

March 13, 2007

Good Farm Neighbor – Recognize Environmental Livestock Producers

Our farm livestock producers occasionally feel unloved due to the pressure from environmental regulations. The Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship is sponsoring the Good Farm Neighbor Award designed to generate positive stories about Iowa livestock producers and to honor producers for their commitment to the environment and their community. I encourage you to nominate your good farm neighbors. The nomination should detail the producer's commitment to the environment, community, neighbors and preserving the land for future generations. Applications may be submitted to: Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Wergin Good Farm Neighbor Award, Henry A. Wallace Building Des Moines, IA 50319 - or by email: agri@idals.state.ia.us , subject line "Wergin Good Farm Neighbor Award Nomination"

Low Cost Campaigns – Is It Possible?

You may have heard me speak about the negative impact of high cost elections on American democracy. Legislative leaders feel compelled to raise huge sums of money to maintain or get their party in power. This requires large donors who expect favorable legislation from the party in power. The State Government Committee passed a bill that would allow for the public financing of legislative and statewide elections and potentially other local elections. The so-called Clean Elections bill requires candidates to agree to limits on contributions from their political party, lobbyists and individuals and to limit spending in exchange for receiving public (tax) money. It sounds like a good idea, yet the downside is finding the money from an ever-strained general fund. One source of funding could come from a tax check-off option and a tax-deductible donation to the fund. Campaign costs could be contained by this legislation, but funding shifts from the private sector to you the taxpayer. Time will tell how this plays out in the legislature as it moves toward debate.

Tobacco Tax Goes Up

This is a chance for some Republicans to tell our party leadership, I told you so. For the last two years, when we were in the House majority we felt the growing pressure to raise the tobacco tax. We passed it up. Why? See my comments above - large tobacco interests donated heavily to the Republican party. The new tax has now been signed into law. I feel I should tell you the rest of the story. Besides the state, those who sell tobacco products (retailers and wholesalers) will also see more revenue and the new law increases the minimum sales price for tobacco products. The bill is supposed to reduce smoking by young people, yet the House rejected an amendment to increase the minimum age to 21. The new tobacco tax said to go entirely for health care, yet not all of it does, much of it goes into the general fund. The tax exceeds current health care spending related to smoking and will help fund state salary increases and new programs which will be paid for only by the smokers (20% of the population). Some argue this is unfair. You may not like tobacco products and may favor this tax, but the fact remains, this new tax is a new tax and it falls most heavily on the poor who make up most of the smokers. Higher salaries and new programs will cost more money in the future for Iowa

taxpayers who are declining in population. Look out when the next economic crash comes. Our ever-growing state government will face greater economic challenges.

Compulsory Education Age Moving to 18 – Ask your school administrator

A bill, working its way through the Education committee, would raise the compulsory age for school attendance from 16 to 18 years of age. This bill applies to school districts, accredited nonpublic schools, and students receiving competent private instruction (home schooling) effective July 1, 2008. The intent of this bill is good, but we have yet to figure out how to effectively educate these young people who do not want to be in school. The Department of Education has requested an amendment requiring a study and report by January 1, 2008 of the necessary services and funding that will be required to serve these students. The bill does not change the truancy law so parents of these kids are held responsible for not having the student in school. This causes some folks heartburn. Have you ever tried to force a strong willed, non-compliant 17 year-old to go to school?

Right to Work/Fair Share Debate Halted

The past few months there has been a lot of discussion about Iowa's right-to-work law which says an Iowa employee cannot be forced to join a union as a condition of employment. The "Fair Share" plan would require non-union members to pay dues to the union. As the "Fair Share" plan was introduced, many individuals, newspapers, and advocacy groups across Iowa stepped up in defense of Iowa's right-to-work law. Iowans care about preserving this law. As we were set to debate the bill, the House majority party went to caucus, four hours later they came out without the votes to carry the bill. It is estimated that this bill would increase union revenue by \$15 million per year.

Rep. Richard Anderson
House District 97