



State Representative District 26B

Patti Fritz

SESSION UPDATE

April 13, 2006

2006 Session Halfway Done

With the 2006 Legislative session half over, I thought it might be good to talk about the progress that has been made so far, and what is remaining to do. I anticipate that we will adjourn by the scheduled date of May 22.

Bonding Bill

This week, the House passed our number one priority, the bonding bill, recommending close to \$950 million in work projects. The Governor's bonding priorities had a total price tag of just over \$811 million, while the Senate calls for projects costing almost \$990 million. Although the House and Senate recommendations are surprisingly similar, the remaining step before passage of the final bill is to reconcile the differences and arrive at one bill that the House, Senate and the Governor can agree on.

Our main request was just under \$28 million for Phase II of the Faribault prison, which would include a new 416-bed living unit, renovation of a living unit into a long-term care housing unit, additional program space, additional intake/holding /watch center unit and demolition of a vacated unit.

Although this project was not recommended for funding in the House bill, I'm very pleased that the Governor did include this project on his priority list. I will continue to work with the Governor, the Chair of the Capital Investment Committee, Rep. Dan Dorman (R-Albert Lea) and with the legislators who will be named by the Governor to the Conference Committee on behalf of this project. This is a safety issue for our community and I'm hopeful it will be included in the final bonding bill.

Eminent Domain and Gopher Stadium pass

Two proposals the House passed last week were eminent domain reform and a University of Minnesota stadium bill. Both bills received overwhelming bipartisan support and it appears they also have the support of the Senate and the Governor, making it likely they will become law.

The eminent domain bill strengthens the protection rights of property owners and construction of a new Gopher stadium supports the rich tradition of the University of Minnesota and provides economic growth by attracting students to the school and fans to the campus, as well as creating jobs.

Health Care

There has been almost no action on health care this session, which is quickly becoming one of the major issues facing not only this generation, but future generations, as well. Whether it's the rising cost of health care, inade-

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
PATTI FRITZ

239 State Office Building
100 Martin Luther King Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

(651) 296-8237

1-800-292-0012

rep.patti.fritz@house.mn



quate health insurance coverage or limited availability, health care issues challenge us all.

Last week, the state of Massachusetts brought both political parties together with business, doctors and insurers and found a way for nearly all citizens of that state to obtain health insurance. Minnesota needs to follow this example and bring all parties to the table for a serious discussion about solving our state's health care crisis.

Budget Surplus

Even though this is not a budget year, there is a modest state surplus that the Legislature can spend. I believe the people of Minnesota deserve the real credit for this surplus and I would like to see some of this money given back to them. The Governor significantly cut Local Government Aid (LGA) to balance the budget, leaving many communities with no choice but to raise taxes to cover city services such as police and fire departments. I think a reasonable way to spend some of this surplus now is to fund some restoration of LGA.

One area of concern with regard to the state budget is the tobacco "fee" that was passed last session. This fee is currently being challenged as being unconstitutional; if the Supreme Court upholds the ruling and overturns this tax, a sizeable hole will be left in the state budget.

Education

There are some education bills that have been introduced in both the House and Senate. I support a bill in the Senate that would offer financial incentives to schools if they reduce class sizes. One of the unfortunate results of the inadequate funding for education is that schools have had little choice but to increase class sizes to reduce costs; I believe this bill would be a good way to address this.

I don't support legislation that would require schools to spend 70% of their budget in the classroom, cuts to Head Start and shortcuts to teacher licensure.

Clean Water Legacy

Legislation that is designed to protect our lakes and rivers, the Clean Water Legacy bill, is moving through both the House and the Senate. This bill would fund testing, monitoring and restoration of water quality and has wide bipartisan support. The difference of opinion lies in how to fund this important work.

A bill passed by the Senate would increase the state sales tax to fund a variety of programs - including Clean Water. The House version would take a portion of the existing sales tax. Both bills would provide one-quarter of a cent of the sales tax for cleaning up our impaired waters.

CREP II

I was disappointed in the support given to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) II. CREP leverages federal money to enhance state conservation programs and was successful in the MN River Valley. The current program focuses on SW, NW and Southeastern Minnesota. The state was seeking \$30 million to meet the needs of the program. The Senate provided no funding in their bonding bill and the House only allocates \$2.7 million. I am hopeful that funding will be provided to make this worthy program effective.

If you have questions or feedback about any of these issues, please feel free to contact me. You can call me at 1-800-292-0012, write to me at 239 State Office Building, St. Paul, MN 55155 or email me at rep.patti.fritz@house.mn.

REPRESENTATIVE PATTI FRITZ WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

**239 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155
(651) 296-8237
1-800-292-0012
rep.patti.fritz@house.mn
www.house.mn/26B**