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STEPHEN M. BREWER
CHAIR

COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS
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Dear Colleagues:

Over the past three years, we as Legislators have been charged with the unenviable task of balancing the Commonwealth's budget in the midst of what is arguably the worst economic recession in our nation's history. Our balanced approach to the crisis has required a great deal of sacrifice and restraint at all levels of government. The funding decisions that we make have a direct impact on the quality of life of our citizenry and each of us recognizes that impact on a daily basis in the districts that we represent. I congratulate each and every one of you for your willingness to tackle these issues and make those tough decisions.

As difficult as the recent budgets have been, the fiscal year 2012 budget presents a new set of challenges. The absence of \$1.5 billion in federal stimulus funds and growth in non-discretionary costs leave us with a budget gap of \$1.9 billion. Once again, we will utilize a balanced approach to address this shortfall, but deep cuts to services and programs cannot be avoided. We must continue to do more with less.

Although our economy has shown positive signs of recovery and it is true that fiscal year 2011 revenue collections exceed benchmarks, we must be cognizant of the fact that the fiscal decisions we make now will enable us to weather the next financial storm. The Senate must continue to make the restoration of our stabilization account a top priority, as the fund has been severely depleted during this Great Recession. Strong bond ratings and preparation for future uncertainty in our global economy dictate our actions in this regard. A healthy stabilization fund, strong bond ratings and enhancing the performance of state government services will better position us into the future. To that end, this budget includes several performance management initiatives that will lead the Commonwealth to more cost effective and efficient delivery of state services.

In our pursuit of a fiscally responsible budget, we are ever mindful of those people who need a helping hand from their neighbor. As the late Senator Hubert Humphrey said, those people who live in the dawn of life, in the twilight of life and in the shadows of life are at the forefront of our responsibility. To the best of our ability, this budget reflects the Senate's commitment to our most vulnerable populations.

I thank you all for your advocacy and thoughtful approach to addressing the complex issues facing our Commonwealth and look forward to continuing to work in collaboration with you to improve the lives of those we represent.

For the committee,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen M. Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Stephen M. Brewer
Chairman
Senate Committee on Ways and Means