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State Representative TINA LIEBLING

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

APRIL 14, 2005

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the latest edition of my legislative update.

With the successful passage and signing into law of the bonding bill, attention has shifted back to the \$1.16 billion budget debate.

Tough times certainly do require tough decision making, but I am concerned that we must craft a budget for our priorities as a state, particularly education, both E-12 and higher education, and healthcare.

In order to be able to adequately craft a budget that addresses the deficit and funds those things that we expect our state government to provide, we must have reliable and complete information about where our money comes from and where it goes. That is why I have co-authored a series of bills that I like to call my Honest Budget Initiative.

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,

Honesty in the Budget Debate

The state budget and current shortfall of \$1.16 billion is the biggest challenge that we face this year. Did you know that when the state sets its budget it counts on inflation in the money that comes in but does not count inflation in expenses? That's right. A law passed in 1998 took inflation off the books, but only on the cost side of the ledger.

Everyone knows that the price of essentials like gasoline, utilities, and college tuition goes up every year. That is why I have co-authored HF10, which calls for including inflation as a factor in our budget process. We can always decide to cut back on a program or service, but

we need to recognize the increasing cost of holding our own. I believe this is a more honest approach to the budget debate.

The second step in increasing transparency and honesty in the budget is to be honest about where the state gets its money. When the state increases the "fee" on everything from fishing licenses to seniors in nursing homes and uses the money to balance the state's budget, that is a tax. That is why I have co-authored HF2178, which says that a tax by any other name is still a tax.

Finally, the House voted this week on a resolution that set the "Budget Targets," the maximum limit for spending in each of thirteen

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budget areas. I voted NO because the process left too many unanswered questions. House Leadership constructed the targets as "Option A" and "Option B." The first option funds state government under the assumption that the Racino gaming bill will not pass. The second option includes \$200 million in Racino profits from a venture with the private owners of Canterbury Park. Either way, House leaders could not explain what would be funded in this budget and what would be cut. I believe that Minnesota can do better.

Comprehensive Childcare Initiatives

I am pleased to report that I am a co-author of a bill that, if passed, would help thousands of Minnesota's hardworking families.

Studies have shown that the best investment we can make is in the education of our youngest children. However, during the 2003 session, the legislature cut funding for childcare assistance and froze payments to childcare providers. This had a devastating impact on many working families with young children as about 10,000 Minnesota children were cut from the program.

The cuts were so deep that Mississippi families now have more access to childcare assistance than Minnesota families. That is not a good place to be. According to the Children's Defense Fund, Mississippi ranks 50th in the nation in the overall wellbeing of children.

Many of my colleagues and I believe that this is the wrong direction for Minnesota. That is why I have co-authored the Child Care Access Bill (HF1329), which will

increase access and availability to affordable childcare services in the state.

The Child Care Access Bill is good for families. It will increase access to affordable childcare for working families by limiting co-pays for qualifying families to 14% of their income. It is good for children. It will provide incentives for childcare providers to improve their skills so children get stable, reliable care that helps them get a good start in life. The bill is also good for taxpayers, because it allows low-income parents to work and support their families.



(L to R) Governor Pawlenty, Rep. Andy Welti and Rep. Tina Liebling at the signing of the bonding bill

Bonding Bill Signed by Governor

The big news this week is that the Governor signed the bonding bill. Early this week, I was pleased to join the Governor and my colleague Rep. Andy Welti at the bill signing, held in Coon Rapids.

TALK WITH TINA!

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

**Saturday, April 16, 2005
12:00 pm - 2:00 pm**

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