy hinges on Minnesota’s capacity to develop a flexible and competent workforce.”

Governor Pawlenty said he will carefully consider the report while building his higher education agenda. He said he is particularly interested in recommendations that would more effectively prepare high school graduates for college-level work. The Governor also expressed interest in a recommendation to bring more clarity, focus and differentiation to the individual missions of Minnesota’s public colleges and universities.

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Governor Pawlenty said he will ask the Higher Education Services Office to further explore a strategy to develop a consumer-oriented accountability system to provide Minnesotans with clear and objective information about the performance of Minnesota's colleges and universities – a need identified in the report.

“We know Minnesota has a reputation for innovation in higher education,” said Governor Pawlenty. “Significant advances in online learning, in responding to changing workforce needs and in collaboration across institutions demonstrate the scope of Minnesota's commitment. We must do better to keep pace with global competition.”

The Citizens League is an independent, non-partisan, membership-based public policy organization. The League promotes the public interest of Minnesotans by involving citizens in studying public policy issues, developing recommendations, and working to implement the recommendations

A one-page summary of the report is attached. The full report is available on the Internet at <http://www.citizensleague.net>.