



Capitol Comments

Newsletter from your
Iowa State Representative
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State Capitol
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Drink Me. Eat Me. Watching Alice Grow and Shrink in Iowa's Wonderland

You may remember Alice in Wonderland. Alice follows the White Rabbit down into a rabbit hole. After a slow fall she finds herself in a long hallway lined with locked doors. A small key sits on a glass table. Alice opens a tiny door with the key and sees a beautiful garden. The door is too small for Alice to pass through. Looking back, she sees a bottle labeled "DRINK ME" sitting on the table. She drinks and shrinks to a size small enough to pass through the door. But alas, Alice has left the key on the table high above her head. In a box under the table Alice sees a cake with the words "EAT ME" on it. Alice eats the cake, thinking if it makes her smaller she can crawl under the door or if it makes her larger she can reach the key.

The cake makes Alice grow so tall that her head hits the ceiling. Frustrated and confused, Alice cries. Her tears flood the hallway. The White Rabbit runs by and drops the gloves and fan he holds. Alice fans herself with the fan and starts to shrink again and swims through the tears to shore. To dry off after the swim, the Dodo bird proposes that everyone run a "Caucus race" in which everyone runs in patterns of any shape, starting and stopping whenever they like, so that everyone wins.

I feel like a bit like Alice. Things keep growing and shrinking, frustration mounts, the key seems out of reach, and a wild "caucus race" makes it look like everyone wins.

Growing and Shrinking

Governor Culver promised teachers more money. The legislature appropriated the money. Then the Governor and the legislative leadership eliminated the "Phase I" money and down goes teacher salaries. Iowa receives federal stimulus money for educational stabilization, then the Governor implements a 10% across the board cut - eroding precious education dollars at the same level as non-essential services.

Iowa's economy was rolling along then the national economic downturn hit us. Then the federal stimulus money arrives. Now the federal stimulus money is beginning to dry up and we are looking at a \$ 1 billion deficit in a budget of roughly \$6 billion dollars (nearly 17% short).

Frustration mounts. The beautiful garden is just on the other side of the door, but the key can't be reached...

Small businesses and farmers are the lifeblood of the Iowa economy. They are the engines that drive economic growth and job creation. The key is enacting policies that help small employers thrive rather than struggle. The nonpartisan, nonprofit Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council recently released its annual analysis of policies affecting the business climate in each state - Iowa is ranked 41st.

Legislative leadership continues to drive this further down by pushing for mandatory payment of union dues by Iowa citizens who choose not to belong to a union (driving new businesses away from Iowa) and risking higher property taxes on farmers by underfunding K-12 education. Ouch.

In 1956 (my birth year) the Iowa population was 2.7 million. Today it is 3.0 million. This is a modest 10 percent growth over 53 years. The Iowa Code (our legislatively enacted laws) in 1956 contained 2 volumes, five inches thick. Today it is 7 volumes, fifteen inches thick. This is a 300% increase in state law during my lifetime! Ten percent growth in population and a 300 percent growth in legislative regulation - isn't it time we returned to the legislature convening every other year!?

Swimming...or drowning in tears of frustration.

Even with the eastern Iowa flood of 2009, it is not likely that Iowa will drown in tears of frustration, but with the growth rate of Iowa laws we may drown in government regulation. Ask your favorite school administrator or small business owner about the demands of government compliance and paper work.

Dodo's Caucus Race.

The Iowa legislature re-convenes this month. Being an optimist I have a glimmer of hope. The majority is talking about implementing some of last year's minority party proposals such as reducing the state motor vehicle fleet, consolidating purchasing to take advantage of volume purchases, consolidating computer technology, and reducing the number of middle management supervisor positions.

I hope our respective Democrat and Republican caucus activities aren't like the Dodo's race in Alice's adventure where we all run around in our own zigzag patterns with no focus or purpose and simply declare everyone the winner. Being a re-election year, I'm not sure...