



State Representative

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At the Capitol with Rep. Steve Drazkowski

A BUSY FIRST WEEK AT THE STATE CAPITOL

By Steve Drazkowski

State Representative, District 28B

The first week of the 2008 legislative session is in the books, and in no way did it go by quietly. As this is my first experience taking part in a regular legislative session, I was somewhat unsure of what to expect. I can report there is rarely a dull moment, be it with constant committee hearings, visits from constituents and lobbyists, and floor sessions.

The week kicked off with Governor Pawlenty's annual State of the State Address, which was held in St. Cloud. This was the first time I've attended the Governor's event, and I must say I found it exciting to hear first-hand about the Governor's vision for our state.

First and foremost, the Governor stressed that lawmakers can accomplish much this session, but warned them not to overreach by proposing tax increases. I think that's prudent advice. Minnesota currently faces a \$373 million budget deficit, and that number is likely to rise significantly when the updated economic forecast is presented at the end of the month.

When financial times are tough, most families spend their income on needs, not wants, and live within their means. There's no reason state government should operate any differently.

And with that in mind, the very next day the Legislature went and approved a tax increase proposal as its first accomplishment of the year.

The bill, known as the dedicated funding amendment, allows citizens to decide whether they want to raise their sales taxes in order to provide more funding for Minnesota's environment and the fine arts.

If approved by voters this November, the bill would amend Minnesota's Constitution in order to increase funds for clean water, wildlife, natural areas and the arts. This would mean an increase in Minnesota's sales tax by 3/8 of one percent, which is expected to raise more than \$290 million per year over a 25 year period.

Specifically, 33 percent of the increase would be used for wetlands, prairies, forests and habitat for fish, game and wildlife; 33 percent for water quality in lakes, rivers and streams and

groundwater protection; 14.25 percent for parks and trails of regional and statewide significance; and 19.75 percent for arts, arts education, arts access and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage.

As an avid hunter, I understand just how critical it is to ensure that our habitat and our waterways are protected for future generations. But this is not the way to accomplish this goal.

Using the Constitution to leverage a tax increase is just not a good idea. Doing this takes revenue away from our General Fund which is used to fund our priorities – like education and transportation. To me, guaranteeing future funding for public television is not a priority.

Further, I feel the measure will likely fail at the ballot box this November. During a recession, most people aren't going to want their taxes raised, regardless of the reason. But if there is one positive out of this, it is that the public will actually make the final decision on this issue, as opposed to the legislature forcing our families to swallow this tax increase.

Please let me know what you think. You can write me at 247 State Office Building, 100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, St. Paul, MN 55155. You can call me toll free, at 1-888-683-3436 or e-mail me at: rep.steve.drazkowski@house.mn. To sign up for my email updates, please visit www.house.mn/28B and click on "Email Updates."