

Capitol Comment

2010 Legislature: The Mercy of Brevity

By State Rep. Mike May

The holidays are behind us and another annual ceremony looms. The 2010 session of the Iowa Legislature gavels itself into session Jan. 11.

That probably doesn't fill you with awe. Me either, but it does mean it's time for your state representative to climb back on the horse and do what he can to make this year's session useful to you - or at least to see that the majority party inflicts as little damage as possible.

The law specifies 100-day sessions in election (even-numbered) years, but in order to save a little money in 2010 we've decided to meet for just 80 days.

There's no doubt in my mind that this is a good plan for every year, not just the ones -- like this one -- when massive over-spending combined with an economic recession finally got the attention of everyone, including the spendthrifts who just a year ago ridiculed us for suggesting that we can't afford everything we want.

After all, Iowa did quite well for more than a century by inviting its lawmakers to meet only every two years. That makes it likely we could permanently cut the length of the annual legislative sessions without the slightest harm to the people, and perhaps with much benefit. For one thing we'd save a bit on lawmaker salaries and expenses.

More important, we might head off the additional burden of unnecessary and excessive legislative action. There is no rule in the universe saying that an act of the legislature will somehow improve your life. There is universal experience that such acts cost you money and reduce your personal freedom.

As I mentioned last fall, I've decided not to seek another term, so this will be my final stint representing you at the Capitol. But I don't intend to come down with a case of short timers' disease.

To help keep you informed I will continue to write a weekly column and to attend forums in both Clay and Dickinson Counties during the session.

Sen. Johnson and I will be available to the public at the city council chambers in Spencer and at the Maritime Museum in Arnolds Park on the following dates: Jan. 30, Feb. 13 and 27, and Mar. 13. We will be in Spencer from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and in Arnolds Park from 11:30 a.m. until 1 p.m.

Even though truncated, this session could be more than lively. As you well know, I come from the small-government school of thought. My like-minded colleagues and I expect a number liberal efforts to sneak special-interest spending through, even as the majority pays lip service to budget cutting and responsible approaches to state spending.

We expect that the fiasco with movie production tax credits and other special exemptions in the mulligan stew of Iowa tax law will create opportunities for discussion of broad tax policy.

Wouldn't it be fine if all this could be done as a matter of logical and genial procedures among wise men and women who have only the public good at heart?

Unfortunately the acrimony you are witnessing in Washington D.C. is very much like what Des Moines has been in recent years. When one political party controls the executive and legislative branches very little cooperation occurs. That's because, of course, the majority party doesn't need the votes from the minority -- and because it is the nature of politics for a powerful block to confuse the public good with its own partisan interests.

Last year the minority party pleaded with the majority to slow spending in anticipation of a drastic cooling of the economy. It was a futile exercise, but perhaps not useless because it reminded everyone who would listen that there is an alternative to the helter skelter rush to make government the source of every economic decision.

Still, in the end, it is up to the Democrats in total control to enact the measures to balance the Iowa budget as the law requires. It will be interesting to see if they're willing to accept help -- or call it political cover if you like - from the members of the minority who have worked hard since 2007 to prevent this train wreck.

Please know that you can reach me at the following:

Cell 712-330-1455

Home 712-336-4656

email: mmmay@longlines.com

mike.may@legis.state.ia.us

<http://www.iowahouserepublicans.com>