

Second Week

Here it is the second week of session. The week is shortened because of Martin Luther King Day, so the actual work in the Capitol spanned two and a half days. Sub-committee work did begin this week with both bills that my committees reviewed needed further work. Amendments will be coming to further consider bills to restrict the serving of alcohol to underage people by a social host (HF 396) and the collection of DNA samples from people convicted of an aggravated misdemeanor (HSB 524). The Veterans Affairs Committee did pass a bill to give income tax relief to active duty military members on federal active duty status within Iowa. This is a technical cleanup bill that give equity to all Iowans receiving Title 32 active duty pay, since Title 10 personnel were given that income tax exemption for 2011.

State of the Guard Message

One highlight of the second week involved Major General Timothy Orr, Adjutant General of the Iowa National Guard, giving the State of the Guard message on Wednesday. His comments gave a clear picture of the Guard being “mission focused and warrior ready.” The past year was a challenging year with about one-third of all National Guard members deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, but by Christmas time all but 90 individuals were home for the holidays. In addition to overseas deployments, National Guard members responded for a lengthy time to assist during the flood disaster along the Missouri River and remained heavily involved with the Counter Drug Task Force to train and assist law enforcement personnel to deter the plague of dangerous drugs and help ensure safer communities.

On the Air Guard side, the 132 Fighter Wing, Des Moines, has now amassed 94,000 flying hours without a mishap. That feat led to receiving the Air Force’s top Maintenance Effectiveness Award. The 185 Air Refueling Wing, Sioux City, supported operations in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, the Far East, Africa and Europe resulting in the award for the Best Tanker Wing in the U.S.

General Orr talked of his dedication to getting all Iowa wounded warriors home and united with their families following recuperation and recovery in distant medical facilities. With his leadership, the National Guard is also working hand-in-hand with Work Force Development and Human Services to assist returning soldiers find jobs. About 10 percent of the redeploying Guard members find they no longer have a job on their return to our state. Many of the returning soldiers and airmen are enrolling in colleges and universities across Iowa. This has put a strain on the allocated funding for tuition assistance. It appears that an additional amount of about \$1.0 million is needed for the second semester to help these students with grants amounting to 90% of the regent university tuition costs. The final bill to solve this shortfall is being worked on as we fulfill our commitments to those who have served our state and country while remaining cognizant of our taxpayers, who pay all of the bills.

Students Sought for Education Reform Advisory Group

The Department of Education is looking for students in Iowa to apply for and sit on a new state advisory council which will discuss how state policy decisions impact students in Iowa. The student representatives will serve as liaisons between the Department and Iowa students.

The council will be called the “Learning Council” and will be made up of 15 students from around the state who are enrolled in grades 8 through 12 in either public or nonpublic schools. This is another step in getting input from as many groups as possible on education transformation in Iowa.

The announcement of this new council preceded by a few days the release by the governor’s office of its education reform legislation. The legislation is intended to focus on three main areas; highly effective educators, high expectations for all students with fair measure and results, and innovation that boosts learning.

Meetings will take place in March, May, September and December. To apply, go to the Department’s website at <http://educateiowa.gov> and search for “learning council.” Applications are due by January 31 and the council membership will be announced on February 10.

Forums with Senator Feenstra

Jan. 28 – Saturday, 8:00 a.m., Rock Rapids, “Eggs and Issues,” Forster Comm. Bldg.

Feb. 3 – Friday, 12:00 Noon, Sioux Center, Pizza Ranch.