

NEWSLETTER FROM REPRESENTATIVE TOM SANDS

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My Committee Summaries

Appropriations

On Wednesday, January 12, Governor Vilsack released his supplemental appropriation recommendations for the 2005 fiscal year. We expected to see something that was around \$77 million (with most going to Medicaid) instead, we have been presented with something that is threatening to extinguish the entire budget surplus (FY 05) of \$213 million.

While supplemental funds are necessary for Medicaid, most of the proposal is not supplemental spending but rather additional funding for new or existing programs. This is bad budgeting practice that sets up the state for a huge tax increase in FY '07 because the FY '06 budget will be extremely low due to the expenditures of FY '05. Rather than fund new programs with the surplus, the money would be more wisely spent funding the existing commitments to priorities like education, public safety and health care while repaying the funds previously borrowed in order to balance the budget without raising taxes.

Fortunately his requests must be approved in the budget subcommittees where they can be thoroughly discussed (and argued) and revisions can be made.

Commerce, Regulation & Labor

As President Bush begins his second term, one of the issues he will make a priority of his second administration is implementing tort reform. Central to this effort will be a push to implement a cap on non-economic damages.

Following the lead of such states as, Illinois, New Jersey, Missouri and Wisconsin, Governor Vilsack has now brought the issue of medical malpractice to Iowa. Since the end of the election, he has been discussing ways to control the costs. While details have not been released, it appears that the Governor is proposing to create a patient compensation fund modeled on what Wisconsin has done. In Wisconsin, physicians pay a fee to fund the program however, Governor Vilsack appears to be proposing that the state provide the funding. The Governor has yet to mention anything concerning caps on damages. The Governor's "commitment" to fixing the problem has yet to be gauged however, it is certain that this issue will remain in the center of the arena.

Public Safety

Several key pieces of legislation have been introduced to the House Public Safety Committee this week. They include:

[HF 32 – Methamphetamine and Pseudoephedrine](#). The committee is looking for ways to address the meth problem in our state. This bill would make all products containing pseudoephedrine a Schedule V controlled substance.

[HF 39 – Crimes Against Older Iowans](#). This bill would enhance the charge of all felonies and misdemeanors if the victim of the crime is age sixty-five or older. The underlying offense will be charged one degree higher in these cases.

[HF 51 – Crime Lab Surcharge](#). [HF 51](#) increases the criminal penalty surcharge from 30% to 32%. The criminal penalty surcharge is a fee that is added to the fines for criminal and traffic violations. The surcharge is then divided among local entities (5%) and the state (95%). The state's share currently split between the general fund (82%) and the Victim Compensation Fund (18%). This bill was passed out of the committee on January 20th.

In case you are unaware, there is a hyperlink to the legislative website that gives you the entire bill and its history so you can follow along with anything that interests you.

Administration & Regulation Subcommittee

This week the subcommittee, that I co-chair, listened to interesting presentations. One was from the Department of Human Rights on the creation of the new Commission on the Status of Iowans of Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage. The other was from the Department of Management to describe the relationship between the State and the Public Strategies Group.

Thursday morning was special (and not just for the President) because I was asked to lead the House and Senate opening prayer. As it was Inaugural Day and the theme chosen was “A Vision of America,” I thought it would be fitting to quote two other inaugural addresses, one from a Democrat and one from a Republican. These are the quotes I used:

“With malice toward none; with clarity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

— Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address. March 4, 1865.

“With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.”

— John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961

