

Your Capitol Voice **Representative Jeff Kaufmann**

With adjournment in less than one week, major bills are moving rapidly through the Legislature. At this point there are still several specific appropriations budgets to be passed, the statewide SILO initiative is stalled (temporarily I hope) in the Senate, the concealed weapon licensure (right to carry) bill is stalled on the House floor, and the health care legislation is headed to conference committee.

In a matter of a few hours these issues could gain life and pass or die despite the votes available to pass them. Such is the “minutes-notice” environment of the last week. In next week’s column, I will update you on these and many other initiatives.

We now know that there will be a minimum of an 830 million dollar total two-year increase in the budget according to recently released budget targets. (The Majority party should have released these budget targets weeks ago.) To place this in perspective, this 830 million dollar increase in the last two years is more than the total increases in the bipartisan budgets of the previous seven years! I will not be voting for budget bills that increase spending by this unsustainable and unrealistic amount. We all know where we are heading: future cuts or higher taxes. Why place ourselves in that predicament when it can be prevented?

When Republicans and Democrats share power I believe that the debates (sometimes quite energetic) and compromise leads to greater fiscal responsibility and better legislation in general. With one party in control, this aspect comes and goes, and I believe this contributes to runaway spending. It is happening in Des Moines now with the Democrats in total control just as it did a few years ago in Washington D.C. when Republicans had total control. I strongly believe in both parties sharing power to avoid irresponsibility in budgeting and policymaking.

The statewide smoking ban was signed by the Governor last week. I still believe that local control would have been a better way to go, but I know that thousands of my constituents are glad for the smoke-free school grounds, government facilities, community breakfasts and dinners, and restaurants.

I voted “no” because of the utter hypocrisy in allowing a casino exemption, while at the same time mandating no smoking in privately owned bars. The *Cedar Rapids Gazette* awarded me the quote of the day last week when I categorized our new ban as the best law “that casino money could buy.” In my campaigns I promised not to give casinos special privileges and my “no” vote reflected that promise. This was legislative hypocrisy at its worst.

The TIME 21 plan for highway and road dollars will also be signed by the Governor. I do not see a whole lot to celebrate with the bill. Cedar County will receive \$47,500 more in 2009 ramping up to about \$310,000 more in 2012. This won’t even build one-half mile of new road. Muscatine County will receive a similar amount initially, but in 2012 they will receive about \$263,000 additional funds. (This is a lower figure because the city of Muscatine is a larger part of that county compared to Cedar County towns.)

These dollars are inadequate given the increases in fees we will now have to endure after July 1st on new cars and trucks. Some will argue that it is a start and I don't necessarily disagree, but with revenues in the state at record levels, our general fund is a relevant and appropriate source of funding for our roads. Again, we missed a huge opportunity to make the right decision for our future. I can't describe for you the frustration I feel at the lack of planning for tomorrow and the fiscal peril we are placing ourselves in.

This week will be long and even chaotic at times. I will personally have multiple amendments on a myriad of issues. I will also remain vigilant. The hurried and sometimes chaotic nature of the last few days is when the "back room" antics and deals multiply. And mark my words, despite claims of scarce resources this session; there will be plenty of pork and pet projects offered in the final mammoth bill which is usually debated on the last day. If this happens, I am a "no" regardless of what politically sensitive legislation is also placed in the bill to garner enough "yes" votes to pass it and obscure the waste and pork it actually contains.

Capitol Visitors (last two weeks):

Brian Froelich, Kirk Trede, Wilton; Kim and Seth Ehlers, Bennett; Kathy Moravek, Mechanicsville; Joan, Elizabeth, Abigail, and Hannah Maske, West Branch

Please contact me with your questions or opinions.

E-mail me: jeff.kaufmann@legis.state.ia.us

Write me: State Capitol Des Moines Iowa 50319

Call me: 1-515-281-3221