

## **Your Capitol Voice** **Representative Jeff Kaufmann**

By the time you are reading this column there are less than two weeks left in the session and so very much to do between the completion of policy bills and constructing a final budget of over 6 billion dollars. I find myself in the middle of several key battles so the stress level has been quite high. My weekends home are a welcome and needed relief I can assure you. An afternoon on the farm, a pancake breakfast in Stanwood, and a meeting at the Cedar County Historical Society Museum were just the activities that strengthen me for another week of intense activity.

Unfortunately the livestock odor research bill has stalled and its future is bleak. This legislation is a cooperative effort between the DNR, Department of Agriculture, and Iowa State University. It seeks to highlight best livestock practices, help with citing of new facilities, and “move the scientific bar” forward in terms of new research and scientific solutions to air quality and odor problems.

To me this was an excellent example of cooperation and genuine desire to find middle ground on a contentious issue. I can not support solutions to the odor and air quality issue that guts our livestock industry. On the other hand, most farmers realize that air and water quality have to be addressed. I strongly believe that giving the DNR more police powers is not the answer. (Every year I deal with constituent issues where this is already a problem.) I believe this legislation is the beginning of a scientific solution. There was strong support from agricultural organizations like Farm Bureau and many environmentally focused groups. And, of course, researchers at Iowa State are crucial to success.

Why did it fail?

-Overextended budgeting made it difficult to find the 5 million per year for 4 years that was requested. My reaction? In a year of record-setting revenues this is no excuse if this is indeed a priority.

-Some believe that livestock owners should pay for the research. My reaction? I believe this is a problem to be addressed by all Iowans. Laying the blame and the bill entirely on livestock producers is unfair.

-Some insist that confidentiality in working with producers does not need to be preserved. My reaction? In trying to solve this problem and find permanent solutions, producers shouldn't open themselves up to law suits. If the lawsuits are just waiting to be filed then why would any farmer participate?

I believe that we missed an opportunity to begin to solve a problem and for that the legislature should be blamed. House Republicans stand ready to work with House Democrats if their leadership will allow a debate on this important legislation.

We did move ahead on more mercury legislation last week. There is universal agreement that more Mercury in our environment is a problem that merits immediate attention. Two years ago I sponsored legislation to reduce mercury emissions in local steel plants by separating out mercury switches in vehicles and properly disposing of them. This year I co-sponsored legislation with two Democratic colleagues (Reps. Foege and Jacoby) to reduce mercury from thermostats from entering our environment. (Our target is 70% in two years, 80% in three years.) This legislation was inspired and promoted by the energetic West Branch Middle School students and their science teacher, Hector Ibarra. It was even featured in the “Around Iowa” section of the *Des Moines Register* on March 25th.

The legislation will require outreach to retailers, contractors, and homeowners by the manufacturers of thermostats, including an easy and cost-effective collection system. Ultimately mercury thermostats will be outlawed in the state, but we still have the problem of disposal of the thousands that are already here. This legislation has passed two committees unanimously and is headed for floor action. This has been a great reminder to me that clean water and responsible environmental policy is not and should not be a partisan issue. It also has taught me that an energized group of science students can make a difference!

I completed 14 Listening Posts and forums in 12 different towns during the last few months. I still have at least 3 more to go with wrap-up sessions. **I want to make an offer to any club or organization: I would be happy to attend a meeting of your group and provide a legislative overview and/or question and answer session. Just let me know.** Of course I will continue my annual visits to the local school boards, city council meetings, and nursing homes as usual.

Capitol Visitors: Ryan Morningstar, Lisbon; Paul Glenn, Mechanicsville; Ron Challis, Tipton; Chad Beatty, Roger Braun, Kirk Trede, Freeman and Ruby Kaufmann, Wilton. (Ryan Morningstar and Chad Beatty are Hawkeye wrestlers and Ron Challis works with the team. Their championship team was honored last week in the House.)

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