

Your Capitol Voice Representative Jeff Kaufmann

Last week began on a positive note. Hector Ibarra and Terry Christiansen accompanied their West Branch 7th graders to the Capitol. Eight cybermission teams displayed their impressive science projects in the Rotunda. 10 parents also came along to extend their support. I was proud to introduce these young people, especially since two bills making their way through the legislative process were inspired by their work.

A variety of bills continue to make headlines and work their way through the process. I continue to hear overwhelmingly negative comments on the proposed collective bargaining changes. As the Governor contemplates a veto, I wonder if he really will force meaningful changes or if the hesitation is providing him political cover before signing. I will give him the benefit of the doubt. By the sheer volume of messages asking me to continue to oppose (132 against and 10 in favor to date), I hope the Governor will veto this legislation in its current form.

Regarding the smoking ban legislation, a conference committee (5 Senators and 5 Representatives) has been formed. The best guess for this legislation is that there will be a statewide ban, but the key question revolves around exemptions. Will this legislation except casinos? Taverns? Veterans organizations? The House will wait for the conference committee report and then vote it up or down. If there continues to be disagreement then the bill dies for the year. I do not see that happening.

Two education initiatives are ready for floor debate. The state is on the verge of adopting a core curriculum for all schools. Do not confuse this with statewide standards which include a way to determine if a specific objective has been met. Quite frankly, I am disappointed in the core curriculum bill. Why?

1. the legislation does not offer new and innovative ways to assess student progress
2. the curriculum often represents a minimum level which many schools have already achieved
3. the legislation mandates this curriculum to non-public institutions
4. the cost results in hundreds of thousands more dollars to the Des Moines bureaucracy

A second initiative seeks to address the snacks and drinks available to students in school. The objective is healthier foods in our schools, including vending machines. I do not have a problem with these efforts, although once again we are usurping the power of local school officials.

This same bill also mandates a minimum amount of time for physical education. I strongly believe that each student's activities should be factored before more physical education is mandated to their classroom schedule. For example, participation in athletics, marching band, dance class, and even a physically demanding after-school job should be taken into account.

One final bill I wanted to discuss is the bottle bill. The Governor really wants a debate on its expansion. He seems to have dropped the “back door” tax increase he originally supported. This had involved the state keeping a penny from the proposed 10 cent deposit.

I sense that my constituents generally like the bottle bill and believe that it works. I also sense that the majority of my constituents believe that redemption centers are a better base for this activity than grocery stores. Finally I believe that curbside recycling should be a significant part of the overall solution, and in the urban areas, the bulk of the solution.

The legislature should discuss an expansion to include water, juice, and energy drink bottles if the process is removed from the stores and handled by redemption centers. Many legislators are open to an additional penny to pay for these centers. I am strongly opposed to any attempt by the state to scoop part of the deposit to balance our budget. I will have no part of that shell game.

What do you think? Am I reading your thoughts correctly on this issue? Please let me know.

Capitol Visitors: Roger Sessler, Mike Shuger, Al Kroeger, Jack Schmoll, Dave Mohr, Jim Williams, Mark Henning, all Wilton; Mark Heckman, West Liberty; Larry Quinn, Lowden; Mary Jo Hainstock, North Cedar Superintendent (Sorry I missed you.)

Please contact me with questions or opinions.

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