

STATE ISSUES FROM SANDS

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News from the Hill... This week the debate on the House Floor lasted into the evening hours, as we finished our second funnel period for bills of the opposite house to be moved through the committee process.

Up in Smoke... The conference committee established to bring the two chambers together on the smoking band is not making any progress. One might say the outcome of the bill appears to be in a cloud of smoke.

Spending Matters... There still is no balance sheet for Iowans to see and time is getting short. I am sure the majority party is waiting for the Revenue Estimating Conference (REC) meeting on April 4 to hear what the additional revenue projection is allowing them to know the dollar amount they will take.

The REC gross revenue estimate for FY 08 is 6.9 percent and the estimate for FY 09 is 2.7 percent. Although there are some ominous economic signs on the horizon, year-to-date revenue growth is running at 11 percent above FY 07. Therefore, while the REC might stay at 2.7 percent for FY 09 (or go lower), it will be more than made up for by the expected increase for FY 08. This would bring in approximately an additional \$60 million.

However, this increase in expected revenue will not be enough to offset their excessive spending approved last year. They will have to use other methods to cover their spending increases and previous spending commitments. This level of spending (approaching \$1 billion over two years) is simply not sustainable.

I continue to push for sunshine and openness when it comes to Iowa's budgeting process in anticipation of the REC meeting on April 4.

Gaming Bill... The gaming bill, SF 348 was anticipated to being debated all week. Finally, on Wednesday morning it was placed for debated on Wednesday evening. While both parties were in caucus, word circulated that we wouldn't be debating the bill that night or the rest of the week. The bill is a reverse referendum.

This section provides if a proposition to operate gambling games on an excursion boat or racetrack has been approved in two successive elections or more in a county since 1994, the proposition to authorize gambling games is not thereafter required to be submitted to the county electorate. This bill takes away the right of the people to vote, and I have always supported the vote of the people.

In addition to this bill, there is an amendment being offered by the state government committee to codify racing performances for thoroughbreds and quarter horses. The amendment also codifies purse money for all three breeds, thoroughbreds, quarter horses, and standardbreds. But the amendment did not codify any racing performances at Prairie Meadows for the standardbreds. I have proposed an amendment with several of my colleagues to codify racing performances for standardbreds.

The governor has sent word he will not sign this bill without changes and help in passing his bottle bill.

“The liberties of a people never were, nor ever will be, secure, when the transactions of their rulers may be concealed from them.”

- Patrick Henry, American colonial revolutionary

For more information on these and other bills: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/>

Until next time,
Tom Sands