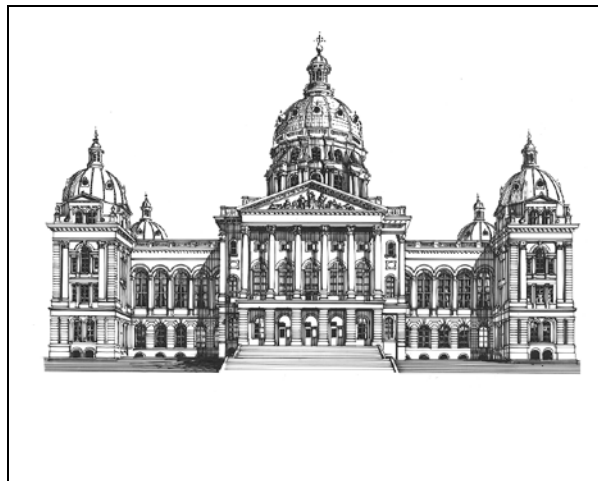


## **Iowa House of Representatives State Representative Cecil Dolecheck Dolecheck's Details**

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**For the week of February 28th, 2011**



### **House Labor Committee Passes Collective Bargaining Reform in Marathon Committee Meeting**

Last Friday morning at 6:04 a.m. the House Labor committee passed HSB 117. Debate began the previous day at 5:00 p.m. after already having met for two hours earlier in the day. The minority party offered over fifty amendments, which resulted in the debate on the bill taking over fourteen hours.

**HSB 117** is the collective bargaining reform bill that seeks to restore the balance in bargaining between the taxpayer and the public unions. Republicans amended the bill to strip out some portions that would have required legislative approval of agreements that had been decided by an arbitrator as well as a provision that would have allowed the Public Employment Relations Board to charge fees for its services. The minority party attempted to amend the bill in a number of ways, but none of the amendments were adopted by the committee.

**HSB 117** still contains provisions that allow for free agent employees, allow an arbitrator to choose between the two final offers of opposing parties, and excludes insurance and procedures for staff reduction from the scope of negotiations that the state and unions bargain over.

As the bill moves to the House floor, a public hearing has also been scheduled for Monday evening, March 7 at 6:00 p.m. The two hour hearing will hear from both supporters and those in opposition to the bill. Those wishing to speak at the hearing may sign up through the Legislative Information Office at (515) 281-5129.

### **Iowa's Charter School Law Ranks Near the Bottom Nationally**

Charter Schools have been receiving more national attention lately due to several outlets of publicity. Number one is the support shown for strong charter school laws by President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan. Charter schools are public elementary and high schools that are often exempt from many of the rules and regulations that public schools are subject to, in an effort to allow for innovation and creativity in the school setting. They establish accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each school's charter, or contract. Conceived of in the 1980s, Minnesota was the first state to pass a charter school law in 1991. California followed in 1992.

Secretary Duncan stated last year "The charter movement is absolutely one of the most profound changes in American education, bringing new options to underserved communities and introducing competition and innovation into the education system." It was important enough to the President that one of the requirements for states to receive Race to the Top funds last year was to ease restrictions on charter schools and adopt some charter-like standards for other schools. Iowa responded by removing a cap on the number allowed, but failed to go any further. Our application for Race to the Top funds was denied.

There are currently more than 1.5 million students attending over 4,900 public charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia across the country. It's a growing number that many parents are seeking because of the promise some of the charters can provide. Many parents want choice when it comes to their child's education and when a child is tied to the school that their zip codes gives to them, it doesn't provide a lot of choice. Iowa offers open enrollment for students, but again, this allows a child to open enroll to a similar public school in an adjacent district. The choice for an alternative learning environment is not available.

Which brings us to Iowa's charter school law. Enacted in 2002, it is currently in its ninth year. After nine years, Iowa has 8 charter schools. Compared to some of our Midwest neighbors, this is a paltry number. Ohio leads the pack in the Midwest with 368 charter schools, followed by Wisconsin at 233, Minnesota at 161, Illinois at 116, Indiana at 62, Missouri 46, and Kansas 37.

A major contributor to Iowa's low number of is the nature of its law. Two national reports in the last few months have ranked states on their charter school laws. In December the Center on Education Reform ranked Iowa 39<sup>th</sup> out of 41 states that have charter laws, giving it a solid F. In January the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools ranked Iowa 36<sup>th</sup> out of 41, again, giving it a solid F.

There are several reasons Iowa's law doesn't fare well in national rankings. It's essentially considered a charter in name only.

- Iowa currently allows only school boards to convert an existing school into a charter school. It is important that multiple different authorizers be given an opportunity to apply for starting charters and that they be allowed to start them in settings that aren't existing public schools.
- While the law states that charter schools are exempt from current laws regulating schools, it then goes on to provide a long list of exceptions, essentially stifling the opportunity for innovation that a charter is supposed to be able work towards.
- Included in this is teacher freedom. Teachers are still subject to the same collective bargaining and contract regulations that public teachers fall under. There is no opportunity for a charter to be creative and try other methods of contracting or pay.

A bill currently before the education committee, HF 124, is working to free up the charter school law and allow for more entities to apply to start a charter school, including colleges and universities, private colleges, and non-profit entities. That doesn't go without saying that some don't live up to their charters. Some fail and need to be closed when their contract with the school district is revoked. Iowa's law provides for a school district to not renew a contract with a charter school that isn't meeting the standards set forth in its contract. That accountability is important.

But when charter schools succeed, they can provide amazing results. Some have been nationally recognized for achievement. While accounting for just 5% of all high schools nationwide, charter high schools make up 18% of the top 100 schools in the nation. Charter schools are not the be-all-end-all to education reform. But they are an important component offering parents and students choice in their education where they exist. One size education does not fit all and the charter school bill will hopefully provide an avenue for choice.

What do you think? Email me your thoughts. My e-mail address is : [cecil.dolecheck@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:cecil.dolecheck@legis.state.ia.us) The number for the House switchboard is 515-281-3221, Seat 65

Visitors to the House include : Montgomery County elected officials.

Information about my legislative forum schedule, past newsletters and biography can be found at [www.iowahouserepublicans.com/members/cecil-dolecheck](http://www.iowahouserepublicans.com/members/cecil-dolecheck)