

**April 4, 2007**

**Riverboat Casinos – A Ridiculous Evolution. Will the Big Bladders Go Bye-Bye?**

When we first started the Iowa economic dance with legalized gambling we spoke of jobs, tourism and a little rural agriculture (raising racehorses and greyhounds). Casinos were limited to riverboats or racetracks. Riverboats evoked those slow moving, by-gone days. Cash flush tourists were to flock to Iowa – the land between two rivers – just to float our mighty rivers and spend a little money on a few games of chance. Riverboat casino owners complained about the cost of cruising the rivers so the schedules were limited. Eventually cruises were scheduled only on Monday mornings as operators hoped to draw a few more patrons early in the workweek. Due to the cost of maintaining US Coast Guard approval and highly paid captains, “boat” casino developers sought and obtained approval for barges floating on big ponds like the one in Osceola. Due to the cost of barge maintenance and limited casino size, operators sought and obtained approval to sink permanent concrete footings for the “boats.” Eventually the “boat” became a land based foundation with a big bladder (much like a waterbed bladder) built into the floor below a trap door! Guess what? With new casino expansion (Council Bluffs) and construction (south of Iowa City), the older “boat” operators want to eliminate all “boat, barge, bladder” requirements and become rejuvenated landlubbers. If this becomes law, the “boat” casinos will be just like “racetrack” casinos – without the racetrack. Did you know that the dog and horse tracks lose millions of dollars every year? So what do you suppose the “racetrack” casinos will want to get rid of? Lookout rural greyhound farms, if the bladders go bye-bye, so might you.

**Changing Face of Education – State or Local Control**

We have now entered this year’s Education Wars. Teacher quality and pay are now the subject of debate. Mandating school nurses and guidance counselors for all schools and how to pay for these professionals on top of increasing teacher pay is creating much lively debate. Interwoven with this discussion is the role of the state in education and the movement toward usurping local school board

**Unfunded Mandate – Hire Counselors and Nurses**

The state is now mandating that all public school districts employ a qualified guidance counselor and school nurse. A one-year, one-time waiver is allowed. Using a worn old phrase, this is an unfunded mandate. The state provides no new money to fund these positions. School districts must either levy more property taxes or use their current budget reserves to hire these new employees. The minority party sponsored an amendment to avoid increasing property taxes but it failed to pass.

**Teacher Quality Or Teacher Pay**

New legislation will double the 2006 commitment for new money for teacher pay. It is good to reward good teachers and recruit good people who will become good teachers. There are several problems with the legislation from the perspective of local school boards. Current Iowa law provides that if a fifth year teacher does not meet teaching standards, the teacher only receives a cost-of-living pay increase. The new legislation strikes this provision and entitles these underperforming teachers to the same pay

increases applicable to high performing teachers through the teacher union negotiations. This continues to entrench ineffective teachers who stay put with higher pay. Market factor pay was recently implemented to allow school boards to pay more money to recruit teachers in hard to fill subject areas. The new legislation takes away this school board authority and makes market factor pay subject to union negotiations. The same is true for an intensive assistance program for low-performing teachers. Just like the erosion of the riverboat we are seeing the erosion of the local school board and expansion of the state. One way or another, local values and authority are being eroded by state regulation.

**Rep. Richard Anderson**  
**House District 97**