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State Representative TINA LIEBLING

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

APRIL 4, 2006

U of M-Rochester Proposal Heard in House and Senate Committees

I was very encouraged by the progress last week of the bill to fund the first stage of the U of M-Rochester expansion. The bill passed the Senate Education Policy Committee and had its first House hearing in the Higher Education Committee. The House Committee held the bill for possible inclusion in the Omnibus Higher Education bill—although there was some discussion about whether the chair intended to have an omnibus bill. I hope this does not mean that House leadership is holding it for use as “leverage” in some final package.

Some people are concerned because the 2003 funding cuts to the MnSCU and U of M systems have not been restored. Student debt is climbing, and recent federal funding cuts will make this even worse. Still, I believe we must seize the opportunity to invest in these programs that are so important to our future economy even as we continue working to restore higher education funding and provide opportunity for all.

Despite earlier rhetoric, the plan is not to start a new, four-year university. In fact, the request—only \$5 million this year—is very modest in relation to the entire higher education system. Our goal is not to duplicate or replace existing higher education in Minnesota, but to create new academic opportunities that will fuel the economy of the future. U of M-Rochester will offer interdisciplinary programs in bioscience and technology that are not available elsewhere, enhancing opportunities for the entire state.

The Rochester Higher Education Development Committee is doing a great job explaining this vision. I am optimistic about our prospects for funding this session, and I will continue working with other Rochester area legislators to build support.

Adopting California Car Emissions Standards to Fight Global Warming

I am sorry to report that the bill to establish California car emissions standards in Minnesota is dead for the session. The bill would have set the first standards in Minnesota for tail-pipe emissions of carbon dioxide, the gas that causes global warming. I was disappointed that the Senate Environment Committee—on a close vote last week—failed to advance the bill.

Minnesotans are noticing that we can't ice fish or ski like we used to because record warm winters are becoming the rule. Four of the last nine Minnesota winters have been among the nine warmest on record.

Carbon dioxide emissions are the primary known cause of global warming. In 2002, California became the first state to set standards for tail-pipe carbon dioxide emissions, which will go into effect for the 2009 model year. Ten states including Massachusetts and Oregon have adopted these standards.

Some people have expressed concern that cars may be more expensive if we implement the California standards, but any increased cost would be easily recovered from the higher fuel efficiency of these cars. More fuel-efficient cars and trucks would also reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

But the true bottom line is the cost of doing nothing. That cost is too high. I will reintroduce this bill next session.



Librarians and staff from the Stewartville and Rochester Public Libraries met with Representatives Tina Liebling and Andy Welti on Thursday to talk about initiatives before the legislature this year.