



Icy Return for Iowa's Lawmakers

Legislators were treated to a "welcome back to Des Moines" snow storm on Monday, complete with white-out conditions that kept many from attending opening night receptions. While the weather outside was icy, the reception inside the Capitol was warm and welcoming. The children and families of legislators made the trip on opening day to watch the swearing in ceremonies and listen to opening speeches.

There will be no shortage of challenges for our 150 state legislators - balancing the budget, helping with flood recovery, giving communities the tools to rebuild, cleaning up Iowa's rivers and lakes, continuing to grow the economy, addressing Iowa's growing unemployment, expanding Iowa's renewable energy industry, encouraging energy efficiency, and continuing to make progress on health care. Most legislators say they will be happy if they can balance the budget and help communities hit by floods and tornadoes. But Speaker of the Iowa House Pat Murphy probably summed it up the best, "I will make only one promise this year - to not make promises."

On & Off the Table

Last year, legislators passed a ban on smoking in most public places, but continued to allow it in casinos. Some bar owners said they couldn't compete with the casinos, and have been pushing for the state to allow smoking in bars, or end it in casinos. Legislative leaders said this week they will not be bringing this issue up for discussion this year. As House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy said, "let sleeping dogs lie."

However, legislative leaders left the door open this week for a few other controversial issues. Sen. Gronstal said increasing the state's gas tax in order to repair roads and bridges is "still an open issue for us." Increasing the gas tax to pay for Iowa's transportation infrastructure is a priority of TFI.

Other legislators say they will keep an open mind when listening to the Governor's proposal to sell the Iowa Lottery proceeds for a quick \$200 million, but would only consider it if it is a good deal for Iowans.

Legislators will also get a chance to debate the merits of a few traffic safety issues, such as requiring all new school buses to have seat belts, banning teen texting while driving, and a complete ban on cell phone use while driving. However, legislators are notorious multi-taskers, so they may have to give up their drive-time office-hours if a cell phone ban passes.

Legislators have until February 20 to request new bills - so look for many more ideas to surface in the coming weeks.

Governor Announces Two Major Recovery Initiatives

Governor Culver decided to delay the announcement of his fiscal year 2010 budget until later in the month, hoping to get a better handle on what will be included in the Federal government's plans to help states. Instead, the focus of his annual "Condition of the State" address was one of recovery - economic recovery and flood recovery.

Governor Culver unveiled two major initiatives to help Iowa get back on its economic feet:

- **\$43 million short-term disaster recovery program.** The Governor is recommending using \$43 million of Iowa's emergency reserves to pay for flood recovery, leaving \$577 million in our "rainy day fund." These funds would be used to:
 - Pay for property tax replacements in communities that lost tax base (\$20 million);
 - Provide more "jump start assistance" to bridge the gap in what federal flood assistance will and will not cover (\$10 million);
 - Give forgivable loans to nonprofit and cultural groups affected by floods (\$5 million);
 - Meet additional unmet human services and social services needs (\$5 million);
 - Maintain the Rebuild Iowa Office, which is a clearinghouse of information and assistance for flood-affected families, businesses, and communities (\$5 million);
 - Fund additional worker training to get people ready to rebuild (\$1 million);
- **\$700 million long-term public works project.** The Governor is proposing to borrow \$700 million to pay for public infrastructure improvements (housing, trails, highways, roads, bridges, mass transit, railways, airports, water quality, wastewater treatment improvements, energy infrastructure, flood control improvements, disaster relief infrastructure, and public buildings). Iowa recently become one of only 10 states with a "triple A" bond rating, the best you can get. That means Iowa has a good credit score, and can get a good interest rate on money it borrows. The Governor's proposal would borrow the money and repay it over 20 years using gambling dollars. The repayment cost would be around \$56 million each year. ***While this proposal will fund many tourism priorities, we will need to watch it carefully to make sure it does not impact the existing funds tourism receives from gaming dollars.***

The Governor's proposals received rounds of applause from Democrats, who called his plan "bold." Republican leaders gave the Governor a mixed review, with new House Minority Leader Kraig Paulsen of Hiawatha saying, "Borrowing money after you've already spent too much is the exact cause of the national financial meltdown. Borrowing just because you can is not the way Iowans manage their budgets, and neither should we."

Budget, Budget, Who's Got the Budget?

The Governor has until February 1 to present his budget for the next fiscal year - fiscal year 2010 - which begins July 1. Everyone is anxious to see how the Governor will reallocate scarce resources and fill the nearly \$800 million budget gap that appeared after the latest revenue estimates were made. But it may be one of those "what you don't know, won't hurt you" moments. Des Moines Register political columnist David Yepsen suggested legislators "take a snow day" since they really won't be able to do much with the Governor's budget until the March revenue estimates are in, and we know just how bad it is going to be.

On another budget note, legislators have decided to spend only two mornings a week in budget subcommittees. Typically, the seven budget subcommittees meet three mornings a week to discuss their part of the state budget. Since there isn't any money, legislators decided they can do that work in only two days. Maybe this way, they can say "no" less often.

More Capitol News

State Representative Royd Chambers of Sheldon will be the third Iowa lawmaker in recent history to miss a legislative session after being deployed overseas to serve in the National Guard. Rep. Chambers will miss the entire legislative session while serving in Kyrgyzstan. Rep. Ray Zirkelbach missed two legislative sessions while serving in Iraq. Before that, former Senator Chuck Larson missed a legislative session while serving in Iraq.

Finally, committees have been assigned. You can view all the committee lists by [clicking here](#). A list of committees of importance to TFI priorities is attached.

Bill Tracker

SF 10 - General Soil & Water Conservation Fund (Status: Senate Agriculture Committee) - This bill establishes a general soil and water conservation fund to support financial incentive programs administered by the division of soil conservation within the department of agriculture and land stewardship. This bill also provides that civil penalties assessed by the department of natural resources which arise out of violations involving the discharge of storm water, are to be deposited into this fund.

SF 4 - Local Watershed Improvement Grant Changes (Status: Senate Agriculture Committee) - This bill would increase from three to five years the period of use for Local Watershed Improvement Grants and allow the board act during that five year period to extend the use period another five years.

HF 11 - Minimum Wage COLA Increase (Status: House Labor Committee) - This bill increases the state minimum hourly wage, including the minimum hourly wage established for employees employed for less than 90 days, annually on July 1 by the same percentage as the cost-of-living increase in social security benefits authorized in the previous fiscal year by the federal social security administration.

HJR 1 & SJR 1 - Sales Tax to Natural Resources (Status: House Natural Resources Committee) - This joint resolution to the state constitution would create a natural resources and outdoor recreation trust fund. Three-eighths of one percent would then be added to the state sales tax and the revenue produced would be directed to the trust fund.

HF 13 - Separation Distance from Attractions (Status: House Agriculture Committee) - This bill provides that a confinement feeding operation structure (i.e., a confinement building, manure storage structure, or egg washwater storage structure) cannot be constructed within three miles of a visitor attraction or two miles from the corporate limits of a city. The bill defines "visitor attraction" as a portion of real estate having unique archaeological, cultural, historical, recreational, scenic, or scientific significance, and that tends to attract the visiting public; or a museum. The bill contains several related details, including an exemption for established operations.

HF 23 - Zoo Income Tax Checkoff (Status: House Ways & Means Committee) - This bill would enable taxpayers filing individual income tax returns to designate \$1 or more on the return to be paid to the Iowa zoo fund to be used to provide grants to qualified zoos that submit an application for funding. The bill creates the Iowa zoo fund in the department of cultural affairs and requires the department of revenue to annually remit moneys collected from the checkoff to the fund. The bill provides that the checkoff is eligible for placement on the individual income tax return form for the tax year beginning January 1, 2010.

HF 26 - School Year Day-to-Hour Conversion (Status: House Education Committee) Replaces the current 180-day school calendar with a required school calendar of 990 hours of instructional time for grades 1-6 and 1,080 hours of instructional time for grades 7-12. Eliminates the authority of the Department of Education to define the minimum school day and allows the minimum hours to include early dismissals or late arrivals for inclement weather or emergency health factors and staff development. Adds a new requirement that the state board define what constitutes instructional time, which the bill states cannot include recess, the lunch period, noninstructional assemblies, late arrival or exceptional dismissal times, or professional development time. Makes a technical change to a provision which specifies that a school district must hold a public

hearing on a request to change the school start date prior to submitting the request to the department. Effective July 1, 2011. Sponsored by Rep. Tjpek

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