

As of this time, it appears that we will end this session tomorrow, April 28th. While we accomplished some good things for Iowans, the Democrats' big government, big mandate, bad for jobs agenda dominated this year's session.

With the Democrats in control of both chambers of the Legislature and the governor's office for the first time since 1965, they have used their new power to push an extreme, anti-jobs agenda, which included items such as repealing Iowa's Right to Work law.

Democrats' push to gut Right to Work discourages job creation and takes away freedom of choice for Iowa's working families. The effort has already had a chilling effect on economic growth across the state as companies that were once considering locating in Iowa now look to other states.

Democrats' policy of big spending and increased taxes also hurts economic growth, not to mention Iowa's taxpayers. The Legislature approved a budget of nearly \$6 billion for the next fiscal year that included more than \$170 million in new revenue from increasing the cigarette tax as well as other new taxes and fees. In fact, Democrats are on track to spend an additional \$1 billion in state money in just two years. That is pretty astounding when you consider that the state didn't reach its first \$1 billion in spending until 1976.

The Democrats' level of spending is just not sustainable. Iowa's economy will not be able to generate \$1 billion in new tax revenue over the next two years, which means Democrats are setting Iowans up for a whopper of a tax increase to pay for all of their spending.

The budget this year represents a 10 percent increase in spending over last year's budget. In contrast, Republicans cut Iowans' income taxes by 10 percent when we took over the majority in 1997. I believe Iowans should keep more of their hard-earned money, not give it away in taxes.

Despite much talk at the Statehouse about increasing access to affordable healthcare, the majority party accomplished little on the issue this year. Unfortunately, all Iowans will get in the area of affordable health care is yet another commission to study the issue, an increased tax on tobacco and more General Fund spending.

Senate Republicans, on the other hand, offered many healthcare proposals such as providing tax credits to small businesses for employee health coverage, establishing a revolving loan fund to help more Iowans establish Health Savings Accounts (HSAs), and increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for Iowa health care providers. It's unfortunate that all of our proposals fell on deaf ears.

Democrats missed tremendous opportunities this year in terms of both health care reform and property tax reform. These are two issues that Iowans care deeply about and, unfortunately, there will be no measurable progress in the near future.

SENATOR JIM HAHN MUSCATINE, CEDAR & JOHNSON COUNTIES