



WattsLine from Repr. Ralph Watts

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Occasional updates regarding legislative issues of constituent interest.

Looking toward Washington

Last week we passed out of the House several bills dealing with Education that did less for Education than they did to Education.

One of the bills on a fast track (a very fast track) was called Race To The Top, which supposedly was a program to improve our schools, all funded by your free money from the federal government. After taking a closer look, it contained some hooks that are definitely not beneficial to our schools, now or ever. There are some provisions that allow expansion of charter schools, funds directed to failing schools, etc. In order to qualify for consideration, the schools needed to file a Memo of Understanding signed by the teachers unions and school administration. That, at first, doesn't seem like a bad thing, except that the school district is unable to change the agreement without further negotiations with the teachers unions and it expands the abilities for the unions to bargain in areas that they currently cannot. This has been a red hot issue at the legislature for the past two years. Fortunately, most of the larger school districts, and those that had administrators that recognized the built-in hook for what it was, declined to enter into an MOU. You can thank them for being attentive and not succumbing to the temptation of giving up board control for a few pieces of silver. It was a bad bargain but it passed both the House and Senate and we're off to Washington with our grab bag open, for this effort and anything else they will give us.

The latest numbers from the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Services Bureau shows a spending gap of \$1.117 billion for the FY11 budget, after the across the board cuts. Half of that is created by a gap in the school funding created by one-time Federal (TARP) funds, by the across the board cuts, past allowable growth allowances, and expansion of the statewide preschool program. If the Governor is successful in getting more Federal funds, which are one time dollars, it will compound our budget problems. We must do whatever we can to solve our budget problems without federal dollars but we don't seem to have the courage to try.

I have heard some majority party leadership say that Republicans are just the party of NO, that we're simply obstructionists. That may intimidate some people to get them to go along with the excess spending for the past three years but I see it differently. I'm glad the majority party really understands who supported them in their reckless moves. We certainly didn't. It was painfully clear where they were taking the train and we didn't buy the ticket to ride.

House Republicans are united in our resolve to not vote for a budget that spends more than we receive in revenue. We must refocus on improving the business climate for job expansion, controlling the rise in costs of the public sector, and improving the prospect of a greater prosperity for our children and grandchildren.

Public Forum:

Saturday, February 6; Waukee City Hall; 9:30 a.m.