

THE HAHN REPORT

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Senator Jim Hahn

Bills Pass in Senate to Protect Consumers

Crackdown on identity theft in Iowa

This was a busy week at the Capitol as the second funnel week is fast-approaching. Many bills crossed our desks, most of them were not controversial and some will be beneficial to Iowans.

Consumer protection is of growing importance as new technologies continues to proliferate, so do the number of criminals interested in exploiting it. People are using technology to steal identities, steal money, and use seemingly safe businesses to trick customers into gaining personal access into their lives. Internet phishing is a tool used to criminally and fraudulently acquire a person's sensitive information such as usernames, passwords and social security numbers. The practice is not only common, but is becoming more sophisticated by the day.

The Iowa Senate is trying to remain one step ahead of the curve and passed two important bills cracking down on these internet criminals. The bills create stiffer penalties for those caught and involved in internet crimes and would also mean banks and credit card companies would have to notify you immediately if your accounts have been compromised in any way. The other piece of consumer protection passed is the consumer's ability to better protect their own credit score. Credit agencies would not be able to release the consumer's credit score to any other agency or person unless consent is given. This will give Iowans more control over their passwords and accounts.

New, stiffer penalties would mean criminals would be responsible for paying the Iowa Attorney General's office and the consumer the money they were defrauded of. This is in addition to currently instituted criminal penalties. This is a chance for Iowans to receive justice and avoid being penalized monetarily for crimes they didn't commit.

All that happens under the Golden Dome is not negative and the Iowa Legislature is proud to pass bills protecting and enabling Iowans. As technology continues to become more sophisticated it is only fitting that our laws keep up.

Accountability in the Classroom Thrown Out

Last week, the Iowa Senate passed an education bill (SF 2329) that would establish categorical allowable growth rates for teacher salaries, professional development, and class-size reduction programs. While this bill allows school districts to plan their annual budgets, several amendments were rejected that would have provided more accountability to taxpayers regarding how the dollars are used and more accountability to parents regarding their child's performance level.

The Republican-sponsored amendments to the bill that were offered would have provided greater insight into some of the concerns surrounding the education system. In reference to professional development, one amendment would have shed light on the amount of classroom time that is being taken from our students in order for teachers to have more professional development during instructional time.

Another amendment offered would have raised Iowa's standards when defining whether or not a child is proficient in various subjects. Currently, according to the Iowa Department of Education, a student is "proficient" in a subject area if they rank in the 40th percentile or higher on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) or Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED), which does not necessarily mean a student is performing at his/her grade level. The amendment would have required a student to be deemed proficient in that subject area when he/she is performing at grade level.

Iowans expect high education standards and deserve to know how their children are doing in school and if they are performing at their proper proficiency level. Not having any sort of educational accountability leads to the abuse of rules and power. We should expect more from our educators and strive to promote more teacher/student time rather than promoting teacher in-service days that don't contribute to classroom betterment.

As Iowa continues to slip in the national education standings, it is time to seriously question why this is taking place. As laws are passed with no backbone, thanks to the Democratic majority, it is clear that a lack of accountability is a major factor in education. Iowa Senate Republicans will continue to strive to provide a strong education system that prepares competent members of the workforce.

Road Funding Earmarked, But Not Enough

Funding Iowa's roads and bridges has become a top priority, especially after the Minneapolis bridge collapse in 2007. Many Iowa roads and bridges do not meet the basic safety requirements outlined by the Iowa Department of Transportation and are in serious need of repair. As the Democrat Majority continues to play with the budget, it remains to be seen as to how they will fund road and bridge repairs.

As of right now, \$9.7 million has been appropriated from the Primary Road Fund for Fiscal Year 2008 to the Highway unit for labor, fuel and salt costs associated with winter road maintenance. That's not even thinking ahead to summer road repairs. As Governor Chet Culver has promised he will not raise gas taxes, Senate Republicans are wondering where the money will come from to fund these important road repairs. No solution has been offered from our counterparts across the aisle that doesn't involve raising taxes.

Senate Republicans have proposed the following measures to fund Iowa road repairs:

- Transfer \$90 million from gambling taxes to the Road Use Tax Fund
- Require any remaining General Fund dollars after the reserve accounts are full to go directly to the Road Use Tax Fund
- Decrease the expenditure limitation of the budget from 99% to 98.5% next year and 98% the following year, ensuring there are sufficient dollars flowing from the General Fund to the Road Use Tax Fund on an annual basis

It is important to point out that the currently proposed appropriations are only for major thoroughfares. It will be a sad day when someone is severely injured or dies because Senate Democrats just can't fit road use funding into their budget. Senate Republicans will work so it never comes to that.

And Last But Not Least

Yesterday, the Democrat controlled House started to debate HF 2645, the Public Employee Collective Bargaining bill. The debate continued into early morning hours this morning and was voted on around noon. The long hours were due to the many amendments the Republicans tried in vain to add to the bill. It is scheduled to come to the Labor and Business Committee in the Democrat controlled Senate with the possibility of debate later today and tomorrow. Make no mistake about it, this bill will strip power away from elected officials to negotiate with public unions and the whole thing should not be taken too lightly. This legislation will mandate what will be negotiated in collective bargaining.

This is a slippery slope that will eventually raise our property taxes. Local municipalities, school boards as well as city and county governments must find the money to pay for various things not covered when the negotiation is taken off the table. Taxpayers deserve fair negotiations, not union mandated tax hikes.

SENATOR JIM HAHN
MUSCATINE, CEDAR, &
JJOHNSON COUNTIES