



**WattsLine** from Repr. Ralph Watts

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Occasional updates regarding legislative issues of constituent interest.

## **Shaping our Iowa**

Earlier this week the Governor showed one more time that he is more concerned about his base in the labor unions than he is with the taxpayers. The Governor announced at a Des Moines meeting of the construction trades group that he was going to issue an executive order in which any state building would be "*required to consider*" the use of project labor agreements in issuing the construction contract. I'm sure the union officials heard what they thought he said but what he said really wasn't what he meant. He fully intends for any state building to be built under a project labor agreement but the executive order as written said the agencies would be required only to "consider" a project agreement. Project labor agreements have been shown to increase the cost significantly of public buildings and have a significant long term effect of increasing property taxes. So the Governor can say he only suggested the use of a project agreement, but I think all of the agencies got the message.

## **Early Retirement**

Earlier this week the legislature passed a bill authorizing an early retirement program for state employees. Normally in a period when an organization is re-organizing and downsizing you would expect the ultimate structure of the organization to be determined and any early retirement plan would be considered to deal with the impacted employees. We didn't work that way here. The early retirement package was hurriedly passed by the Senate and the House considered the bill shortly after. One of the problems with the early retirement bill is that we have no firm idea how many employees might accept it nor do we have any idea how many of the jobs will be back-filled. Obviously, if most of the openings are filled by someone else we will have gained nothing for downsizing government in the process.

## **Government Reorganization**

You may have heard about the huge government reorganization bill that the legislature is considering. As it appears at this point in time the reorganization looks like a mixture of bad and worse rather than good or better. It doesn't appear to be reducing the size of state government and much of it appears to have been written by the unions. It will be an unfortunate situation if we squander an opportunity to thoroughly organize and downsize our state government and ultimately reduce the burden on taxpayers but it doesn't look like that's going to happen.

## **Right to Work and other Labor Bills**

Bills were filed which will be taken up next week that revives the battle on several contentious labor issues that led to the Speaker throwing the public out of the chamber last year and the stunt where the Speaker left the voting machine open over an entire weekend to pressure some of his members to support the bill.

There is no question that the labor unions are putting on the full court press for their legislation to be passed in one way or another during this session. Many of the union issues are being incrementally passed through a wide variety of bills in more than one committee.

The next couple weeks will likely be very contentious at the legislature.

**Next Forum:** Saturday, Feb. 6; Waukee City Hall, 9:30a.