

Iowa House of Representatives

State Representative Cecil Dolecheck

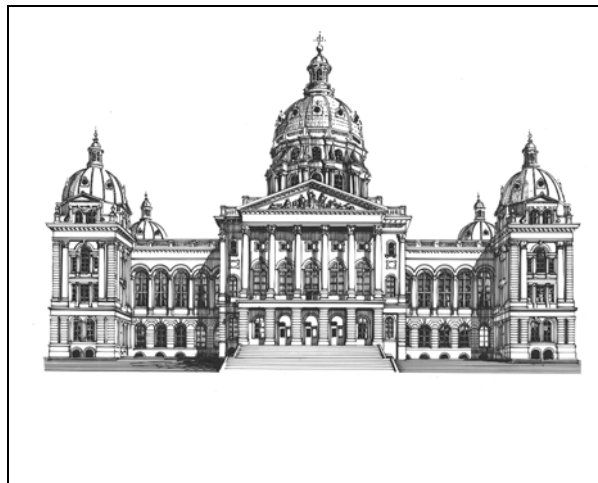
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**For the week of January 11th-January 15,
2010**



Session Starts 2010

The 2nd session of the 83rd General Assembly gets underway at the State Capitol here in Des Moines.

The Governor's "State of the State" was delivered Tuesday January 12th and is the main highlight of the first week back in session. In this speech the Governor laid out his visions, ideas, and condition of the states finances.

First, let us get the record straight on the budget. The Governor claimed that the budget spends less in 2010 than any budget since 2006. This ignores almost \$700 million of general fund spending that was pushed "off-budget" in order to balance the FY 2010 budget.

When the use of cash reserve funds and federal stimulus funds for general fund purposes is included to provide an accurate picture of state spending, the numbers show that FY 09 and FY 10 are both around the \$6 billion mark:

FY 2007 - \$5,385

FY 2008 - \$5,888

FY 2009 - \$5,934 (plus \$154 million in stimulus) = \$6.088 billion

FY 2010 - \$5,233 (plus \$592 million in stimulus, \$80.3 million in cash reserves) = \$5.905 billion

Source: Legislative Services Agency, Fiscal Services Division

The primary reason there is a \$1.1 billion spending gap in FY 2011 is because of overspending and the use of one-time money in FY 09 and FY 10.

House Republicans believe that the budget should be transparent to Iowans. By not telling Iowans the whole truth, they are keeping them from knowing exactly how much state government is spending.

Executive Order 20: Governor says will save Iowans \$140 Million next year, \$500 million over 5 years

On December 17, the Governor issued Executive Order #20, which contained 39 proposals to reduce or eliminate spending. The Governor claims that the EO will save the taxpayers \$140 million in FY 2011 and over \$500 million from FY 2011 to FY 2015.

Some of the ideas were offered by Republicans last year but were voted down by Democrats. Those ideas included consolidation of information technology systems, reducing the fleet, limiting equipment purchases and service contracts. Some are not reductions in the budget but rather revenue increases, like the vague "improve the state's debt collection" and "improve collection processes for unemployment taxes". Other items are transfers of funds from one area of the budget to another – for instance, "Encourage larger state agencies to support budget, accounting and pre-audit services for smaller state agencies."

Here is a link to the 39 cost saving measures included in executive order 20:

www.governor.iowa.gov/files/Executive_Order_No20.pdf

The Governor will also submit to the Legislature another list of efficiency savings and revenue increases that will require legislative approval. He says these savings will amount to \$200 million next year and nearly \$1 billion over five years. One of the proposals; shifting the funding of the state troopers to the Road Use Tax Fund has already run into stiff opposition by members of both parties.

I will support the ideas that streamline state government and make it more efficient. I will however, oppose ideas that grow government. It is good that the Governor is realizing that at least some of the ideas offered by House Republicans last session had merit. Hopefully the Legislative Democrats will come to that realization as well.

State of the Judiciary

The second highlight of the first week of session is the State of the judiciary speech by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

With the current budget crisis in mind, Chief Justice Ternus warned of the necessity of the accessibility and administration of justice in her State of the Judiciary speech. At times, the speech seemed like an open plea to both the Legislature and the Governor for a stop to the budget cuts in the Judicial Branch. The Chief Justice asked that “after a decade of downsizing, the time has come to hold the line.”

The Judicial Branch’s budget has always consisted mostly of staff salaries. That means cuts hit staffing hard, and according to the speech, the courts’ staffing levels today are down 17% from where they were in FY2002. The Chief Justice noted that while they only employ 4% of the state government’s workforce, their workforce reduction represented 23% of the total number of layoffs.

The Chief Justice warned that the judicial system now operates with a smaller workforce than it had in 1987. This is despite the fact that over the same period of time the number of cases filed in the courts has increased by 66%. With this in mind the Chief Justice pleaded with the Legislature and Governor for a status quo budget. To help maintain their appropriation, the Chief Justice noted that they would be open to again increasing court fees.

Funding for the courts was not the only topic of discussion. The Chief Justice touted the beginning of testing for their electronic data management system, with hopes of full implementation in four years. She also noted the work being done to explore digital audio recording in the courtroom. The Chief Justice received an unexpected applause when she declared “the court has no plan to displace court reporters.”

On consolidation of the courts, the Chief Justice clearly stated “the Judicial Branch has no plans to consolidate the courts.” She noted that there is little money to be saved by doing so at this point. She recognized that the Legislature has made it clear they have no interest in consolidation either but she warned that further cuts could “eventually starve us into consolidation.”

With her remarks, the Chief Justice made it clear what she sees as the perils of further cuts to the courts. Whether those cuts materialize or not will remain unclear until the Governor submits his budget later this month.

What do you think? Email me your thoughts. My e-mail address is : cecil.dolecheck@legis.state.ia.us

House Visitors include : The Dasher family of Lenox and Paul & Marge Warder of Stanton.

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

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