



“Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.” - Abraham Lincoln

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Appropriations

(Contact Brad Trow at 1-3471)

Inside this issue:

2017-18 House Republican Budget Principles

House Republicans are committed to these principles to produce a balanced and sustainable state budget:

1. We will spend less than the state collects;
2. We will not use one-time money to fund on-going needs;
3. We will not balance the budget by intentionally underfunding programs; and
4. We will return unused tax dollars to Iowa’s taxpayers.

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How Iowa’s Ending Balance Has been Used

As the Legislature has turned its focus to moving forward with the state budget for the next fiscal year, certain Democrats with a lack of memory have tried to raise questions about the use of the state’s ending balance over the past five years. While some in the minority have tried to assert that these funds have gone to fund tax relief to big, bad corporations, actual legislation tells a much different tale. Below is a list of the various ways these funds have been returned to the taxpayers or used in other ways that help address priorities of Iowans.

- Honey Creek Premier Destination Park Bonds
- 2002 Prison Infrastructure Revenue Bonds;
- 2010 Taxable I-Jobs Bonds; and
- School Infrastructure Bonds.

Filling the Cash Reserve Fund and the Economic Emergency Fund – By law, the state’s two reserve funds are required to equal 10 percent of the General Fund budget for that particular year. Over the past few years, funds remaining in the ending balance have been used to add to the reserve funds. Here is the amount of funds used to meet the statutory requirement of 10% of the General Fund being held in reserve:

Returning it to the taxpayers – During the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions, IRC coupling bills have been passed. These bills both took funds from the ending balance and returned them to the taxpayers. The amounts were:

2015 (SF 126) - **\$98.98 million**

2016 (HF 2433) - **\$97.6 million**

FY 2013 - **\$21.1 million**

FY 2014 - **\$47.2 million**

FY 2015 – **\$26.8 million**

FY 2016 – **\$22.3 million**

FY 2017 - **\$19.1 million**

Taxpayers Trust Fund - Some funds that may have gone into the Ending Balance were deposited into the Taxpayers Trust Fund. \$60 million dollars was deposited in the Taxpayers Trust Fund in FY 2013 and FY 2014. Taxpayers were returned \$84.6 million in FY 2014 and \$27.4 million in FY 2015. There is still \$8.2 million in the Taxpayers Trust Fund that will also be returned to the taxpayers.

Paying off state debt – During the 2013 legislative session, the General Assembly took a portion of the ending balance - **\$113.8 million** - and used that money to pay off four series of bonds issued by the State. The bonds were:

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Natural Disaster Relief – In 2011, the Legislature decided to have the state's share of disaster aid payments and state-funded disaster relief (known as Performance of Duty) to be paid annually out of the Economic Emergency Fund. The ending balance would then refill the Economic Emergency Fund once the payments have been made. Here are the amounts that have been paid in recent years for Performance of Duty:

FY 2013 - **\$26.15 million**

FY 2014 - **\$15.8 million**

FY 2015 - **\$32.7 million**

FY 2016 – **\$12.3 million**

FY 2017 - **\$17.0 million**

Making Strategic, One-time Investments in Iowa - During the 2013 and 2015 legislative sessions, the General Assembly also took part of the ending balance for one-time

investments. In 2013, the amount spent on these was **\$64.5 million** on economic development initiatives, completing various infrastructure projects at the Dept. of Corrections and the Board of Regents, and assisting UNI. In 2015, the amount spent on these items was **\$14 million**. Additional resources were spent on radio communications equipment for the Department of Public Safety, a one-time peak of commercial and industrial property tax replacement claims, and mental health services.

Initial Investment into the State's Water Quality Initiative – In 2013, the Legislature made a substantial investment in the Water Quality initiative established by the Dept. of Agriculture, Dept. of Natural Resources, and Iowa State University. As part of the Strategic Investments and Debt Reduction bill, the legislature provided an initial investment of **\$20 million** for the initiative.

Additional funding for Medicaid – The program with the largest growth in cost to the state over the past six years has been Medicaid. General Fund spending on the program has grown by \$816.1 million between FY 2011 and FY 2016. During this

time, the state has had to provide additional funding to the program during the fiscal year. During the 2015 session, legislators had to provide an additional \$43 million to Medicaid. And in 2016, the additional amount provided to the program was \$67 million.

With the implementation of the Medicaid Modernization effort, it is expected that the state will be able to have more cost certainty with the second largest program in the budget. Without Medicaid Modernization, every other appropriation in the General Fund – including the school aid formula – would be fighting for the scraps left after Medicaid consumed new revenue first.

Lower State Tax collections - Since FY 2014, the revenue forecast for the General Fund has not been met by actual state tax collections. In those cases, the Ending Balance is used to fill in the gap between projected revenues and actual revenues. In FY 2015, \$127 million of the ending balance was used to fund the difference. In FY 2016, the amount was \$153 million. For FY 2017, the amount used will be what is in the ending balance, which was \$18.2 million.

Agriculture

(Contact Lew Olson at 1-3096)

House Appropriations Panel Okays Water Quality Financing Structure Legislation

Late Tuesday, April 18, 2017, the House Appropriations Committee considered and adapted an amendment to House File 612 that proposes a long-term Water Quality Financing structure with funding to address its water quality issues. The bill passed on a bi-partisan 17-8 vote. The bill provides a multi-year funding plan to support water quality improvements for surface water and to support upgrade and refurbishment of existing drinking water supply systems and wastewater treatment systems. HF 612 repeals the state sales tax on metered water furnished by a water utility or water service and instead creates an excise tax of six percent on metered water furnished by a water utility or water service and transfers the money to the wastewater and drinking water treatment financial assistance fund. This fund is phased in over a six year period (starting July 1, 2017 but with the Appropriation amendment commencing July 1, 2018) with incremental one-sixths of the excise tax amount added each fiscal year. The sales tax on state metered water constitutes about 1% of the state overall sales tax collection. The Appropriation Committee amendment also strikes from the bill the proposed 13-year year commitment of Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF) money to support non-point agricultural water quality improvement practices that would have sent \$232 million of RIIF money for this

purpose through fiscal year 2030. This is a significant portion of future RIIF funding and with the recent downturn in tax revenues and declining gambling taxes, the RIIF budget is extremely stretched in upcoming years even before distributing funds to support non-point water quality improvement efforts.

The bill specifies that moneys in the Water Quality Financial Assistance fund will be allocated in the following manner:

- one-sixth of the amount to the Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) to be credited to the 'Water Quality Protection and Wastewater Treatment Grant Fund' created by this legislation, and five-sixths of the balance of the fund to IFA to be credited to the 'Water Quality Projects Financial Assistance fund' created by the bill. The Appropriation Committee amendment changes this distribution to one penny to support non-point water quality issue by funding the IDALS Water Quality Infrastructure fund and the other 5-pennies to the IFA which in turn will distribute these funds 1/6th of the amount to IFA Water Quality Protection grant Program and 5/6ths of the 5-pennies to the IFA Water Quality Financing Program.

The Water Quality Protection and Wastewater Treatment Grant Fund moneys under the measure may be awarded to municipalities and eligible entities which are:

- (a) participating in nutrient reduction exchanges,
- (b) conducting economic and technical feasibility studies concerning implementation plans and reports required by the Iowa Nutrient Reduction strategy, for water source protection, and for water-system and wastewater infrastructure improvements with priority to be given to grants to projects that will improve water quality in relevant watersheds, and to grants supporting state revolving loan projects for wastewater treatment of drinking water supply systems.

The Water Quality Projects Financial Assistance Program fund created by this legislation is designed to be augmented by tax-exempt bond investments securitized to leverage and expand the amount of money that can be used in a revolving fund for financial assistance to eligible entities engaged in projects that will protect and enhance the quality of surface and groundwater through collaboration between point and nonpoint sources.

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HF 612 sets out the criteria for communities to be eligible to participate in the Water Quality Financing Program financial assistance efforts. A financing entity shall include two or more entities acting jointly to propose a project plan designed to improve water quality in a local area or watershed. Preference shall be given to projects that will have the greatest impact on achieving the goals of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and plans designed to achieve those goals shall be presumed to substantially improve water quality in the local

area or watershed.

HF 612 has a similar near Senate companion, Senate File 512 which is very similar to legislation that House passed in the 2016 session but does not include the collaborative and innovative financial leveraging structure that the House measure espouses. SF 512 includes the Water Service Excise tax provision that the House does, but send it to a narrow funding silo to support municipal drinking and wastewater infrastructure upgrades without the collaborative and interacting option to coordinate joint point and non-point water quality im-

provement efforts. SF 512, instead of committing RIIF funds for out-years for non-point water quality improvement efforts would beginning in FY 2021 commit \$15-million in gambling tax proceeds now supporting Vision Iowa Bonds that are scheduled to come off the book during fiscal year 2020 to provide the funding for non-point water quality efforts that the House used RIIF funds for in last year's legislation on this matter and which is in HF 612 as introduced, but which would be stricken by the Appropriation amendment.

Economic Growth

(Contact Brittany Telk at 1-3452)

Economic Development Budget

This year's Economic Development Appropriations budget bill proved to be just like all the other budget bills -tough to administer due to the unfortunate revenue status, yet achievable through some prioritization and tough decision making. The bill appropriates \$38.4 million from the state's general

fund to the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Iowa Economic Development Authority, the Iowa Finance Authority, the Public Employment Relations Board and Iowa Workforce Development for FY 2018. It represents a decrease of \$3 million in funding, with no changes in FTE positions. The bill

appropriates \$38.7 million from other funds for FY 2018, which is a \$10 million increase over FY 2017. These funds come from the Skilled Worker Job Creation Fund, various funds within IWD and federal dollars. All FTEs are capped at FY 2017 levels.

Total Economic Development

FY 2017 Revised	FY 2018	Difference
\$41,400,457	\$38,441,265	-\$2,959,192

Total Other Funds

FY 2017 Revised	FY 2018	Difference
\$28,023,084	\$38,723,084	\$10,700,000

For FY 2019, this bill provides funding levels at 50% of FY 2018.

Most of the changes come from the three big departments: Department of Cultural Affairs, Iowa Economic Development Authority and Iowa Workforce Development. The bill appropriates \$5,756,055 to the Department of Cultural Affairs, \$50,736 less than FY 2017, but does add a

“\$25,000 appropriation to go towards Cultural Trust Grants,”

which had a funding change due to the deappropriation bill earlier this session. As for the IEDA, the bill contains a \$1,587,807 cut from FY 2017, and appropriates a total of \$15,043,201 for FY 2018. The biggest change comes from the IEDA's operations budget, although the World Food Prize took a \$312,500 deduction for a total appropriation of \$400,000, as well as a few thousand dollars from a couple other line items. For IWD, the bill appropriates a total of \$15,641,557 for FY 2018, which reflects a cut of \$1,233,975 from FY 2017. The biggest cuts come from the Division of Labor Services, which received \$270,845 less than FY 2017 as well as from Field Office Operations, which received a \$900,000 cut; however, within this line item, the bill removes earmark

language that a certain amount of money for certain satellite field offices around the state to give the department more flexibility to allocate resources where they are needed.

As for the Other Funds portion of the bill, all of the programs previously funded through the Skilled Worker and Job Creation Fund received status quo funding; these programs include: STEM internships, High Quality Jobs funding, Regents Innovation fund in addition to entrepreneurial centers at all regents institutions.

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In addition to these dollars, the Other Funds portion includes further appropriations to IWD for field office operation; the bill appropriates \$1,060,000 from the Unemployment Compensation Program and \$1,706,084 from the Special Employment Contingency Fund. In addition to these funds, the bill authorizes IWD to utilize federal dollars from the REED ACT for unemployment insurance modernization

and administration. These federal dollars represent a one-time transfer for the department.

This bill also includes a policy change for the Iowa Energy Center. Currently, a portion of nearly all utility ratepayer dollars goes to fund the Iowa Energy Center which is housed within Iowa State University. This bill moves the Iowa Energy Center from Iowa State University to be overseen and administered by the IEDA. This

bill also includes a sunset for the Iowa Energy Center and all rate collection on July 1, 2022.

The bill will move as a joint bill through the Senate first, and then be taken up by the House. As a reminder, LSA's full presentation over the Governor's recommendations, with more details can be accessed [here](#).

Education

Contact Jason Chapman at 1-3015)

Public Input Sought on Fine Arts Standards

The Iowa Department of Education announced they are seeking public input on Fine Arts Standards that are under consideration in Iowa.

The legislature last year created a Fine Arts teacher mentoring program and with that, public support for the topic convinced the Department to convene a Fine Arts Adoption Team in February of this year to create statewide standards. These standards would serve as a guide for educators to provide a high-quality arts education for students in preschool through 12th grades. Fine arts include visual art, music, theater, dance and media arts.

The input being sought from the public is on the National Core Arts Standards, developed by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, an alliance of national arts and

arts education groups. You can view those standards on their website, <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

There are two ways to provide public input:

In Person: Public forums throughout the state will be held on April 25 and April 27. To see a list of locations and times, visit the Department's website here: <https://www.educateiowa.gov/article/2017/04/13/input-sought-fine-arts-standards>

Online: An online survey will be open through May 12 and can be accessed here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZF7BCQY>

Feedback from the public forums and online survey will be used to provide guidance to the Fine Arts Standards Adoption Team,

which is expected to submit a final recommendation to the State Board of Education later this year. If adopted

“fine arts standards would be optional for school districts.”

This effort on Art Standards is not to be confused with the other work the Department is currently doing on all of Iowa's standards. The Governor issued an Executive Order in 2014 directing the Department to review all of Iowa's standards, and that process has been taking place continually since that time. Here is an overview of which reviews have already begun:

	Review Team	Public Input	Recommendation	Adopted
Science	Nov 2014	Feb 2015	April 2015	August 2015
Social Studies	Jan 2016	Jan 2017		
Literacy	Feb 2016	April 2015	Sept 2016	Nov 2016
Fine Arts	Feb 2017	April 2017		
Mathematics	No action yet			
21 st Century Skills	No action yet			

For more information about the Fine Arts Standards Adoption Team, visit the Team's

page on the Iowa Department of Education's website: [https://](https://www.educateiowa.gov/fine-arts-standards-adoption-team)

www.educateiowa.gov/fine-arts-standards-adoption-team

Environmental Protection

(Contact Lew Olson at 1-3096)

Diesel Emission Reduction Grants Available

On Friday, April 14, 2017, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issued a press release that announced that this state agency has received grant funding from the Environmental Protection Agency for a diesel emission reduction program in Iowa. The DNR has created a competitive

application process to fund projects that will implement cost-effective strategies that result in diesel emission reductions statewide. County agencies, municipalities, school districts, and transit agencies are encouraged to participate in the DNR's 2016 Diesel Emission Reduction (DERA)

program. Please visit <http://www.iowadnr.gov/dera> for the DERA program overview, specific guidelines and requirements, all application forms, and additional information.

Judiciary

(Contact Amanda Wille at 1-5230)

Judiciary Bills signed by the Governor

As the end of session approaches, members of the House Judiciary committee are still hard at work passing bills on the House floor. Below are several significant bills the Governor has signed that originated from the Judiciary Committee

Senate File 444- 24/7 Sobriety and Distracted Driving

A person who is using a hand-held electronic device, and kills another while driving is guilty of a Class "C" felony. SF 444 also establishes a 24/7 sobriety program requiring certain offenders charged with alcohol or controlled substance violations to report twice a day for alcohol and drug testing. This bill is designed to reduce the number of repeat drunk drivers on the road.

Signed by the Governor

HF 517- Firearms

This bill makes changes to Iowa's firearms laws including; permitting procedures, stand your ground, safety training requirements,

confidential permit records, age to teach firearms safety, and limits on government restrictions on firearms in a state of emergency.

Signed by the Governor

Senate File 332 –Drug Rescheduling

SF 332 classifies and reclassifies substances, including synthetic drugs, in accordance with actions taken by the United States Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Agency.

Signed by the Governor

Senate File 413- Statute of Repose

The bill strikes 15 year statute of repose and replaces it with a statute of repose that is specific to certain structures:

Nuclear power plants, or interstate pipelines- 15 years
Residential construction- 10 years
Actions related to, or improvement to other real property-8 years

If there is intentional misconduct or fraudulent concealment of unsafe or defective conditions the claim must be brought within 15 years. If the unsafe or defective condition is discovered within one year prior to the applicable statute of repose, the period of repose shall be extended for one year.

Signed by the Governor

Senate File 446- Civil Asset Forfeiture

SF 446 prohibits civil asset forfeiture for property valued less than \$5,000, if there is no conviction. The standard of proof in cases of civil asset forfeiture is increased from preponderance of evidence, to clear and convincing evidence. SF 446 requires property to be reviewed proportionally to the crime. Requires law enforcement agencies to retain records related to asset forfeiture

Signed by the Governor

Natural Resources

(Contact Carrie Malone at 5-2063)

House Passes Hunting/Fishing Bill

On Tuesday, April 18, 2017, the Iowa House passed HF 631 on a 92-6 vote. The bill changes how hunting/fur-harvesting/fishing license fees and wildlife habitat fees are established by striking current Code provisions that explicitly set them to specific monetary amounts and with authority for the Natural Resource Commission to establish the fee amounts through the administrative rules process with a year-long layover/delay for General Assembly nullification, amendment, or acceptance. This lay-over/automatic delay provides for an opportunity for the General Assembly to accept the proposed fee increases, amend them, or nullify them. So oversight and accountability for the fee increase still lies with the intent of the Legislature. DNR has indicated

that it would seek a 17% license fee increase through the administrative rule process this summer to be effective 12-15-2017 that would generate an estimated \$3.85-million increase in revenues for the 2018 hunting, fishing and fur-harvesting season with \$2.75-million of increase fees being paid by resident Iowans, and \$1.1-million being paid by nonresident hunters and fishers.

The fees established by the process created by HF 631 are to be periodically evaluated by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) not less than every three years to ensure fee paid are sufficient to meet the needs of natural resource management and maintain public access. By December 15th

of each year after 12/15/2018, the DNR shall file a written report to the NRC, and the General Assembly concerning the evaluation and any recommendation on whether fee prices need to be changed to increase Fish and Game revenues. Any such fee increase recommended by the evaluation and subsequently proposed by the NRC shall not take effect until the following December 15 or later to give the General Assembly an opportunity to nullify, amend, or leave as is the fee changes proposed by administrative rule process. Additionally, such fee increases shall not exceed 5% in any calendar year.

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The bill further authorizes DNR and the NRC to offer multi-year licenses, and non-

resident five day hunting licenses. The measure also caps the amount of habitat fee revenue that can be used to purchase land by the state for public hunting purposes at current levels in an effort to ensure

that future increases in these fees will be used to support habitat development on existing state lands and upgrades in state fishery infrastructure.

State Government

(Contact: Mackenzie Nading 1-3626)

House Passes RIIF Budget Bill

Late Tuesday night, the Iowa House considered HF 643, a bill allocating funds from the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF). The bill passed on a party line vote of 58-40 and will now move to the Senate for consideration. The RIIF budget bill is unique in the sense that it is not funded by the general fund.

According to Iowa code, “the rebuild Iowa infrastructure fund is created under the authority of the department of management. The fund shall consist of appropriations made to the fund and transfers of interest, earnings, and moneys from other funds as provided by law. The rebuild Iowa infrastructure fund shall be separate from the

general fund of the state and the balance in the rebuild Iowa infrastructure fund shall not be considered part of the balance of the general fund of the state.” Iowa code also mandates that moneys in the RIIF fund in a fiscal year shall be for vertical infrastructure projects. Vertical infrastructure includes only land acquisition and construction, major renovation and major repair of buildings, routine, recurring maintenance, all appurtenant structures, utilities, site development, recreational trails, and debt service payments on academic revenue bonds.

House File 643 appropriates \$94 million in FY 2018 from the following sources:

- Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund: \$73.9 million
- Technology Reinvestment Fund: \$10.1 million
- State Bond Repayment Fund: \$ 12.2 million
- Revenue Bond Capitals Fund: \$760,000
- Total infrastructure funding (including prior appropriations): \$180,661,610

Below are some highlights of funding allocated in House File 643

Department of Administrative Services—Major Maintenance

FY 17	FY 18	FY 18
Estimated Net	Governor’s Request	House File 643
\$9,974,856	\$2,000,000	\$12,010,000

This budgeting unit is for major maintenance, repairs and improvements to State facilities. Major maintenance funds are used to correct deficiencies in State buildings and make a wide range of repairs. Twelve state agencies and divisions participate in the DAS Vertical Infrastructure Program. The Program includes approximately

“900 buildings at more than 70 locations across the state.”

Projects are ranked by priority order: threats to health, life and safety; nonemergency repairs to prevent exponential damage;

increasing or maintaining access in accordance with the ADA; scheduled maintenance in order to prolong the equipment or building life; projects to increase operational or energy efficiency; and demolition. Emergency repairs are made as needed and occasionally bump a lower priority project on the list when they arise.

Economic Development Authority—Lewis and Clark Water Systems

FY 17	FY 18	FY 18
Estimated Net	Governor’s Request	House File 643
\$0	\$3,500,000	\$2,250,000

Funding provided is for the connection of communities to the Lewis and Clark regional water system. This multi-state system is located in northwest Iowa and will connect with Minnesota and South Dakota.

Department of Human Services—Community Action Agencies

FY 17	FY 18	FY 18
Estimated Net	Governor's Request	House File 643
\$0	\$0	\$1,800,000

This is a new appropriation in FY 2018. Funding will be distributed to Iowa's 17 community action agencies that provide services from across the state. These funds will go toward infrastructure costs as well as technology and programming updates.

Department of Transportation—Commercial Service Air Vertical Infrastructure

FY 17	FY 18	FY 18
Estimated Net	Governor's Request	House File 643
\$1,400,000	\$500,000	\$900,000

This appropriation is for commercial service air vertical infrastructure in Iowa. Of the 109 publicly-owned airports in the State, eight are commercial service airports. They are located in Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Dubuque, Fort Dodge, Mason City, Sioux City, and Waterloo.

Department of Transportation—General Aviation Vertical Infrastructure

FY 17	FY 18	FY 18
Estimated Net	Governor's Request	House File 643
\$0	\$400,000	\$500,000

General aviation vertical infrastructure projects receive State matching grants of up to 85 percent of the total project costs, with a minimum level of \$5,000 in State match to be considered. Projects include landside development and renovation of airport terminals, hangars, maintenance buildings, and fuel facilities. These grants are available only to general aviation airports. Of the 109 publicly-owned airports in the State, 101 are general aviation airports that are eligible to apply for the grants.

Board of Regents - ISU Student Innovation Center

FY 17	FY 18	FY 18
Estimated Net	Governor's Rec	House File 643
\$1,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$6,000,000

This section reduces the FY 18 appropriation for the construction of the Student Innovation Center by \$3 million dollars, and moves that appropriation to FY 2022. Appropriations in future years for this project are:

FY 2019 - \$12,000,000
 FY 2020 - \$10,000,000
 FY 2021 - \$10,000,000
 FY 2022 - \$3,000,000

Government Oversight

(Contact Mackenzie Nading at 1-3440)

Cameras in Bathrooms

SF 499 passed the House this week on the floor (82-14). The bill focuses on the removal of monitoring devices in specific areas where people have an expectation of privacy.

It defines “monitoring device” to include cameras and other recording devices that include visual and audio recordings. These devices will be removed from areas such as public hospitals, public libraries, public schools and areas that have a reasonable expectation of privacy. An area that is a reasonable expectation of privacy is some-

where that a person can disrobe or partially disrobe in privacy without being concerned that they are being viewed, photographed, or filmed when doing so.

On or before July 1, 2017, the state or a political subdivision of the state will remove these monitoring devices from public libraries, public schools, or other government offices open to the public where a monitoring device in a toilet, bath, or shower facility, locker room, common area within such a facility or room, including an area where a sink or changing table is located, or other

space open to the public where a person has a reasonable expectation of privacy. All of the cameras currently up will be removed and no longer used.

The removal and ban of these monitoring devices do not apply to a public hospital where use of a monitoring device is necessary to protect the health or safety of a patient during the course of treatment.

This ban on monitoring devices in this area is effective upon enactment.

Veterans Affairs

(Contact Kristi Kielhorn at 2-5290)

VA Unveils New Program to Check on VA Care Wait Times Online

Recently, the federal VA launched a new program that provides Veterans with an easy way of checking on patient wait time and quality of care data. The tool provides Veterans with more information about VA services they might be eligible for as well as accountability on the quality of services.

The tool allows Veterans to access:

- Average times patients are waiting to

be seen in their local area

- Veteran descriptions of their experiences
- Timeliness of appointments for care needed right away
- Quality of health care delivered at VA medical centers as compared to private

-sector hospitals

According to the VA, the Access and Quality Tool is the most transparent and easy to understand wait time and quality data website in the health-care industry. The VA plans to continue to make improvements to this tool based on the feedback it receives from Veterans. The Access and Quality Tool can be found at www.accesstocare.va.gov.

Ways & Means

(Contact Kristi Kielhorn at 2-5290)

House Committee Votes to Stop State TIF Backfill

This week the House Ways and Means committee voted 16-9 in favor of stopping the state from backfilling the property tax from tax increment financing that is diverted from the schools. The FY 18 estimated amount of the state backfill is \$58.5 million. House Study Bill 195 would make this change for all new TIFs as well as for new property annexed into an existing TIF.

When a tax increment area is created, the property tax base is essentially frozen.

From that point forward, property taxes from the new growth in the area are diverted from their normal destination (cities, counties, schools) and instead go to pay for public improvements in the TIF area, or as grants and loans to private enterprise as an incentive to locate within the TIF.

House Study Bill 195 excludes the school district foundation property tax from the normal TIF diversion method. Instead it is required to be levied, collected, and paid to

the school district in the same manner as all other property taxes. Since the schools will receive the property tax—there will be no need for a state backfill.

The bill provides that the change applies to property taxes due and payable in fiscal years beginning on or after July 1, 2018. The bill now moves to the floor for further consideration.