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# State Representative TINA LIEBLING

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

APRIL 13, 2006

Dear Friends,

We are now more than halfway through the 2006 Legislative Session. With the House passage of the bonding bill this week, I thought this would be a good time to recap the progress of the session so far.

The bonding bill is our main task this session. With the House and Senate bonding bills on their way to conference committee, we're on track to finish the session on time by May 22.

Action at the Capitol will increasingly shift from committee rooms to the House floor. Many of the issues below will be voted or decided on in the coming weeks. I welcome your thoughts on these issues or any others that are on your mind.

Warm regards,

### BONDING

2006 could be another successful bonding year for the Rochester area. Our Bioscience Development Center proposal, Regional Public Safety Training Center, and Olmsted Waste to Energy Facility funding made it into both the House and Senate bonding bills. I will continue working to get the funding to complete the National Volleyball Center into the final bill.

### U OF M-ROCHESTER EXPANSION

I'm optimistic about prospects for passage of the first stage of the U of M- Rochester expansion this session. Last week I told you that I hoped our bill would not be used for leverage to get votes for other things. This week, our bill was included in the House Omnibus Higher Education Bill, which is on its way to the House floor. Besides funding our proposal, this omnibus bill would repeal the statement of legislative intent to pay for at least 67% of instructional costs at public colleges and would repeal the requirement that funding be based on enrollment. These provisions would hurt students in Rochester and all over the state. This bill will be debated on the House floor where amendments can be made before a final vote is taken.

## **BUDGET AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF**

On Tuesday the State Supreme Court heard arguments on the tobacco tax/health impact fee. If the court rules that the fee/tax violates the tobacco settlement our state's "surplus" will vanish. If the court upholds the fee/tax we will have the good problem of deciding what to do with the money.

Property taxes have risen sharply because property owners are paying for more of the services the state used to pay for, from schools to county jails. I would like to see targeted property tax relief for those lower-income property owners and renters—many of them elderly—who have been hit hardest by the increases. Then we must reform our tax system to make it fairer overall. While everyone likes to get a check in the mail, the current House Republican proposal to refund 10% of property tax payments across the board does not address the long-term inequities of our system. It would also send almost 70% of the money to the metro area. It is time to stop balancing our budget with shifts, tricks, and gimmicks and then buying off the voters at election time.

## **HEALTH CARE**

While access to quality health care is the top concern for most Minnesotans, there has been little progress on health care this session. One issue under discussion is how to handle the large surplus in the Health Care Access Fund, which is used to finance the MinnesotaCare program. The money in this fund comes from a 2% tax on the health care providers. I sponsored a bill that would put the Health Care Access Fund in a "lockbox" and lower the provider tax when there is a surplus, but my bill did not receive a hearing. If we can't lower the tax, we should keep the promise to spend the money on health care for those with low incomes—not steal it to balance the budget so the Governor can say he did not raise taxes.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Top environment bills this session include the Clean Water Legacy Act and a constitutional amendment to dedicate an increase in the sales tax to environmental funding and the arts. The House will likely vote soon on whether to put this amendment before voters on the November ballot. The Clean Water Legacy Act, making progress in both the House and Senate, would fund the testing, monitoring, and restoration of water quality in our lakes and rivers. I hope that we will also take action this year to greatly reduce dangerous mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants in Minnesota.

## **STADIUM**

Last week the House passed the bill to fund a new U of M Football Stadium through an annual \$9.4 million state contribution over 25 years. This is a new proposal, rolled out only a few weeks ago, that increases state support for the stadium by about \$50 million. While a new stadium for the Gophers would be nice, I do not think it is a priority for the state. It is sad that we are committing so much money to a football stadium while the Higher Education Bill proposes to leave more college students behind by cutting state support for their education. And just think what that money could do in Rochester!

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