

STATE ISSUES FROM SANDS
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News from the Hill...

The national economy continues to slow, but Iowa's economy is reaping some of its best growth in years. There are red flags appearing, however, giving need to be concerned for the growth in the near future. On Friday, August 4, the Revenue Estimating Conference (REC) met to revise the fiscal year 2008 and 2009 revenue estimates. With revenue continuing to exceed the December estimate, the REC increased fiscal year 2008 by \$78.8 million and fiscal year 2009 by \$49.1 million. These figures, though, are still estimates. By Iowa Code, we are supposed to spend no more than 99% of the December Revenue Estimating Conference meeting. It is hard to tell how much money the majority party will attempt to spend because they have not yet shared their balance sheet with us.

Facts and myths about SILO...

The special option sales tax for schools, known as SILO, has been a great funding source for school infrastructure and reducing the property tax burden on Iowans. SILO is voter approved and sunsets every ten years. The accountability is to the local school boards.

The bill passed Wednesday, April 9, repealing SILO and replacing it with a bill increasing the state sales and use tax to 6 percent. The bill raises taxes about \$32 million dollars. The people of Iowa will not get to vote on this again. This is a broken promise and the monies are not protected. I voted for an amendment to constitutionally protect the monies for school infrastructure and property tax relief. Unfortunately, the amendment failed; the majority of the people have better ideas for spending the money in the future.

Clean Water versus Safe Schools...

The legislature voted against constitutionally protecting the school infrastructure fund but voted to approve to constitutionally protect an anticipated future funding source for clean water. Senate Joint Resolution 2002 establishes a constitutionally protected pool of money able to be used by the DNR for various natural resources priorities.

The two main actions that arise out of SJR 2002 are as follows: It creates a constitutionally protected trust fund for the money, and it makes that money contingent on an increase in the current sales tax rate. This needs to pass two consecutive general assemblies and go to a vote of the people before it becomes law.

Smoking Ban...

House File 2212 has passed the Legislature, and is now on its way to the Governor. After a couple of weeks of not meeting, the conference committee met and reported to the general assembly the proposed bill passed by the legislature. They exempted casino gaming floors, the Iowa Veterans Home, State Prisons, the State Fairgrounds and other fairgrounds, to name a few. The law, however, does not permit smoking in bars and restaurants. There seems to be some irony and hypocrisy in this bill. I continued to vote no as this is not a function of

government. The decision should be up to the local businesses to determine if they are going to permit smoking in their establishment. Patrons could then decide if they are going to frequent the smoking establishment or the nonsmoking establishments. Workers could then decide if they are going to work in a smoking environment or in a nonsmoking environment.

Compulsory Education...

Current Iowa law requires children age six through age sixteen to attend school. The child may enroll in a public school district, a nonpublic school, or receive competent private instruction. HF 2623 would raise the compulsory age to seventeen. Students enrolled in private education are not affected by this bill.

On Tuesday, the House Ways and Means Committee voted 17 ayes and 8 nays to move HF 2623, the compulsory education bill, to the House calendar. I was one of the no votes in committee. There are better ways to address the problem of students dropping out before they graduate. Making them stay in school and disrupting class is a terrible solution.

This bill should not have been in the ways and means committee. It was placed there by the majority party only because they forgot to place the bill on the unfinished business calendar.

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

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