

For Immediate Release

Capitol Comment

Bitter Sweet

By State Rep. Mike May

The Iowa House and Senate are in a race to shut down by March 26. Since this will be my last assembly I have bitter sweet feelings. I will miss this place, my caucus mates, many on the other side of the political aisle, as well as those around the capitol that make this a comfortable place to work. I will miss seeing many of you here as well.

At the same time I look forward to more time with my family, friends, and my business. Life can be bitter sweet.

A very large amount of work remains to be done before we close the session. A significant number of bills that would affect you are on agenda. Some are good, some bad, and I want to devote this column to some of this pending legislation.

Same Trucks More Axles

House File 2512 has passed out of both the House Transportation and Agriculture Committees. This bipartisan bill, while not increasing the size of trucks, would allow them to carry more weight if the tractor and/or trailer has additional axels.

Under the new rules, six-axle trucks carrying livestock and construction materials could carry up to 90,000 pounds, and those with seven axles 96,000 pounds. The purpose is to increase hauling efficiency and save energy since these trucks could haul 25 per cent more product. Additionally, with more axels they would reduce weight damage to the roads. The bill has not reached the House.

Special Deal

One of the most contentious bills of the session is SSB 3248. There are two objectionable parts. First teacher supplemental salaries would be exempted from any across the board cuts made for the 2010 school year. Teachers would also be exempted from future cuts. You will recall that early in FY 2010 the governor cut state spending 10 per cent across the board which affected this state appropriation as well as many others.

If passed this bill would force local school districts to make up the salary cut even though the state is renegeing on its promise to fund this appropriation item. District could be forced to levy property taxpayers for relief (potentially a 24 million dollar tax increase) and/or cut programs and staff. As an example the Spencer School District will have to find an additional \$93,000 after already losing close to a million dollars from the earlier ATB cut.

In my estimation carving out exceptions to the pain we all feel is a poor precedent, and frankly most educators I know would rather share in the pain than see additional staff and program cuts. This bill also applies to community college instructors as well, but excludes the retroactive portion.

Second, this bill makes teachers the only professionals in the state that will immediately get the name of person filing a complaint against them. All of Iowa's other 32 licensing boards don't release the name unless it becomes a founded complaint.

State Preschool

The state has for the past three years handed out preschool grants to school districts willing to provide 10 hours of preschool instruction to any qualifying child. All districts were to be included over a five-year period as the state sought to supplement private preschools, Head Start, Shared Visions, and special education programs around the state with a goal of having 85 per cent of children enrolled in preschool education programs by 2012.

I have suggested cutting the present weighting of .6 per student to .4 in order for all districts to get a grant and end the unfairness of the exclusion of some districts. SSB3248 will allow the remaining school districts not receiving grants to get one for the 2011 school year.

Grants will not be as large but I do think this bill is necessary to stop the inequity of the present system which has caused some school districts to lose preschool students to neighboring districts already receiving grants.

Appropriations

Appropriations bills are beginning to appear on the House Debate Calendar which means you will finally be getting some picture of how the majority party intends to pay for what appears to be another very large budget. We still are looking at a one billion dollar short fall which has dire consequences for the 2011 budget and even more devastating ones for 2012. I remain committed to not allowing the state to spend more than it takes in, opposing legislation that leads to increasing property taxes, and finding more savings by improving government's delivery system.

Funding for Schools

It appears that the state will not be able to fully fund its portion of the 2 per cent per pupil allowable growth money for the 2011 school year. The legislature is likely to fund some portion of this \$270 million promise but not all of it. The legislature may allow local districts to levy for the portion the state does not fund (maintain spending authority). Along with the "special deal" noted earlier, this will undoubtedly have a significant impact on your property taxes. Our rural schools with significant declining enrollment will need to levy to make up the failed promises of the state