

Subject: Legislative Report -- week 1

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Conversation: Legislative Report -- week 1



Iowa

Legislative Report

83rd Iowa General Assembly

IA Speech-Language-Hearing Assn

Week 1: January 12 – January 16, 2009

Paula Feltner & Mike Heller, Lobbyists

A dismal budget, inclement weather, start-of-session ceremonies, and many new faces greeted legislators this week for the gaveling in of the first term of the 83rd Iowa General Assembly. The sober news of **a \$779 million gap between revenue and spending** for this year (according to the latest report issued by the non-partisan Legislative Services Agency) definitely cast a pall on the celebrations. This is after cuts of **\$178.4 million** from the **\$6.1 billion dollar state budget** have been ordered by Governor Culver in the month of December. Grappling with this budget deficit will dominate this entire legislative session.

Tuesday, the Governor delivered his state of the state address. In his State of the State Message, Governor Culver stressed the importance of balancing the budget and the constitutional mandate to spend within the states' means. He asked for programs to rebuild the state, make storm repairs, create jobs, and make infrastructure and flood

recovery a top priority. He promised to cut back on day-to-day expenditures but invest in the same time in brick and mortar to create jobs and keep the economy going.

- He proposed a \$700 million initiative, known as the **Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Investment Bonds**, is designed to create jobs, strengthen the economy, and address unmet infrastructure needs across the state. The plan calls for the state to issue bonds to pay for public buildings, utilities, roads, mass transit, railways, airports, water quality and wastewater treatment improvements, trails and bridges and repay the bonds over 20 years with existing gaming revenue (about \$56 million a year) and require no increase in taxes.
- Governor Culver stressed the need to continue rebuilding Iowa following last summer's floods and tornadoes, create new jobs by addressing the state's infrastructure needs, and to balance the budget without raising taxes on working Iowans by also passing a **\$43 million Rebuild Iowa Bill** to help communities, businesses and families impacted by the floods and tornadoes of 2008 pay for long-term disaster recovery efforts. Funds for the proposal would come from the state's cash reserves, which currently sit at a record \$620 million. The money would be used for property tax replacement, retraining, rebuilding costs that feds don't cover, and nonprofits affected by the flood.
- He also asked the Legislature to approve recommendations of the **Rebuild Iowa Advisory Commission** made after last summer's historic storms. Recommendations include improvements for flood plain mapping, land use planning, disaster insurance, regional watershed management, first responders, and local emergency management departments. (For more information on the RIAC Commission recommendations, visit www.rio.iowa.gov <<http://www.rio.iowa.gov/>>)

Governor Culver will be submitting his FY2010 budget proposal to the legislature at the end of January.

Wednesday legislators heard an address on the state of the Judiciary by the Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court. The Honorable Marcia Turnis told legislators that foreclosures and debt collection cases are on the increase and that she expects criminal, domestic abuse and drug abuse cases to increase due to the recession. Since 96% of the courts costs are labor, she will employ furloughs which will reduce services but is concerned about the access that the poor and middle class have to attorneys and to the courts. She also highlighted the need for juvenile court officers, translators for litigants and defendants, the need for more jurisdiction for district court judges, and changes in duties and roles for magistrate.

Organizational committee meetings were held the rest of the week (Wednesday and Thursday) and the legislators headed home for Martin Luther King holiday and the inauguration. However, the makeup of the Iowa legislature deserves mention this first week of session. It certainly reflects the changing culture in our state. The legislature is more diverse than at any time in history. Six (6) black lawmakers were elected in the Iowa House and all are Democrats. The Senate has no black members. Twenty-five (25) females were elected in the House, compared with 74 male representatives.

Of those women, 7 are Republicans and 18 are Democrats. Nine (9) women were elected to fill seats in the 50 member Senate, and one is an Indian-American. Of those women, 6 are Democrats and 3 are Republicans. The average age among representatives is 51, with the youngest being 25 and the oldest 80. The average age in the Senate is 57, with the youngest being 28 and the oldest 79. One sitting House Republican will miss the entire session: Rep. Royd Chambers of Sheldon was call up for active duty.

The legislature has **twenty-seven (27) new legislative members this year** (although two are House members who ran for the Senate seat) **so it is possible your representative and senator have changed.**

New House Members:

- John Beard, D – Decorah
- Kerry Burt, D – Waterloo
- Peter Cownie, R – West Des Moines
- Gene Ficken, D – Independence
- Chris Hagenow, R – Windsor Heights
- Erik Helland, R – Grimes
- Charles Isenhardt, D – Dubuque
- Jerry Kearns, D – Keokuk
- Kevin Koester, R – Ankeny
- Larry Marek, D – Riverside
- Renee Schulte, R - Cedar Rapids
- Jason Schultz, R – Schleswig
- Kent Sorenson, R – Indianola
- Sharon Steckman, D – Mason City
- Annette Sweeney, R – Alden
- Phyllis Thede, D – Bettendorf
- Nick Wagner, R – Marion
- Nate Willems, D – Lisbon

New Senate Members:

- Merlin Bartz, R - Grafton
- Swati Dandekar, D - Marion
- Randy Feenstra, R - Hull
- Shawn Hamerlinck, R - Davenport
- Pam Jochum, D - Dubuque
- Tim Kapucian, R - Keystone
- Kim Reynolds, R - Osceola
- Steve Soddors, D – State Center
- Mary Jo Wilhelm, D - Cresco

The whole week, the Governor and the legislator emphasized that more significant cuts will have to be made and that any new monies would be directed toward flood recovery and infrastructure repair. It is a certainty that cuts in existing programs will have to be made. **We need to be concerned about AEA service cuts, cuts in optional Medicaid Services, etc. It will be more critical than ever to know your representative and senator and communicate with them throughout the session.** Let your legislators know what valuable programs and services you provide **in their districts;** get others to join the effort and have them contact their legislators about the importance of our services. **This year, more than ever, we have to be heard.**

Start by identifying the names of your Representative and Senator. To know for sure who your representative and senator are, go to the legislative website at: www.legis.state.ia.us <<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/>> and click “Legislators” on the left hand side of the page. That will lead you to a link called “Find Your Legislator”. All you

have to do is enter your zip code and/or mailing address (no name needed) and your legislators will be listed with contact information. Home phone numbers will be listed on that site.

Legislators are home in the districts on Friday and Saturday of every week. After identifying your representative and senator, make it a point to meet call them and arrange to meet them individually if you don't know them already. Arrange a brief face-to-face visit to introduce yourself, explain what your job is in the district, how it affects the district in a positive way, and that you want to be a resource to him/her on issues that concern you.

If you do know them, meet with them to refresh their information about what you do in their districts. Give your legislators your cell number so that you can be easily reached. They want to meet their constituents and expect to hear their concerns. With this groundwork, when you contact them on a specific issue, they know who you are and the contact is much more effective. **REMEMBER – all politics is local. Personally knowing your legislators will be the most important thing we will ask you to do all year!**

Next week we will start indicating the bills that have been introduced this session. After the inauguration legislative, committee meetings will replace ceremony and work will begin in earnest. Until then, stay warm and have a good week.

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