

Good morning.

I've always said, if you really want to find the true, battle-tested Minnesotans, you come to Duluth in January.

Then when you consider people in your line of work, who have to work in all kinds of conditions, I really have to tip my hat to you.

In fact, I'm told that the Arrowhead EMS Association is not just known as the best regional EMS association in the state, but the best in the country.

You should be very proud. I am.

All of you are doing something I really believe in: You're taking an active role in developing your professional skills and making an effort to become leaders in your field.

And in your field, being up-to-date can mean the difference between life and death.

So by working toward continuing education credits and improving your abilities, you are also making sure your fellow citizens will be protected and cared for.

Sounds like one of those win-win situations.

I commend your efforts to make our country a safe, stable place to live and work. It's comforting to know that we can turn to people like you.

The work you do has become even more critical in recent months, hasn't it?

Since Sept. 11th, the world has become increasingly unstable, uncertain and dangerous, and it's more difficult to anticipate the dangers facing us.

And because we don't know where danger will strike next, all we can do is prepare to deal with the unexpected and try to be ready for any eventuality, particularly at the local level.

I am continuing to make homeland security one of my top priorities.

Yesterday, I introduced my legislative recommendations for terrorism preparedness.

We're focusing on four basic areas: planning, identification and detection, training, and response.

In the planning area, we're asking for 4.9 million dollars over the next two years.

That money will be used to coordinate terrorism assessment, and develop and implement data management systems to keep us up-to-date on the resources we have for timely emergency response.

Our plan calls for more than 5 million dollars for the Health and Agriculture departments to develop safe testing methods, quickly produce test results and provide analysis of weapons of mass destruction agents.

We're requesting more than 1.4 million dollars over the next two years for training and exercise for emergency responders like you at both the state and local levels.

That includes bomb squad and HAZMAT teams, food safety people and Health Department personnel who coordinate training and outbreak response.

And speaking of response, we're recommending 5 and a half million dollars over two years for equipment upgrades, additional staff and expanded technology.

I realize these are lean times, but you know better than anyone that terrorism preparedness is NOT the place to be cutting back right now.

I have already presented a detailed plan to eliminate the nearly 2-billion dollar shortfall that's projected, and now that the Legislature is in session, I expect action, and soon.

Today is February 1st. If the Legislature fails to take serious action by mid-February, we're going to be faced with losing around \$3.7 million dollars in revenue for every week of delay.

And you know what that means: even bigger spending cuts and less service.

Together, we have a responsibility to balance our budget, pass a redistricting plan and a capital-bonding bill. Those are our constitutional responsibilities and we should take them seriously.

So I'm asking legislators to do a flip-flop from their usual routine.

Do the important budget work first and once we have solved these very serious problems, then the legislature take up other issues like stadiums.

Clearly, if they manage their time well and face up to their responsibility to make tough decisions we can get these things done.

A few weeks ago I announced my administration's plan to reduce the deficit. I characterized it as spreading the pain around: giving everyone a headache, instead of an impacted wisdom tooth for a few.

As soon as I announced my plan, everyone was quick to point out what's wrong with it.

But I haven't been hearing too many alternatives.

My proposal is comprehensive, fair and balanced.

It helps state agencies provide necessary services, in both the metro and non-metro parts of our state, and solves the problem for the long term.

I'll tell you what is NOT part of the solution: opening up last year's historic tax reform bill, which is another suggestion I've been hearing.

Some people claim last year's tax cuts caused the deficit. I want to know why the same people don't then criticize the new spending that was in the tax bill.

You can't have it both ways, saying only the tax reform aspect of the bill caused the shortfall and the spending had nothing to do with it.

The tax reforms did not cause our financial problems. It has been well documented that this shortfall is a result of a nation-wide economic downturn and the events of September 11th.

When it comes down to it, our economic problems are not someone's "fault."

No one in state government acted irresponsibly to put us into this position.

But here we are, so now we need to work together.

It's not the time to be pointing fingers and playing politics.

The people of Minnesota elected us to do a job and now more than ever they're looking to us to do it.

By the way, one of my other jobs is promoting Minnesota, so I'm just going to take just a minute to talk to those of your from out of state.

If you have time, try to check out some of our tourist activities.

Our tourism industry is one the things we're proudest of in Minnesota.

If you're passing through the Twin Cities, stop by the Mall of America.

If you have some free time while you're here in Duluth, you can go skiing at Spirit Mountain or visit the Great Lakes Aquarium.

I'm going to be doing my radio show at the aquarium later this morning, and I'm excited to see it-  
-it's just a couple years old and I haven't been there yet.

And, if you're pressed for time now, try to come back and visit us this summer. We have some of  
the best camping, fishing, and water-skiing around.

In fact there's really nothing that compares to the beauty of northern Minnesota, so take  
advantage of it.

Thank you for all of the life-saving work you do, and I hope you have a productive conference.

Now I'll take a few questions.