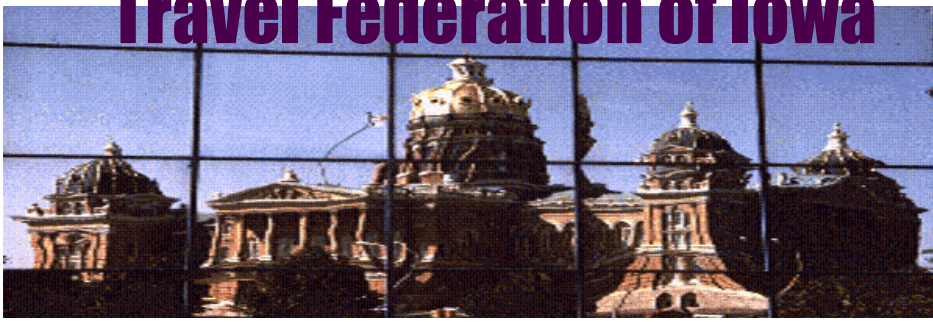


Travel Federation of Iowa



LET'S TALK
TOURISM

Issue Eight – May 7, 2007

Capitol News

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Important Bills

CAPITOL NEWS

Say what you will about this legislative session – the state's new legislative leaders finished on time (almost)! It was only a couple years ago that the Legislature went an entire month past their deadline – so going an extra day (albeit a really long extra day) is a piece of cake.

The 2007 Iowa Legislative Session wrapped up in the dead of night, just after midnight on Saturday/Sunday, April 28/29. Ending just 111 days after they began, the Legislature was able to complete their work just one day (and 30 minutes into their second day) past their deadline.

Finishing on time wasn't as easy as you might expect. Legislators struggled in the final weeks to put the finishing touches on the State's \$6 billion budget, reach a compromise with the Governor's office, and hammer out details of remaining legislation like the \$100 million Power Fund.

Despite the House, Senate and Governor's Office all being controlled by Democrats, there was still a pretty good bit of negotiation that had to happen before a budget could be passed and session could wind down.

And even with agreement, you still had a few surprises. Like the debate on wild pigs that popped up on the final day, threatening to throw everything back up in the air. Apparently, wild pigs like to mix it up with domestic pigs and spread disease, and wild pig hunting is becoming quite the attraction in some areas of the state. Legislators were able to work things out, but it looked a little dicey there for a several hours. You never know what will pop up in those final few hours.

So how does this session rate? Democrats announced the session was a success. Republicans declared the session a disappointment. As is always the case, the truth depends on what you think about what legislators did this session. Having control of the House, Senate and Governor's office for the first time since 1966, Democrats set out this session with an ambitious set of goals, of which many were accomplished:

- Increasing teacher pay to the national average (a \$4,500 raise for teachers);
- Raising the state's minimum wage to \$7.25/hour;
- Lifting the ban on stem cell research;
- Expanding Iowa's civil rights laws to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity;

- Raising the state's tobacco tax by \$1 per pack; and,
- Creating a \$100 million Power Fund with the goal of making Iowa energy self-sufficient.

Left undone were things like addressing the state's unequal and complicated property tax system, addressing the state's poor water quality, campaign finance reform, more money to maintain Iowa's roads (gas tax, vehicle-related fee increases, pickup taxes) and addressing a number of controversial labor issues.

So how about the issues that impact the travel and tourism industry. Get out your scorecards, because you'll have to judge this one for yourselves!

[Click here to review the list of signed/pending signature bills of interest to the tourism community.](#) This list appears at the end of this update.

[Click here to review the entire list of bills passed by the Legislature this year.](#) This list is updated as bills are signed, and includes veto messages.

[Attached is a list of bills that are dead – they didn't make it through the legislative process and will not be enacted into law.](#)

The bills on this list are eligible for debate again next session – so if you see something you like, let your legislators know!

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NEXT ISSUE – SESSION REVIEW

If all things go well and as expected, our next report will be short & sweet! The next report will be sent out the first week of June, following the Governor's veto period.

The Governor has 30 days following the end of the legislative session to either sign or veto all bills sent to him. At the end of the 30-day period, we will update the bill list to reflect the Governor's actions, and let you know what happened. As long as the Governor signs everything (and makes no line item vetoes), our report will likely be little more than an updated list.

TOURISM NEWS

Legislators actually spent a good deal of time this year discussing tourism and its impact on the state's economy this year, with the goal of continuing to move the state forward as tourism destination. Here are some highlights:

Tourism Marketing

Legislators continued in their effort to expand the resources available for tourism marketing.

- [\\$250,000 increase for the Department of Economic Development's Office of Tourism \(SF 562\).](#) This brings the state's general fund commitment to \$3,794,443. The bill also earmarks the total budget for the Office of Tourism for the first time in a decade, making sure the money and the increase go directly toward tourism marketing.
- [Allowed the Office of Tourism to begin collecting last year's earmarked gambling funds quarterly](#) (rather than at the end of the year, making the money unavailable until July 2008). This revenue stream is expected to add at least \$1 million to the line item above for tourism marketing. This bill (SF 302) has already been signed into law.

- Efforts were also made to increase tourism funding to the Midwest Regional Average of \$8.3 million (HF 490 & SF 177) and double the gambling revenues earmark (HF 871). Despite receiving huge numbers of co-sponsors, they were ultimately unsuccessful.

School Start Date

Several attempts were made in the final days of session to address the school start date issue – to get schools to start later (after Labor Day), reduce funds for every day started prior to Labor Day, and enforce the current legislation.

Unfortunately, most of these amendments were defeated or ruled non-germane (out of order because they did not deal directly with the subject matter in the bill). Sen. Putney and Rep. May say they will continue to push for this issue, although they know it will be an uphill battle.

CAT Reauthorization

The Community Attractions & Tourism (CAT) Fund was set to end its run in 2010, but many with pending multi-year projects began to get worried that the money would run out and they needed a longer term commitment than was presently available. Legislators agreed that the program is a success, and one they want to continue, so they went ahead and reauthorized it for another three years until June 30, 2013 (same funding level - \$12 million per year). This was included in the Standings Budget (SF 601), one of the last bills completed this year.

Historic Preservation

Despite long discussions throughout the early and middle part of session, the large “Livable Communities” bill was split into pieces, and only a few parts survived. One of these parts allows people to receive the full benefit of their historic preservation tax credit (instead of receiving a pro-rated version, the taxpayer would be able to carry the tax credit into future years until the entire benefit is received). The same bill (SF 566) also increases the total amount of tax credits to \$20 million annually over three years (\$10 million for the first year, \$15 million in the second year, and \$20 million by year three) and increases the total amount that can be used in Cultural & Arts Districts to \$4 million annually.

Recreational Trails

Recreational trails will get \$2 million from the gambling dollars this year, to help build and connect trails. There was much discussion of creating a recreational trail interconnectivity fund to help create an interconnected network of trails throughout Iowa, and provide \$100,000 to market recreational trails, did not receive approval and was ultimately left out of the package of legislation that arose out of early discussions on SF 556.

Film Incentives

Legislators helped Iowa’s small but growing film industry this year by enacting legislation (HF 892) that creates an Iowa Film Advisory Board and a Film, Television & Video Project Promotion Program to increase the fiscal impact on the state’s economy of film and television.

Regional Sports Authorities

In the final days, legislators slipped language and funding (\$1 million) into the Infrastructure Budget (HF 911) to allow the Department of Economic Development to establish up to ten Regional Sports Authority Districts in the state. To receive this designation and funding, a group containing more than one city and more than one Convention & Visitors Bureau would need to apply.

The group must agree to actively promote youth sports, high school athletic activities, Special Olympics, and other nonprofessional sporting events in the local area.

State Cookie

Last but not least, efforts by Rep. Mike May to designate the chocolate chip cookie as the state's "official cookie" failed. Apparently there are too many sugar cookie fans in the Iowa Legislature, because, as the resolution stated, "there is nothing more delicious than a warm, gooey chocolate chip cookie and a cold glass of milk."

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OTHER NEWS

Rep. Dawn Pettengill of Mt. Auburn announced this week that she would be changing parties from Democrat to Republican. Rep. Pettengill was often at odds with her party leaders this year, opposing a number of bills proposed by unions. She is expected to seek re-election as a Republican in the 2008 Election.



The switch means the Democrats next session will control 53 votes in the Iowa House to Republicans 47 votes. This isn't much of a change for Democratic leaders – they had been operating this year with only 53 votes, as Rep. Ray Zirkelbach of Monticello has been absent while serving in Iraq for the last two years.

Since the Iowa Constitution requires a constitutional majority to pass bills (51 in the House and 26 in the Senate), this means the Democrats can only spare two votes on any bill they wish to pass. And as we witnessed this session, that isn't an easy feat at times.

Rep. Pettengill becomes the second legislator to change parties in recent years. Rep. Doug Struyk of Council Bluffs left the Democratic Party in the middle of the 2004 session and became a Republican. He has been re-elected twice since that time.

Spring Into Action

Just because the legislature went home for the summer doesn't mean your work as tourism's best advocates is done. In fact, it has only just begun. Believe it or not, now is the time when you have the most impact on legislators. When they see you back home, in the district!

Take some time to contact your Representative and Senator in the next month or two, and thank them for their hard work in representing you, and making and keeping tourism a priority. Some ideas about how to get started:

- Ask them to sit down over a cup of coffee to talk about tourism and its local impact.
- Invite them to your office for a tour and visit.
- Invite them to local event.
- Get a few local tourism folks together with your legislators and talk to them as a group.

- Add them to your mailing lists – this is a very important way to keep them updated on what you are doing and may very well prompt your legislator to contact you about something.
- Send them a thank you note for their support of tourism this year, and tell them we very much appreciate the \$250,000 increase in tourism marketing (and anything else you see on the things accomplished this year).
- Make sure you show how the legislation they passed this year – whether money for trails, three-year extension of CAT, historic preservation, more money for tourism marketing, or film incentives.

And it is caucus season, so take advantage of Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucus status and get out and meet the candidates for President. They seem to be underfoot on an almost daily basis. They are usually looking for different opportunities to talk issues with a variety of people. If nothing else, it is a great photo op for candidates, and a great way to showcase Iowa to the nation!

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LEGISLATIVE HOME CONTACTS

www.legis.state.ia.us/asp/Legislators/LegislatorInfo.aspx

DON'T KNOW YOUR LEGISLATOR'S NAME? DON'T WORRY, CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT:

www.legis.state.ia.us/FindLeg/

BILLS OF INTEREST

An updated bill list has been attached to this report. We have also attached the list of bills that did not make it through the session ("dead bills").

2007 Top Tourism Priorities

1. Increase the Iowa Tourism Office's budget to the Midwest regional average of \$8.3 million. Iowa's current budget of \$3,442,000 is not even half of the Midwest regional average.
2. Maintain a traditional school year calendar.
3. We encourage local interest groups to consider what will best serve the industry in their location and encourage them to advocate for those issues.

Your Advocacy Toolkit:

[Find Your Legislator](#)
[Legislative Committee Listings](#)
[Listen to Debate \(live\)](#)
[Session Calendar](#)
[Guide to the General Assembly](#)
[Forums/Roundtables](#)

[Contact Your Legislator](#)
[Track Legislation \(instantly updated\)](#)
[House & Senate Calendars \(weekly & daily\)](#)
[How a Bill Becomes a Law](#)
[List of Local Public Legislative](#)

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