

Iowa House of Representatives

State Representative

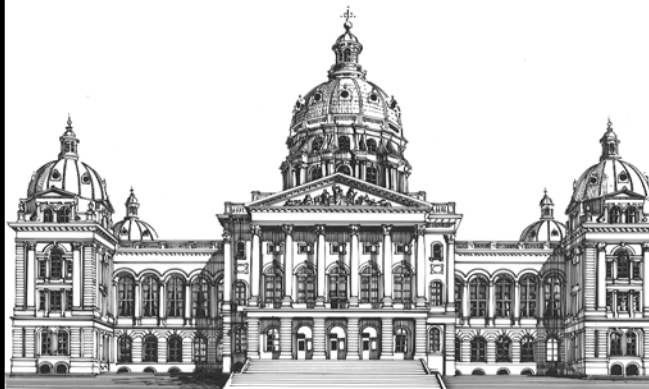
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For the week of January 14—January 18, 2008



Iowa Lawmakers Talk Money – Your Money

As we complete our first week of the 2008 session in the Iowa Legislature, it would be accurate to say lawmakers and the Governor have discussed a number of controversial proposals including whether to raise the tax on soda, beer, water and other drinks, and who the “winners” and “givers” will be in education this year. In each case, we’re talking about how to spend your money. That’s why it’s important for you to get involved with these issues, to communicate how you feel about the issues and stay informed on the session’s progress.

Some media in Des Moines have been quick to say this session will be noncontroversial because it’s an election year. I don’t think so. The Governor’s proposed budget alone sets the stage for controversy – even within his own party. Governor Chet Culver released his budget on Tuesday. In it, he proposes raising the tax we all pay on soda, beer and other drinks (AKA the “bottle bill”). He also proposes underfunding community colleges – a move he knows Democratic leaders (especially in the Senate) strongly oppose.

To lend some perspective on the “money moves” let me explain the budget has ballooned more than \$1 billion in two years – for the year covering this fiscal year and the next. By comparison, it took eight years for Governor Tom Vilsack and a bipartisan legislature to increase the state budget by that amount. Iowa is enjoying record growth in revenue – an increase of 10%. Spending, on the other hand, has increased 20% over two years.

Winners in the budget include K-12 education, teacher salary increases and funding for Regents Institutions. All three categories are important to people who live in my district and to many who live in Waterloo and Cedar Falls. As I mentioned, community colleges are not winners – at least in the Governor’s initial proposal – receiving \$3.5 million of their \$12 million funding request. Hawkeye Community College in my district serves an increasing number of students. Administrators there tell me they’re concerned tuition could go up for these students with the proposed budget. This comes at a time when the state is ever more dependent upon community colleges to train our badly needed workforce.

That said, let me make it clear House Republicans agree with the Governor on three main points he makes about his budget:

- To limit new spending
- To live within our means
- To fill the state’s cash reserves

We stand ready to help him accomplish those goals. We also agree with the Governor on his call for civility in our process. That is important, though all of us, as representatives, owe it to our constituents to ask questions along the way.

A Quick Look at the Proposed “Bottle Bill”

As I mentioned, Governor Culver has proposed expanding Iowa’s “bottle bill”. He’d like to increase the tax on beverage containers to 10 cents from five cents. He’d also like the tax to cover more types of beverages including water, tea and sports drinks.

Here’s what it means to you. You would pay a 10 cent deposit for every soda, beer or water bottle you buy. Right now, you pay five cents on a more limited basis – only for carbonated beverages. Under the Governor’s proposal, you would only receive eight of your 10 cents back. One of the other cents would go to redemption centers to help them pay the cost of recycling the containers. The other cent will go back to the state to pay for an environmental program called REAP.

REAP is popular with environmentalists in Black Hawk County and funds some projects at Hartman Nature Reserve. I’d like to know what my constituents think about paying more for soda and other beverages and about the fact not all of the additional money would go back to them.

Beware of Income Tax Phishing Scams

The Internal Revenue Service has issued several recent consumer warnings on the fraudulent use of the IRS name or logo by scamsters trying to gain access to consumers’ financial information in order to steal their identity and assets.

The latest IRS phishing scam involves an email that asks recipients to click on a link to access a form for a tax refund. In reality, taxpayers claim their tax refunds through the filing of an annual tax return, not a separate application form.

Additionally, emails claiming to come from tax-refunds@irs.gov, admin@irs.gov and similar variations told the recipients that they were eligible to receive a tax refund for a given amount. It directs recipients to claim the refund by using a link contained in the e-mail which sent the recipient to a Web site. The site, a copy of the IRS Web site, displayed an

interactive page similar to a genuine IRS one; however, it had been modified to ask for personal and financial information that the genuine IRS interactive page does not require.

If you or someone you know has received an email such as those listed above, you can relay that email to a new IRS mailbox, phishing@irs.gov. The IRS can use the information, URLs and links in the suspicious emails you send to trace the hosting Web site and alert authorities to help shut down the fraudulent sites.

The IRS does not send out unsolicited e-mails or ask for detailed personal information. Additionally, the IRS never asks people for the PIN numbers, passwords or similar secret access information for their credit card, bank or other financial accounts.

News from District 21

Thanks to all of those from Black Hawk and surrounding counties who visited with me at the Capitol this week. I heard from a number of veterans who are vigilant about learning what the state budget means for them. Those included Black Hawk County Veterans Affairs Director Bennie Spain. Also – thanks to the people from Operation Threshold from Waterloo who came to the Iowa Statehouse to tell lawmakers more about a program to help families be self-sufficient (FaDDS – Family Development Self Sufficiency).

Please join me and the rest of the legislative delegation from Black Hawk County for a forum at AEA 267 on Cedar Heights Drive this Saturday starting at 10:00 a.m.