



# State Representative **TINA LIEBLING**

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

## **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

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Dear Friends,

The regular legislative session has drawn to a close, and we immediately convened into a special session. Although I would like to be finished, it is important to continue until the work is complete.

Lawmakers at the Capitol are very aware that the public is watching. The negotiations between leaders in both bodies and the governor must continue until a reasonable compromise is reached. We are all hoping that this will happen soon. In the meantime, I will not be accepting additional payments that legislators are entitled to in connection with the special session.

We have had many successful compromises so far this year, including passage of a good bonding bill, a comprehensive public safety bill, and a bill to raise the minimum wage.

Of course, there have been disappointments too, as when the governor vetoed the historic, bipartisan transportation bill that would have been a huge boost to southeast Minnesota's roads and bridges. That said, the governor's recent demonstration of flexibility makes me optimistic that there can be agreement on the remaining issues, which include bills to fund our public schools and nursing homes.

Serving you in the legislature is a great privilege. I really appreciate all your calls, letters, e-mails, and our brief conversations when I see you in Rochester. Keep them coming!

Warmly,

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## **2005 LEGISLATIVE SUCCESSES**

We passed a bonding bill to create jobs and invest in Minnesota's economy.

These investments were largely overdue because of the partisan meltdown of the previous year. This bill invests \$945 million in bonding projects across the state, including funding for a Mayo Clinic/U of M genomics research facility and nursing and health laboratory space at Rochester's University Center.

We made progress toward controlling the epidemic of methamphetamine addiction and the scourge of meth labs.

The final bill is weaker than the one that left the House when it comes to control of the precursor drugs, but it contains substantially more money to treat this terrible addiction. It also contains more money for battered women's shelters, crime victim services, probation services, and other vital areas of public safety.

We raised the minimum wage for the first time since 1997. This will have a profound impact on the hundred of thousands of low-wage workers in the state.

CON'T

We saved about 1700 Minnesotans, mostly women, from losing their court ordered support. I am pleased to report that my bill to permit the Department of Human Services to continue collecting support payments passed both the House and Senate without a single dissenting vote. These

collection services mean financial survival for recipients who are often elderly, disabled, or victims of domestic violence.

In addition, local legislators worked in cooperation to secure \$3.2 million for planning and implementation of Rochester's higher education future.

## REMAINING WORK

### BUDGET FIX

With a \$1.16 billion budget deficit, we must either cut healthcare again and continue under funding our public schools, or find more money. About two days before the end of the session the Governor made a significant offer to find more money by adding 75 cents to the price of each pack of cigarettes sold in Minnesota. This money would help fund public education and healthcare.

After years of annual budget deficits and cost cutting, I am pleased that the governor recognizes Minnesota's need for more revenue. The governor's plan contrasts with the Senate plan, which proposes a temporary tax increase on the top tier earners in the state. Under the Senate plan, Minnesotans earning between \$162,000 and \$597,000 a year would keep 92% of the combined state and federal tax cuts they have received since 2001. A typical single filer with an income of \$200,000 would see her tax bill increase only \$36 under the Senate plan. House Democrats also have a budget plan, which calls for a combination of budget cuts along with cigarette tax increases, more modest income tax increases (only for those earning over ¼ million dollars per year), and closing some loopholes that help corporations avoid paying their share of taxes. The toughest negotiations are over how much to invest in education and healthcare and how to pay for those levels of investment.

### CHILDREN'S FREEDOM TO BREATHE ACT

This bill would protect young workers (under 18) against secondhand smoke by prohibiting child labor in any establishment while smoking is permitted.

### CLEAN WATER LEGACY

To ensure that future generations can enjoy Minnesota's great outdoors, we need to identify the impaired waters in the state and take steps to clean them. In addition, we must implement a plan to fulfill the requirements of the federal Clean Water Act. I'm sure that every legislator agrees with these goals. What we don't all agree on is who should pay and how much. As the bill is currently written, the costs would fall most heavily on homeowners and small business and move away from the principle of "polluter pays." Environmental groups, business leaders, lawmakers and others are working together to find a compromise.

### HEALTHCARE

You don't have to be one of the 77,000 Minnesotans who have lost their healthcare coverage since 2001 to know that health insurance is quickly becoming unaffordable for many

Minnesotans. Families are faced with rising co-pays that rapidly outpace any increase in their wages. The House Republicans support the Governor's budget recommendations for healthcare that would mean the loss of affordable healthcare coverage for another 26,000 Minnesotans, which they say is necessary in order to control costs. Trouble is, while the plan might balance this year's books, it compounds the problem in future years as more uninsured Minnesotans come to our hospital emergency rooms and clinics unable to pay. Dropping working Minnesotans from health insurance is both unkind and unwise. In the end, the cost is passed on to you and me.

### K-12 EDUCATION FUNDING

Rochester schools have been making cuts almost every year for the last 10, and next year will be no different if the legislature and governor do not step up to the plate. The governor's latest plan-supplemented by newly proposed cigarette money-would increase education spending significantly, but also depends on \$140 million in property tax increases and almost a \$100 million in shifts. The Senate would increase funding by 5% this year and 4% the next without shifts or gimmicks-such as property tax increases. I applaud the governor for his commitment to education funding, but I believe that the state should follow through on its responsibility to fully fund our kids' education and give every Minnesota child the opportunity to succeed.

### TRANSPORTATION

The transportation bill would have brought at least \$36 million in new transportation dollars to Rochester and Olmsted County over the next 10 years. The bill brought together rural and urban legislators from both parties. All regions of the state stood to gain, while no one got all that he or she wanted. While I personally thought the gas tax increase should be smaller I voted for the package in the spirit of compromise because we badly need to get something done for roads, highways, and transit in Greater Minnesota as well as in the Twin Cities. It is important to note that gas taxes and tab fees are really user fees because the money is constitutionally dedicated to highways. The gas tax has not been raised since 1988, while our state has over \$1 billion in unmet transportation needs every year.

The Governor and House and Senate members will now have to go back to the drawing board and come up with a transportation funding plan that is acceptable to all parties. I will continue to work in a positive, cooperative way to get the job done on transportation funding for all of Minnesota.