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State Representative **TINA LIEBLING**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

MAY 6, 2005

Dear Friends,

This week, the House continued its work on the large Omnibus Finance Bills on a variety of areas of state government. This week's omnibus bills were the Agriculture Policy and Finance Bill, the Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Bill, and the Education Finance Bill. The House also passed a bill to raise the minimum wage for the first time in eight years.

In this weeks update, I talk about the House Omnibus Education Finance Bill and the Minimum Wage Bill.

It is a great privilege to serve you in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Please keep those calls, letters, visits, and e-mails coming.

Warmly,

REP. LIEBLING VOTES 'NO' ON HOUSE EDUCATION BILL

In last week's edition of my legislative update I described the House Democratic Education plan-a plan that calls for honest solutions to address the budget crises experienced by so many of our state's school districts. As you know, funding for Minnesota schools has not increased for three years and was actually cut last year for the first time ever. Every representative has heard the message that we need to do better for our kids' education but there are very different approaches to solving the problem.

This week the House debated and narrowly passed the Omnibus Education bill on a vote of 70 to 63. The bill does include some increased

funding but it is not enough to fill the hole created over the last three years.

The bill relies heavily on revenue shifts and includes \$112 million of property tax increases to pay for our public schools. Even with the funding in this bill, the Rochester school district will have to cut its 2006-7 budget by about one million dollars on top of the \$3.2 million in cuts already scheduled for 2005-6. This bill does allow school districts to go to the voters for additional funds from property taxes and to impose some tax levies without voter approval.

Although Rochester property owners have been generous in the past, property taxes are inherently unfair. Some of our citizens are in danger of

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losing their homes if property taxes continue to rise. I stood on the House floor and told the body that it is wrong to finance our schools in this way because relying on property taxes to fund our schools makes for huge inequalities across the state. All of Minnesota's children need and deserve the opportunity to succeed.

I would have liked to see some bipartisan give and take between the Republican plan and our House Democratic plan, but it did not happen. The House Democratic plan would increase per pupil funding by 5% in each of the next two years, provide an additional 5% for special education in the second year of the biennium, dedicate funding for gifted and talented programs, and fund voluntary all-day kindergarten. The plan would also make significant investments in early childhood programming, which is the best investment dollar-for-dollar that our state can make to ensure our youngest citizens' future success. In Rochester, the Democratic plan would provide an additional \$959 per pupil in state aid over two years, \$369 more than the Republican plan. It is interesting to note that the Minnesota Senate last night unanimously passed an education bill similar to the House Democratic plan.

REP. TINA LIEBLING SUPPORTS INCREASE IN MINIMUM WAGE

I am pleased to report this week of the passage of a dollar increase in the state's minimum wage in the House. The bill, SF3 passed on a vote of 84-50. This bill has been introduced in the House every year for the last six, but was not even given a hearing until this year.

This bill will help hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers across the state. The current minimum wage has not increased since 1997, and in that time, its buying power has decreased by 20%. Under this bill the minimum wage will increase from the current rate of \$5.15 an hour to \$6.15 an hour beginning August 1, 2005. (For those working for small employers-under \$650,000 gross revenue--the increase is from \$4.90 to \$5.25 per hour.)

Most people recognize that \$6.15 per hour is still not a living wage. A worker still would not be able to adequately support a family even with the increase, but it will help. We need to continue to increase the minimum wage on a regular basis, not wait for 8 years to pass, to even out the increases for employers and help employees maintain and improve their buying power.

There is some misinformation about who the low-wage workers in the state are. 73% of minimum wage earners are over the age of 20; 66% of them are married. Additionally, 63% of them are women. This bill will also send a message to those low-wage workers-many working in restaurants, nursing homes, and hotels-- that we value the work they do.

I believe that increasing the minimum wage is a good investment in our economy because people at the bottom of the income ladder spend every dollar they earn. Fourteen states have increased their minimum wage above the rate of the federal minimum wage. Of those states, over half are outpacing the national average for job growth.

The Senate has passed the Minimum Wage Bill as amended by the House, and it now awaits the Governor's signature.

TALK WITH TINA!

*Share your ideas and concerns with
Rep. Liebling at an informal meeting*

**Saturday, May 14, 2005
12:00 pm - 2:00 pm**

**Rochester Public Library, Room A
101 2nd Street Southeast**