



CONTACT

Tina LIEBLING

State Representative

Office:
393 State Office Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155
(651) 296-0573
Toll Free
1-800-339-9038

Home:
P.O. Box 6332
Rochester, MN 55903
(507) 289-4664

E-Mail:
rep.tina.liebling@house.mn

Webpage:
www.house.mn/30A



State Representative TINA LIEBLING

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

APRIL 7, 2005

Dear Friends:

Welcome to the latest edition of my Legislative Update. As you have probably noticed, I have decided to change the format a bit. I hope you find it to be an informative, timely and easy to read update on the goings-on in Saint Paul.

The big legislative news items from this week are the budget resolution and the final passage of a bipartisan bonding bill, now awaiting the Governor's signature.

It is a great privilege to serve you in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Please call, write, e-mail, and visit whenever you have a comment, question, or concern.

Warmly,

The Budget Resolution

The budget resolution was the big event on Tuesday, March 29. As I described in my last newsletter, the budget resolution set the parameters for the two-year (biennium) budget. The House leadership put forward a resolution that caps state general fund expenditures. I share concern with many of my colleagues that the ceiling may place legislators in a situations where public education can only be fully funded at the expense of healthcare, or vice versa. In an attempt to increase flexibility in the budget debate, Reps. Dan Dorman and Mindy Greiling offered an amendment to raise the budget cap by \$358 million dollars, which I supported. The amendment failed by 72-61, on an almost-partyline vote.

Rochester legislators are asking for \$3,200,000 to improve higher education in Rochester and for \$30 million over the next two years for startup

operations for the Mayo-U of M Bioscience Partnership. Where will the money come from? We need to have more debate, not less, about our priorities for the state. I will continue to work for a balanced and reasoned approach to the state budget, that focuses on meaningful investments in public education, both E-12 and higher education, and healthcare.

In the budget process, the Governor and the House leadership have raised taxes and are raising them again. They did so by creating a budget that depends on raising fees, property taxes, and tuition at state colleges and universities. The Governor's budget calls for \$441 million in property tax increases. How does that meet the test of the "no new tax" pledge?

I am calling for honesty in the budget debate. It is time to have an honest discussion of how much the state needs, who should pay, and

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how much. I am a co-author of a bill that requires fees passed by the legislature to be called what they are - a tax. (Ronald Reagan once said that "fee" is spelled T-A-X. In that, we have bipartisan agreement.)

The Bonding Bill

On the bonding front, the House-Senate conference committee has reached an agreement on a bonding (borrowing) bill that spends about \$945 million dollars on projects all over the state. Although Rochester did not get every project we wanted, we did secure funding for three important projects: \$21.726 million to build a three story "condo" on Mayo's Stabile Building for the research activities of the Mayo-U of M Genomics Partnership, \$12.7 million to build health science classrooms at RCTC, and \$2 million to help Olmsted County build a third burner to keep trash out of the local landfill and turn it into energy. I am as pleased as I can be to see these projects approved, especially the RCTC project that I sponsored and lobbied hardest to get. It was gratifying to be part of the final bipartisan agreement and passage in the House.

I will be even more pleased when shovels hit the dirt for the three projects. Construction means jobs for construction workers, more opportunity for more students, and research that will improve lives and bring more prosperity to our state. Estimates show the bill might produce as many as 12,000 good-paying jobs across the state.

Spousal Support

Last week I told you about my spousal support bill, which clarifies that the Department of Human Services may collect spousal support payments when no there is no child support order. The bill was heard last week in the Civil

Law Committee and passed with no dissent. I could almost hear the sighs of relief from all over the state, because this bill means the difference between financial survival and economic disaster for as many as 1700 people - mostly women - who are elderly, disabled, or victims of domestic violence. The next stop for the bill will be Jobs and Economic Development Committee, where Chairman Gunther has promised me a hearing. A companion bill is making good progress in the Senate under the sponsorship of Senator Becky Lourey.

Annexation Bill

We often read in the paper about township residents up in arms about annexation, but Rochester residents are not as aware of the issue. This is unfortunate, because it has a huge impact on us and on the state as a whole.

As Minnesota's population grows, homes and services must be built. The state's policy is that urban growth should occur in cities, rural development in rural areas. This makes sense: if we spread our population all over the landscape we get poor use of land and poor environmental stewardship.

Annexation is the process by which land intended to support urban growth (or, in many cases, where there is already growth) becomes part of the city. An orderly process by which Rochester can manage the growth around its borders is critical.

My bill on this topic would make the process fairer and less expensive for cities, but the issue is controversial because it removes some control from townships, whose land may be annexed. Mayor Ardell Brede testified for the bill and so did Gary Neumann, Rochester's Assistant City Administrator. The committee took the bill under consideration along with other bills on the subject.

**Please feel free to call or write if you have ideas or concerns
you want to share about state or local issues**

I can be reached by phone at: 1-800-339-9038 or 1-651-296-0573

**by mail at:
393 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155**

by e-mail at: rep.tina.liebling@house.mn