



WattsLine from Repr. Ralph Watts

Date: Jan. 29, 2010

email: ralph.watts@legis.state.ia.us website: www.ralphwatts.com

(O) 281-7475 (H) Ph: 993-4850

Occasional updates regarding legislative issues of constituent interest.

Governor's Budget

On Wednesday we received the first version of the Governor's proposed \$5.707b budget for FY11. At first glance it shows that the budget continues on the same path that we have been traveling for the past three years; i.e. spending more than we will be getting in revenues and using one time funding for \$387 million. Some other juggling includes an item showing \$341m in savings from government reorganization. The non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau has only been able to show \$29m for any reorganization at this time. Approx. \$140m of leftover Federal stimulus is proposed for a portion of Medicaid and education funding.

The proposed budget doesn't fund the previously approved 2% allowable growth for schools, property tax credits are shown below last year's level, and it is proposed to fund the Highway Patrol from the Road Use Tax Fund. These moves will cause property taxes to increase depending on the condition of the local school budgets to absorb the lack of funding.

An interesting sidelight was that the Governor's budget was slated to be released at 2:00 p.m. and at very near 2 p.m., the fire alarm went off at the Capitol, with the sirens and PA announcements to vacate the building. Apparently there was some sort of malfunction but it was an interesting start to a new budget year.

Voting after midnight

You may recall that at the end of last year's legislative session we had a couple of marathon days where we started at 9 a.m. on Friday and closed the session at approx. 5 a.m. on Sunday morning - with only 5 hours out of the Capitol. That's when a great deal of bad legislation was rammed through on bills that nobody had a decent chance to read. It was bad lawmaking. On Thursday morning, we passed a bill that dealt with some House rules on other matters and Repr. Cownie of West Des Moines offered an amendment to the House Rules that would prohibit voting on any bills between 12 a.m. and 8 a.m. Apparently the majority party is very comfortable with these kinds of shenanigans because the amendment failed on a direct party line vote. It appears we will see some of the same misguided procedures this year.

Renaming a State Dept.

Many times it's difficult for the public to see what's actually happening inside the Capitol as well as the internal workings of state government. I wanted to share a personal observation that I have been seeing for the past couple years. When the Republicans were in the majority four years ago, another standing committee was formed in an effort to address some of the unattended issues related to our veterans. I have been pleased to have served on the Veterans committee since its formation. For the first couple years it functioned well as a bi-partisan committee which did some good work for veterans. Last year (and it appears to be continuing this year), it became a platform for labor unions to expand their influence. Interestingly, it appears to be aided by the Dept. of Workforce Development.

Last week the House passed a bill allowing unemployment benefits to the spouse who quits a job because of deployment or relocation of the military spouse. This has been something pushed by labor unions for a long time and virtually every labor union was registered for the bill. It was interesting that one of the organizations representing veterans was registered in opposition. (Now the Democrats are trying to eviscerate the lobbyist who voted in opposition). The Dept. of Workforce Development apparently was pushing it as well, according to the floor manager who is the chair of the Veterans Committee.

Workforce Development was pushing a bill last year through the Labor Committee (and it may be back this year) that would make owners liable for employee payments in case of bankruptcy of a corporation. It doesn't seem to make any difference to them that if this bill was passed into law, it would effectively shut down any future formation of businesses of any kind that would employ anyone. After considering all of those issues the Dept. of Workforce Development seems to be supporting, I think it's time to rename the Dept. to more adequately describe its apparent mission; i.e. we should consider renaming it to the Dept. of Workforce Destruction. At least people would better understand what they're up to.

Next forum: Saturday, Feb. 6; Waukee City Hall, 9:30 a.m.