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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

WEEKLY SESSION UPDATE

2005 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BROUGHT ABOUT RENEWED BIPARTISANSHIP

The new improved spirit of bipartisanship fostered by new and senior members alike is a major accomplishment that benefited residents of our area and the state as a whole. We passed a comprehensive bonding package to make investments in our communities, in our colleges and universities, and in the process created as many as 10,000 new jobs for the state. We passed legislation that increased the minimum wage, which had not been increased

since 1997 and had dropped in purchasing power by 20% as prices these lower-income Minnesotans face for housing, health insurance, and transportation increased dramatically. We passed a bill that is tough on dangerous offenders and another that confronts the growing issue of methamphetamine production and abuse in the state. Even the transportation bill vetoed by the Governor was a bipartisan compromise and success.

EDUCATION FUNDING CENTRAL IN SPECIAL SESSION DEBATE

Strong support for education, our students and our classrooms--from early childhood to higher education--is the best investment that the state can make. We have fallen woefully behind in our support for our public schools, and without a significant investment, our children will pay the price. All of us have witnessed the teacher lay-offs, increasing class sizes, and reductions in class offerings that threaten our historically world-class public education system. I am proud of the plan crafted by the House DFL Caucus that would

increase school funding for 5% in each of the next two years. It also includes an additional 5% for special education, dedicates funding for gifted and talented programs, and funds voluntary all-day kindergarten. I am the chief author in the House of both the 5%-5% plan and voluntary all-day kindergarten.

Under our plan, the Robbinsdale school district would receive \$15.398 million in new money, or an additional \$994 per pupil. Hopkins schools would see an additional \$8.841 million, or \$962 per pupil. Our plan is the only

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one that would completely stop the cuts to our schools.

I believe that our aggressive but balanced and honest plan for education raised the bar significantly. Since the release of the House DFL Education proposal, which the Star Tribune coined “a good idea,” we have wit-

nessed the Governor and the House Republican caucus increase the overall funding in their proposals. Certainly the end product will be a compromise; and I feel confident that our schools will see a significant increase in much needed state revenues.

BIPARTISAN TRANSPORTATION BILL A MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT, DESPITE VETO

We must begin to seriously address the needs of our transportation and transit systems in the state and significantly in the metro area. In a truly bipartisan effort, the House Omnibus Transportation Bill was amended to provide the immediate, dedicated funding necessary to stop the cuts to Met Transit and to make substantial investments over the next ten years to improve our transportation system to meet our current and future needs.

The Governor chose to veto this bill, and without a change in course, our roads and transportation systems will continue to deteriorate. The Minnesota Department of Transportation released a report saying that \$1 billion of new funding a year, every year in the next ten years, would be necessary just to

remain at our current level of congestion and keep up with the maintenance of our present infrastructure.

In recent years, we have enjoyed some success in forwarding transit options in the state with the successful inclusion of Northstar Commuter Rail in this year's bonding bill and the impressive ridership of the LRT line. However, accomplishments will fall far short of their promise if we do not have funds available in Metro Transit to pay for operational expenses and the busses that will feed into these transit systems. The transportation bill would have invested \$7.8 billion over the next ten years to address our current and future transportation needs.

WHAT WILL SPECIAL SESSION BRING?

Certainly a special session was not the outcome that we wanted for this legislative session. That said we have enjoyed many more bipartisan compromises and accomplishments over the course of the regular session. Are there disagreements? Of course. But I believe if we continue down this course of cooperation and compromise during special session, we will accomplish good things for the state, for education, and for healthcare.

In the special session the focus will largely be on the work remaining on taxes, education, health and human services, jobs/economic development and natural resources.