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FLOOR DEBATE

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We are not yet finished, but solid progress has occurred. Senator Wehrbein and the Appropriations Committee have worked as hard as any committee could. Much has been made of our past areas of disagreement on budget issues. Recently, however, I compared budgets, now versus three years ago, before the recession set in. Virtually every state agency and many aid programs are spending less than anyone would have anticipated five years ago. I believe we would all agree that in 2003 our choices could have been phrased as, "pick your poison: cut programs or raise taxes." Neither is popular. The check and balance in the budget process between the Governor and the Legislature can be painful, but in the end decisions are made. Senator Raikes and the Education Committee fashioned a proposal last session that addressed state aid to schools. Examining the results of this legislation since it was passed has led me to the conclusion that this approach is on target, and it's part of my proposal this year. Senator Landis skillfully restructured the regulation of our state's natural gas industry. It was a monumentally divisive issue that required two years of negotiation. Senators Schrock and Stuhr took on an issue that has historically been regarded as one of the most controversial, water policy. Legislation will be in front of you that embodies unprecedented compromise and necessary stewardship. Senators Kremer and Jones and the Ag Committee propose that the time has arrived to revisit the Initiative 300 provision of our state constitution. They could not have picked a tougher issue to address. The simple mention of this constitutional provision stirs aggressive debate. Committee members, however, recognize that young farmers and family farmers are being hampered, not helped, by this 20-year provision. Every legislative session creates its own personality. The mood gets established early. I ask you in this legislative session to first recognize and applaud the reform initiatives undertaken as I have laid out. Then I ask you to help in this process, to help reform continue. There are more issues that need your help. I need your help. We have a historic opportunity to effect substantial and necessary change. In times of economic plenty, effecting change like this is nearly impossible. Change will be difficult even today, but I believe we must act now. I propose five goals for our future. They are mental health reform, education reform, reform of I-300, reform of water policy, and reform in the way