



State Representative

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## *At the Capitol with Rep. Steve Drazkowski*

*By Steve Drazkowski*

*State Representative, District 28B*

Solving Minnesota's \$935 million budget deficit has quickly taken top priority at the State Capitol, as we only have two months remaining to get our finances back in order.

Recently, Governor Tim Pawlenty outlined his proposal that would eliminate this shortfall. Besides not raising taxes, Pawlenty wants to reduce the growth in state spending by \$341 million, use \$250 million of the \$653 million budget reserve, and use \$250 million from the surplus in the Health Care Access Fund.

Most state agencies would receive a four percent cut to their operating budgets under the Governor's plan, and a number of state programs would also see reductions. Not among them would be K-12 education, as Pawlenty wants to hold this area harmless.

I support Governor Pawlenty's recommendations generally, with the exceptions of the cuts to facilities that serve our elderly and disabled residents.

In meeting with folks from ARC Southeastern Minnesota, Home and Community Options, Great River Homes, and nursing homes in Zumbrota and Kenyon, I've learned about the difficulties these organizations and families face, and how lawmakers can help. One way is simply to remove government barriers. The second is to provide adequate funding to ensure the needs to their residents are being met.

The problems began last session, the DFL-led legislature gave our nursing homes a two percent funding increase for last year and one percent this year.

To help solve the nursing home funding crisis, I joined other House Republicans recently in support of a bill that would give our nursing homes and their employees a much needed financial boost. Currently, our Health Care Access Fund has \$262.7 million surplus for fiscal year 2008 and is anticipated to have \$338 million for fiscal year 2009. We propose taking \$20.8 million from this fund, and giving our nursing home workers a 2.25 percent cost of living increase this year, while giving other long-term care providers a 1.25 percent raise.

Our nursing home facilities were short-changed last session. We need to provide a COLA increase for those who provide and take care of our state's most vulnerable citizens. Since the

end of the session, Democrats and Republicans alike called for providing additional assistance to these facilities and providers. The Health Care Access Fund currently has a major surplus. The spending is justified as the source of revenue.

In the days and weeks ahead, every agency and government program will receive scrutiny in order to determine if their budget can be reduced in order to balance the state's books. Local schools should be left out of this debate. Facilities that care for the elderly and disabled should not only receive a pass as well, but they should also be targeted for further increases.

Have a wonderful Easter,

*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](mailto:rep.steve.drazkowski@house.mn). To sign up for my email updates, please visit [www.house.mn/28B](http://www.house.mn/28B) and click on "Email Updates."*