



Capitol Comments

Newsletter from your
Iowa State Representative
Richard Anderson

State Capitol
January 20, 2011

Saving Money. Saving Lives.

The Iowa legislature is now in full swing. Two things stand out to me so far – we can bring public spending in line with revenue, and some government justice programs are working.

Thomas Jefferson once said that “the natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.” This has been true in Iowa. The growth in Iowa government over the past four years has exceeded our willingness to pay for it. We are responding.

Tax Payer First

On Wednesday, January 19 the House approved House File 45, also known as the Taxpayers First Act (TFA). With this first bill to be debated House Republicans were serious about our conviction that the state should not spend more money than it takes in. The journey down that road begins with this bill.

The TFA provides that after our cash reserves are full, additional revenue will go to the taxpayer rather than more government spending. It is your money. We are simply the stewards.

We are willing to work with Governor Branstad to deliver a two-year budget. The budget is quite similar from year to year, so a two year budget will save time and money in the legislature by allowing us to set the budget every other year.

The TFA also reduces state spending by roughly three percent a year for the next three years. This is the first step to fiscal responsibility and eliminating the spending gap projected to be around \$700 million for next year.

High end state salaries, such as the \$186,000 per year paid to the director of the AEA, were the focus of much discussion. It is hoped that we can preserve valuable services by applying reasonableness to state salaries.

Protecting Vulnerable Iowans

Through refocused spending priorities, the TFA provides \$25 million to eliminate the mental health waiting list in Iowa and begins the important redesign of the mental health delivery system in Iowa. This redesign should complement the vision of new DHS Director Chuck Palmer.

In a meeting I had with Director Palmer, he clearly indicated his goal is to retain the current number of beds and staff in the interest of safety for the vulnerable patients at our state mental health facilities. He expects to make internal changes and work with the legislature to respond to the budget challenges.

Judge Bower from Waterloo shared moving stories of lives saved through the state drug court program. People who have been using drugs for 30 years are finding freedom and life. As we strive to reduce spending that is beyond the scope of government, bringing justice and restoration to lives caught up in crime and drugs through drug courts becomes a reality.

Other Priorities and More Savings...

Other priorities of the new House leadership include a rolling sunset of all state programs. This requires a comprehensive review of each government program. Waste, abuse, and fraud will hopefully be identified. A searchable database open to the public will allow you to keep an eye on state spending and audits. Subjecting government practices and spending to the light of public scrutiny is the best way to bring accountability.

Important and divisive social issues such as immigration, marriage and late term abortions will be debated in this public forum. Although consensus may not be achieved, advocates of differing perspectives intend to bring their views to the forum. It promises to be an interesting session....and hopefully one that will save lives and money.