

Your Capitol Voice Representative Jeff Kaufmann

Last week at the Capitol ended in the majority party's decision to not debate the statewide smoking ban bill. The official reason given was that amendments were not ready. I am quite sure that the real reason was the lack of 51 votes for this bill that exempts casinos. As I stated in my last column, I will vote "no" to a bill that exempts casinos from a new law that affects every other public business in this state.

We also found out that the Governor's plan to "capture" the unclaimed money from gift cards may be debated in the Legislature. I find it disturbing to think that money from individually-owned gift cards could end up in the state general fund. The Governor and State Treasurer claim that their plan just holds the money for the consumers until it is claimed. They contend this protects the consumer as opposed to the current scenario where businesses essentially keep the unused dollars from gift cards. I see this as a way to increase state revenue in a desperate budget situation brought on by a lack of fiscal responsibility. Let me be clear: I will vote "no" to strengthen such a plan. I hope that politicians from both parties will do the same.

I realize the pressure is strong to find money to balance the budget. As I cautioned throughout all of last year: you can't increase spending by 21% and not expect problems. At the end of this year, the Senior Living Trust will basically be empty and here we are now, thinking about scooping the money from unused gift cards. These actions are not the solution. Controlling our spending and handling the state budget like we would our own personal budget is the answer.

The response to my request for surveys was wonderful. We have over 350 returned. I will present the results, six questions per week, in the next three columns. There are certainly limitations in gauging public opinion on complex issues measured by relatively simple questions. I do believe, though, that I have a much better idea of where many of the citizens of the 79th District stand on several key issues of the day. Here are the results from six of the questions:

1. The results were overwhelming against the idea that non-union employees be forced to pay a percent of union dues as a fee for services provided by a union. 94% of the respondents were against this.

2. Only 39% of respondents approved of an increase in the gas tax to pay for road and bridge repairs, while 43% approved of an increase in registration fees to pay for transportation infrastructure. Several people specifically mentioned pickup trucks. What wasn't surveyed was the willingness to pay for these costs with a variety of revenue sources.
3. Regarding the reduction of taxes, 51% favored property taxes be reduced, 42% favored income taxes, and 7% marked sales taxes as their preference for reduction.
4. The fourth question asked about the problems facing public education in Iowa. Respondents were asked to mark two. The results follow:

Uninvolved parents	34%
Non-challenging curriculum	28%
Low teacher pay	20%
Not enough money	15%
Lack of funding for pre-school	3%
5. 64% supported the statewide SILO initiative which would make the school penny tax permanent and guarantee that sales-rich counties would share their sales tax revenue with rural areas and small towns. It was obvious that a disproportionate share of people who did not favor this idea were my Johnson County constituents.
7. Finally, 71% of the respondents favored an amendment prohibiting gay marriage. This number actually increased from two years ago. I did not ask about civil unions or contracts.

The next six questions will be presented next week. Any new surveys will be tallied and added to the end results. Thanks to all who participated.

Capitol Visitors:

Becky Allgood, West Branch; Curtis Frick, Durant; Dennis Pruess, Clarence; Richard and Vera Smith, West Liberty

Listening Post Schedule:

February 23 9 am Hill of Beans Coffee Shop, Durant
1 pm Courtyard Estates Assisted Living, Walcott
March 1 9 am Student Center, Muscatine Comm. College
1 pm Bennett American Legion

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