

## Keillor takes prairie-home pitch for funds to Washington

By Steve Berg  
Staff Correspondent

### Washington, D.C.

The Bard of Lake Wobegon visited Washington Thursday, bringing news of the mythical Minnesota hamlet and lobbying for money to buy technical equipment for "A Prairie Home Companion," the radio program that brought fame to his town.

Garrison Keillor arrived by jet plane, not by chartered bus, as had

the Lake Wobegon High School graduating class of 1958, the last official delegation from the town to visit the national capital.

He and Bill Kling, president of American Public Radio, which distributes the show to 285 stations across the country, asked legislators to pry loose a \$283,000 Commerce Department grant that has been pending for three years.

After a brief visit with House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, Keillor

made his way past a line of shiny black limos — you don't see those in Lake Wobegon — and into the Rayburn House Office Building for lunch with about 40 Capitol Hill officials. The event was sponsored by Reps. Tom Downey, D-N.Y., and Gerry Sikorski and Bruce Vento, D-Minn.

The rice, peas and a generic form of *Chicken Kiev*, mastered only by the House catering service and several airlines, appeared to make Keillor feel more at home.

Downey, who chairs the arts caucus, welcomed Keillor to the House of Representatives, reminding him that House members are like the children of Lake Wobegon — "all above average."

Sikorski, who claims that Lake Wobegon is in his district, thanked Keillor for "helping" in his reelection campaign. "Garrison doesn't know it, but we were boyhood friends," Sikorski said. "We

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stole apples together, and . . ."

After finishing his peas, Keillor was coaxed to the microphone. Summoning the courage to stand up and do what needs to be done, he peered at Sen. Dave Durenberger, R-Minn., and reminded him that Minnesotans are diligent eaters.

"Go ahead, you can eat if you want to," he said.

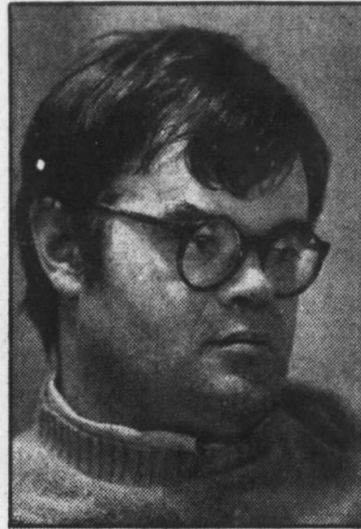
Moments later, Durenberger shook hands and dashed off. "He didn't even eat his salad," Keillor told the others. "Food was placed in front of the man and he just rearranged it. He wasn't brought up that way."

Keillor began a monologue on change in the modern world, lamenting over the recent baseball All-Star Game played in downtown Minneapolis under a roof and on artificial grass.

The Metrodome can't replace "a graceful old stadium in the cornfields outside Minneapolis," he said. There, the bratwurst was cooked over open coals, he said, not sealed in plastic hours before game time. And the beer was poured fresh, not served in plastic cups with Saran Wrap over the top. Now, he said, the beer is "long dead by the time it gets to you."

On a beautiful summer evening ("We have 2½ months a year of that in Minnesota") going into the Metrodome is similar to being punished by your parents, he said.

Keillor agreed to take questions "under oath" from the congressmen. Downey wanted to know if pending



Garrison Keillor

legislation would affect Bob's Bank or Bertha's Klitty Boutique.

Sikorski wondered if there were hazardous waste sites near Lake Wobegon.

Keillor said that a trip to the town dump had become a social event on Saturdays. "It's a place to hang around and see what other people throw out."

The money sought by Keillor and Kling would help buy remote and touring equipment for "A Prairie Home Companion" and a new transmitter for KJSN, the show's flagship station.

Other members of Congress attending the event included Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa; Democratic Reps. Jim Oberstar and Tim Penny of Minnesota, Charles Stenholm of Texas and Gerry Studds of Massachusetts; and Republican Rep. Bill Green of New York.