



WattsLine from Repr. **Ralph Watts**

Date: March 12, 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.

MAKING A NEW BUDGET

It looks like we are within two weeks of the end of the 2011 session so the budget bills are starting to move. There will be several bills for the major departments of state government. It is apparent that we are continuing to go down the same path that we have for the past three years. We again do not have a balance sheet which would simply tell us how much we will spend after the budget is complete. Instead, we are asked to pass a budget without a total budget target. The practice of spending more than we take in without a locked in budget target is the major reason we are in trouble with the state budget.

The Revenue Estimating committee (REC) on Thursday reported a slight increase of nearly \$33 million for the FY11 budget. By law, we must use the December number provided by the REC and \$33 million for a \$1b overall budget deficit doesn't do much. The overall effect of this budget may force local increases in property taxes depending on school financial conditions and their possible need to raise taxes to cover their budgets. House Republicans are maintaining the position that we will not support spending that appropriates more than we take in. It is not responsible to pass a series of department budgets without an overall budget target.

TEXTING

The texting while driving ban has become a bouncing bill since the Senate amended the original House bill. The bill left the House originally with a ban on texting but not reading a text message for all drivers. When the bill returned from the Senate it had been amended to include reading a text message. When the House again took up the bill it was re-written by amendment to provide a ban on texting for only those with a graduated driver's license, i.e. teens up to 18 years. It's uncertain at this point whether the Senate will go along with the House amendment.

LARGER TRUCKS

A bill was passed through the House Agricultural Committee this week to eventually increase the total weight allowed for certain trucks from 80,500# to 90,000#. Each truck would be required to have additional axles to handle the weight, which would have minimal or less additional impact on the roadway. If the higher loads are allowed, each truck could haul an approx. 25% greater load with only 10% increase in fuel use. The County Engineers Association and others are supporting the measure. It still has to pass the House and the Senate before it would go into effect. The trucks with the higher capacities would look the same as we commonly see now except they would have one or two additional axles in their undercarriage.

NEXT FORUM: Saturday, March 20, 9:30a at Waukee City Hall.