



WattsLine from Repr. **Ralph Watts**

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Occasional updates regarding legislative issues of constituent interest.

Health Care Bill

A health care bill (HF2539) was passed out of the House this week that had some good news and some less than good news included in it. While the bill passed the House on a unanimous vote, it was not an easy vote for me.

There is always pressure to do more in the health care area and this bill was no exception. There were several areas of the bill that could be considered improvements. The bill sets up a mechanism to give Iowans the ability to have access to their medical records when they are away from home. It sets up an advisory committee to coordinate setting up electronic health care records across the state. It also authorizes the establishment of a group in the Dept. of Health that will coordinate information on chronic disease and will work with health care providers to implement best care practices for chronic disease prevention and treatment.

There was some work done to make it easier for small businesses to get the same tax treatment as some large companies for providing employee health care coverage. The bill requires the Insurance Commissioner to work with businesses employing 25 or fewer to set up qualifying plans and take advantage of this incentive to provide health care coverage. It also provides a tax credit of up to 50% to small businesses for wellness programs after the program is established. It provides for expanded the eligibility for the HAWK-I (Health and Well Kids in Iowa) insurance program to include kids in families earning up to 300% of the federal poverty level. It is expected it could cover an additional 40,000 kids in Iowa who do not currently have health insurance.

Along with these items the bill was essentially a shell bill that expressed the intention of the legislature to eventually have all children and adults in Iowa covered with insurance. The inference is that the cost of the insurance would be heavily subsidized. While the noted improvements will be funded at about \$2 million, there is not nearly enough money to provide the almost universal coverage noted in the bill. As everyone knows, the cost of universal health care that is heavily subsidized by the government means a very hefty tax bill. Unless the money becomes available (and it won't without a massive tax increase) the onerous parts of the bill will not get done, and that will make it at least a little more palatable.

Voting Machine Changes Continue

A bill was passed in the House Appropriations Committee that would provide funding for another change in voting machines in some counties throughout the state. The bill requires the state to use a uniform voting system for all elections conducted on or after November 4, 2008. In an effort to provide a verifiable paper trail for each vote the state will be requiring a uniform standard which will be the Optical Scan Voting System. Funds will be provided for each county to be updated so we will meet all of the HAVA (Help America Vote Act) requirements. All of the precincts in Dallas County already have the optical system.

Forum

The next forum will be Saturday, March 15 at 10a at the Community Center in Woodward. Senator Jerry Behn and I will attend.

Future forums: March 22 at 9 am at Waukee City Hall and April 12 at 10 am at ISU Extension Office in Adel
(The March & April forum schedule has changed, so update your calendar.)

