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Occasional updates regarding legislative issues of constituent interest.

We're in session but stuck in the ???!

With the start of the 2009 session of the legislature on Jan. 12, we were faced with a problem, a big problem. Our budget is currently out of balance and, according to the law, something must be done to get it back in line. The Governor gave his State of the State address on the 13th and I was left wondering "where's the meat?". Most of the speech was taken up by a video of the flood event in Cedar Rapids and eastern Iowa last summer, and, as important as that issue is, we have a bigger problem with our budget, and that was conspicuously absent from the Governor's address.

A few weeks ago when the Governor made the initial across the board cut announcement to state employees, he mentioned something about our condition was due to bad policy in Washington for the past eight years. He also mentioned in his State of the State address the directive "Let's be clear". Indeed, let's be clear about how we ended up with what may be nearly a billion dollar hole in a 6 billion dollar budget. This time we can't blame our fix on Bush!

Over the past two years, our budget has risen from \$5.3 billion to almost \$6.2 billion, a 17%+ increase over two years, an unprecedented growth in spending for the state. Over that time, there were repeated calls for the majority party to produce a balance sheet for the budget. As you may recall, the response from the majority leader in the Senate was, "we don't need your votes to do the budget, we'll give you a balance sheet when we get it done". Lest we get lost in the terms, a balance sheet merely shows how much money will be spent after the 13 or more Appropriations bills are passed. Without a balance sheet, a vote on an Appropriations bill is just a vote to spend taxpayer dollars not knowing what the total spending binge will be. At the end of the session last year, we knew then we had almost a \$700 million tally of built-in expenditures for the 2009 session. These expenditures were made long before any impact from Washington reached our doors.

As a result, the House Republicans did not support a single Appropriations bill last year and very few in the 2007 session. It was apparent the Governor was on a spending binge with control of both the House and Senate and we weren't going to support it.

So, when you hear talk about how Washington got us into this mess, remember that's only a part of it. This is a picture that changes day by day now and the truth may not be known until the Revenue Estimating Conference meets again, not due until March. When the impact of the national downturn in the economy is added to our own irresponsible spending, we may have over a \$1 billion hole to fill.

I hope we can get the courage to do the right thing and drastically reduce the spending that was put into place over the last two years and abandon efforts to go further into debt via bonding or other attempts to increase revenues.

As usual feel free to contact me by phone or email regarding issues of concern to you.