

### **Twas the night before...**

Among the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season we find our fair state serving as the backdrop of international news as presidential candidates scurry about looking for votes as Santa's elves scurry about looking for gifts. In the Iowa House not a creature is stirring but Iowa legislators are gathering for pre-session meetings. With the best of the ancient astronomers from the east, I shall try to be a wise man from the west and provide you with an overview of key issues coming up in January when the 2008 Iowa legislature re-convenes.

### **The children were nestled...**

With Iowa's recent commitment to increase teacher pay, the call now is to make sure our kids are getting a sound and relevant education in order to get a good job in a growing international job market. Iowa has prided itself on local school control. This has enhanced community involvement in the values, policy, content and quality of education. Yet only one third (33%) of ACT college entrance exam takers are considered ready for college. Thus, there is growing pressure for what are called "state standards" to improve basic education. Everyone seems to have a different understanding of what this means. Some advocate that we adopt the Iowa-based ACT college readiness standards. Some advocate that we have a uniform curriculum at all schools across the state for each grade level. Some advocate for higher proficiency standards for our children at all levels of education. We need to make our community colleges accessible and affordable for basic worker readiness.

### **Visions of sugar plums...**

Health care issues dominate much the discussion as states try to react and respond to the proposals coming out of Washington. Americans and Iowans increasingly suffer from chronic disease that is directly related to personal inactive lifestyle choices. Type II diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease are leading causes of health care spending and death. These are directly related to eating too much food and getting too little exercise. Iowa legislators need to set a good example by being good role models. Perhaps we should all participate in at least one community fun run this next year. Iowa policy should include incentives for individuals and businesses which encourage wellness. This will help prevent and manage chronic disease.

### **Momma in her kerchief and I in my cap...**

A declining health care workforce is a long term problem which needs to be addressed now. A shortage of nursing educators and new dental graduates are growing issues in this state. The erosion of funding for medical residencies threatens Iowa's physician population. The Iowa legislature should respond by creating incentives which encourage nurses to pursue graduate degrees and become educators. We need to work with the University of Iowa to increase the number of dental school graduates. We need to encourage doctors to stay in Iowa by providing financial assistance during residency in exchange for a commitment to practice medicine in Iowa.

### **What to my wondering eyes should appear, but a miniature sleigh...**

Iowa, like most states, has seen funds available for maintaining roads and bridges diminish. There has been a substantial increase in the cost of materials, particularly steel. Last session we passed the policy framework for making needed highway and bridge improvements. A special interim committee met to

address funding these improvements. Suggestions for increasing highway funds include a gas tax increase, motor vehicle registration fee increase, and an increase in the use tax on the sales of motor vehicles. All of these suggestions involve tax increases which will be met with stiff resistance. More rapid than eagles Santa's tiny reindeer came. More rapid than Iowa Hawks will Iowa legislators flee from increasing taxes and fees. So I suspect this issue may get stuck in the snow forcing us to re-assess our spending priorities.

**...He looked like a peddler just opening his pack.**

When we re-convene in January we will begin working on the budget for the 2009 fiscal year (July 2008 to June 2009). In spite of a strong economy now, this may be a challenge. Due to built in and anticipated spending there appears to be a shortfall of \$450 million in the general fund budget (total \$6.4 billion). This is roughly 7% less money than we need. There will have to be some belt tightening by Santa or a significant increase in revenue.

Please feel free to contact me, Iowa State Representative Richard Anderson, with your concerns about Iowa policy or issues. Mail: Iowa State Capitol, Des Moines, IA 50319; email: [Richard.Anderson@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:Richard.Anderson@legis.state.ia.us); local office telephone: 712-542-2141.

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