

December 18, 2007

The Honorable Tim Pawlenty
Governor, State of Minnesota
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Pawlenty:

As the 2008 legislative session approaches the Minnesota Medical Association would like to work closely with you on the health care policy challenges that face our state, including the growing number of uninsured Minnesotans and the affordability of health care. We appreciate the commitment you and your agencies have shown over the last six months through the work of the Health Care Transformation Task Force.

Our state faces another challenge as well. According to the November forecast the state's budget is running a deficit. While we know that all options to balance the budget must be considered, we would strongly urge you to avoid looking to the state's Health Care Access Fund (HCAF) to solve this problem.

As you know, physicians in this state have never believed that the "sick tax" was a fair or appropriate way to fund the HCAF. We believe that it is a selective tax that is regressive and falls more heavily on the sicker of our citizens. Yet, in recent years we have not actively worked to repeal this tax as long as it remained dedicated to addressing health care access. Transferring money from the HCAF to pay the General Fund's shortfall is inappropriate.

When we met with you in 2006 to discuss how the HCAF was used to address the last big budget deficit you acknowledged that you had very little choice, and said that you wished you hadn't needed to do that. Well, this time around we hope you will remember the anger that this action caused within the health care provider community.

The money in the HCAF is dedicated to addressing the health care access needs of our state and they should not be used for other purposes. You have the opportunity to put Minnesota among the leaders in addressing health care access, quality, and cost this year but it will require a commitment to protect the funding we have for health care coverage. At a time when Minnesota's uninsured rate is increasing we do not want to see the HCAF diverted away from its intended purpose.

Thank you again for your leadership on health care reform. We look forward to working with you on the difficult challenges.

Sincerely,

James J. Dehen, MD, FACS
President, Minnesota Medical Association