



Capitol Comments

Newsletter from your
Iowa State Representative
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State Capitol
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An Enormous American Dream

It happened to me again this year... It was night, the lights were low. Other than the security guards muffled steps on the polished marble floor, nothing but silence filled the air. I felt alone inside the beautiful Iowa State Capitol. Enormous stone columns standing tall and strong directed my vision upward. Soft spot lights shone on the gold statues, agricultural themed murals and inspirational quotes on the walls high above my head.

Entering the House chamber, to unpack my desk supplies and get ready for the beginning of the 2010 legislative session the next morning, I looked up at the portrait of George Washington and it hit me again. What an honor to serve in American representative democracy. Contrary to President Obama's minimization of "American exceptionalism" I support that idea in its best tradition. The shock waves of the dreams of America's founding as set forth in our Declaration of Independence still ripple throughout the world.

Read it again... "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Take some time to reflect on those key words: self-evident truth, unalienable rights rooted in our Creator, life, liberty, and happiness, consent of the

governed. (By the way Jefferson's view of happiness is not mere pleasure we think of today, but Aristotle's view of happiness which equates happiness with the pursuit of virtue.) I feel like a dwarf standing on the shoulders of the giants who came before me. Long live the American dream: political, religious and economic freedom.

First Week Budget Buzz

During this first week in the legislature the budget is the focus of the discussion. It always amazes me how the two different parties can look at the same numbers and come up with two completely different characterizations. I think they call that political spin. Rather than use the numbers held up by the respective party leadership I like to use the non-partisan Legislative Service Agency (LSA) numbers. These are the people who keep the real books for the state of Iowa. I suspect, quietly, behind closed doors they shake their collective head in amazement or dismay when they hear the spin. The facts from the LSA are that Iowa is spending more money than it brings in. I think this needs to stop.

No New Taxes – A Governor's Credibility Problem

You fiscal conservatives will appreciate this - maybe. Apparently we have reached the point where tax increases are off the table. The Democrats (sounding like the Republicans) seem to be reciting in unison "No New Taxes!" Governor Culver proudly (and falsely according to the LSA numbers) proclaimed that since his first day in office he has balanced his budget without raising taxes. Wait a minute! Didn't he lead the charge in raising: taxes on cigarettes (\$140 million), vehicle registration fees, sales and use tax from 5% to 6%, court costs and fines (\$16.7 million), county recorder fees (\$2.4 million), hunting/fishing license fees (\$1.7 million)...? These are just a few of the increases in state revenue seen in the last few years, plus there are numerous reductions in state funding which have increased property taxes. Out of fear of losing power, it appears the Governor is developing a credibility problem.

Education Funding In Flux

In a very unusual move, we were held over Friday the first week of the session to address some fast moving education bills with no time given to study them in subcommittee.

One bill, being referred to as “Culver’s Fig Leaf” by pundits, is thought to be flimsy legislation he seeks to hide behind. This bill is an attempt to limit the potential property tax increases that will occur as a result of Governor Culver’s October 2010 across the board cuts to K-12 schools (\$235 million). This bill requires school districts to spend down unspent, undesignated reserve balances. It has little impact on the majority of school districts in the state since they have already spent most of their reserves below the level addressed in the bill. The underlying philosophy of the bill has a strong stench to it as the heavy hand of the state bears down further on local school districts.

Another bill, nicknamed the Race to the Money, is Iowa’s attempt to qualify for federal “Race to the Top” education money. Iowa wrestles with issues facing education as President Obama is encouraging private charter schools, which are abhorrent to Iowa’s education gurus. In spite of Iowa’s great education tradition, a number of public schools in Iowa are failing to meet the grade. It is another education bill that appears to have minimal financial benefit on rural Iowa schools as most small districts can’t support the burdens imposed by (strings attached to) the federal education legislation. On goes the battle in rural Iowa.

How to Contact Me

Please feel free to contact me regarding issues and concerns.

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Please send me an e-mail if you would like to receive my weekly newsletter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

