

Good afternoon.

It's good to be in Anoka County and the north suburban area. I like being around people who not only have common sense, but a practical approach to the future.

I like working with suburban and rural Minnesotans who won't let petty politics get in the way of what is best for the long term well-being of the state as a whole.

I appreciate your support of a multi-modal transportation policy that looks beyond highways as the only answer to congestion.

Incredibly, our legislature, especially the Republican leadership in the house, doesn't seem to get it.

We have this wonderful opportunity to build a commuter rail system in the Northstar Corridor with the federal government picking up most of the cost and they are saying no.

Can you believe that?

For \$120 million the State of Minnesota can leverage another \$147 million of federal funds to build this project. And most of the republicans just say no. I guess their idea of a modern transportation system is to blacktop the whole state.

The sad thing is that if we say 'no' to the money from the feds, I guarantee you that it will end up in another state that is more forward thinking than Minnesota.

If that happens, we should get ready for the Tim Pawlenty-Dick Day transportation plan, which will require huge increases in gas taxes to pay for the blacktopping of Minnesota.

Maybe we could make our "roads only" transportation plan part of the farm conservation program and pay farmers a supplement for every acre that they take out of production and put into blacktop. Think of the erosion we can prevent.

Seriously, I know that this all sounds silly but for the life of me I cannot understand why we can't agree that the future of transportation is more than roads.

Enlightened people understand that modern transportation requires more than roads. In order to preserve our land and natural resources we must make use of railways and bus ways as alternatives to roads.

We only have to look at Europe, Japan and other more developed countries to understand the value of mass transportation being integrated into a system of parkways, highways, and freeways.

I have been there, and believe me, it works.

There isn't much time to get this right so I urge you to call your senators and representatives and tell them to quit playing politics and do the smart thing by funding the Northstar Corridor.

And while you are talking to them please ask them to quit sitting on their hands and get down to the business of balancing the budget.

It's interesting that it has been almost two months since the republicans and democrats went to the dance together, did a fast dance and ended up married to a budget deal.

And boy did they celebrate! Yup, they celebrated like there was no tomorrow.

But guess what? There wasn't any tomorrow.

As fate would have it the budget wasn't balanced, the recession's effects got worse, and they put the state's triple A credit rating at risk.

That's right folks; it was all a cruel joke.

The February budget fix was a scam that is now being exposed and the marriage of the House Republicans and Senate Democrats is breaking up.

But there is an answer to this. The answer is for the legislature to look beyond the coming election and solve the budget problem with integrity rather than with moves that simply buy time so they can add to their power base.

The answer is to agree to the principles that I set forth when we started this process back in January.

Those principles are:

Balance the budget so that revenues match our spending commitments through this biennium and the next, and

Ensure that any reserve funds used to get us through the short term are restored for the long term. And ensure that we pay for future obligations.

This is simply good financial planning that should be the bottom line for any responsible elected official.

But, what we have in reality is legislators who want to spend almost a billion dollars on capital projects but not appropriate the money to pay for them.

We have legislators spending their time and your tax dollars passing laws to curry favor with constituent groups to ensure a safe passage through the November elections.

The time for moving on is here.

It's time to agree to a balanced budget.

It's time to pass a bonding bill that is paid for and includes funding for roads, trains and buses.

It's time to stop playing politics and start making tough decisions.

That is my message and I think it is the people's message.

Thank you.