



## *Capitol Comments*

Newsletter from your  
Iowa State Representative  
Richard Anderson

State Capitol  
February 15, 2010

### **Untying the Gordian Knot.**

The Gordian knot is an old Greek legend coming from the time of Alexander the Great (330 B.C.). A region, in what is now Turkey, was without a king. A prophecy decreed that the next man to enter the capitol city driving an ox-cart would become king. When a poor peasant, Gordias, entered in his ox-cart, he was declared king. Gordias tied the ox-cart to a hitching post with a very complex knot. The ox-cart remained securely tied for many years. The ox-cart and knot became a shrine. Later, another prophecy decreed that whoever untied the knot would reign over all of Asia. Alexander the Great came upon the knot and attempted to untie it. When he could find no loose end of the knot, he withdrew his silver sword and with a single stroke sliced the knot in half. Alexander went on to many military victories and ruled Asia. “Gordian knot” has become a figure of speech for a complex problem without an easy solution.

For the past three years the Iowa budget has become a Gordian knot. I might call it Chester’s knot. We now struggle to untie it.

### **Chester’s Knot – Untying the Governor’s Gordian Budget Knot**

(For your understanding - \$60 million is about 1% of our general fund spending.) To balance his budget for the year beginning July 1, 2010, Governor Culver is relying on \$207 million from our state savings account and \$142 million in Federal Stimulus money. The non-partisan Legislative Service Agency and the State Auditor report the Governor still needs to cut another \$341 million in (roughly 6% of spending) through government re-organization.

## **Beware of the Alexandrian Solution – Radical Cuts with the Sliver Sword**

### **Slicing MHIs, Empowerment and LSAs**

For the past few weeks, the House State Government committee has worked on the government reorganization bill ([SF 2088](#)) which will save around \$65 million. It really has been a good example of bipartisan work which confirms that with enough work and votes this can be done. However, there are still thorny political and regional issues which have to be worked through.

In an effort to save additional money, a slash and burn view was taken with respect to rural Iowa programs. “Savings” were proposed by three controversial moves: 1) closing the Clarinda MHI and moving patients to the higher cost MHI in Cherokee, 2) moving early childhood and pre-school programs from a locally administered program called Empowerment to the state Department of Education, and 3) closing Library Services Areas and moving the services to the State of Iowa Library.

### *Mental Health Institute Update*

On the MHI issue, the bill initially proposed closing the Mt. Pleasant MHI. The Senate pulled back on Mt. Pleasant and put the Clarinda MHI on the chopping block for reasons other than sound objective economic data. A late House floor amendment pulled all MHI closure language from the bill. We are not out of the woods yet, as the battle moves back to the Senate. I think we are making good progress. For all of you who emailed, wrote, called and traveled to the capitol in support of the Clarinda MHI, I say, “Thank you, thank you, thank you for your commitment, your time and your hard work!” We still have work to do on fixing our mental health system.

### *Empowerment and Library Service Areas Update*

The government reorganization language would have eliminated local programs and moved these programs into state agencies. Like with the MHI issue, Iowans let their voices be heard. Through the effort of members of both parties, these lower cost and local programs have been preserved – at least for now. This debate also moves back to the Senate. Those who support local Empowerment and Library Services Areas must keep the pressure on.

## **Rejecting Alexander's Solution – Can We Untie the Gordian Knot?**

Even though Republicans and Democrats in the House have been able to come together and work on government reorganization in a bi-partisan manner, I believe there are additional efficiencies and savings we can find in state government.

Several additional proposals were submitted by lowans, offered in the House, and were defeated. Here are a few:

1. Combine administrative functions at the Regents universities (savings \$62 million)
2. Shift voluntary preschool responsibilities to Empowerment (savings \$45 million)
3. Sell and completely privatize the state general purpose vehicle fleet (savings \$18 million)
4. Sell or lease the Iowa Communications Network (savings \$15 million)
5. Delay the implementation of K-12 core curriculum for one year (savings \$10.5 million)
6. Cancel all Regents sabbaticals for Fiscal Year 2011 (savings \$6 million)
7. Eliminate non-essential adolescent social programs (\$4.25 million)
8. Cut funding for office supplies, service contracts, equipment purchases (savings \$5 million)
9. End state benefits to illegal immigrant adults (savings \$92.3 million)
10. Move the Rebuild Iowa Office responsibilities to Homeland Security (savings \$1million)
11. Eliminate taxpayer-funded lobbyists (savings \$4 million)

## **Who will Rule?**

Knotty problems remain. Alexander used the sword. Some legislators tried this as well. You, the people, responded on several issues. Your voices were heard. In fulfillment of the Gordian prophecy you should be the ruler. Sound familiar? How about the James Madison/American Constitution vision, "We the People...." Your input has the power to help us untie the knot and bring us back from the knotty economic problems that our State faces. Stay in touch.