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ASSISTANT REPUBLICAN LEADER

COMMITTEES

Administration and Rules
Appropriations
Commerce
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Public Safety

PREVAILING WAGE BILL COULD ADD 20% TO COST OF CONSTRUCTION

This week the House Labor Committee debated a bill that would require what is known as the Prevailing Wage to be paid on construction projects using state or local funding. Effectively this would require a higher wage be paid on all projects undertaken by government agencies.

For example under current practice if the Dubuque County Board of Supervisors wish to build a new maintenance shed, they let the project out for competitive bid. The lowest bid normally gets the contract, granted assurances for quality are in place.

Effectively the Prevailing Wage bill would raise the bottom of the wage scale for public works by requiring that all bids submitted or accepted account for the average county wage for like employment as the base for salaries. Thus, according to most assessments such legislation would raise the cost of construction projects for taxpayers by as much as 20%. This would also presumably lead to fewer jobs being let, higher property taxes paid by taxpayers and a potential budget crunch for many sparsely populated cities and counties.

At this time I intend to oppose this legislation. For me every bill we debate this year has to answer a simple question: does this help grow Iowa's economy and put people back to work? Experts are telling us that this actually does the opposite, and because of that I think it should not proceed.

Compulsory Age to 17 Moves to Calendar

By a narrow 12 to 10 vote, the House Education Committee approved a bill raising Iowa mandatory attendance age to seventeen.

Current Iowa law requires children age six through age sixteen to attend school. The child may enroll in a public school district, a nonpublic school or receive competent private instruction.

House File 40 raises the compulsory school age to seventeen years of age as of July 1, 2010. Students receiving competent private instruction are not impacted by this bill. The bill sets up a formal process for those students who choose to dropout which includes an exit interview and notification to the school board.

A student who reaches age eighteen may withdraw from school but is "encouraged" to file a declaration of intent to terminate school enrollment with the school board.

The student then undergoes an exit interview to:

- Determine reasons why the student is leaving school
- Discuss options that might keep the student in school
- Inform the student of adult education and test preparation to qualify for a high school equivalency diploma

Each school district must convene a work group by July 1, 2009 to consider the necessity of expanding support programs and services for dropouts.

The Department of Education also convenes a working group to review "supports for students affected by an increase in the compulsory attendance age."

The bill now goes to the House Calendar.

Searching for a Job? Website May Help.

As the economy continues to struggle and the number of Iowans unemployed increase, many individuals are proactively looking for work. In addition to the ads in the daily newspapers, Iowans have a tool at their disposal that may point them in the right direction in their pursuit of finding a job.

The Iowa Department of Economic Development has a website that serves as a clearinghouse for information on job opportunities for Iowans. The Generation Iowa website contains information on student internship programs, and many jobs statewide through various links. Individuals can begin their job search by directing their web browser to www.generationiowa.com/career/resources.asp

From there individuals can visit different sites that allow them to view details on specific employment availabilities throughout the state. Through these sites, individuals have the ability to search by career fields or by region.

HOUSE RULES CHANGED STRIKING REFERENCE TO MALE ONLY GOVERNOR

This week the House passed new rules that govern our procedures. While not a major piece of legislation, one unique change is worth noting. Ever since the House rules were first adopted, when referencing the Governor the rules have always used a male reference, such as “his” signature or when “he” delivers his budget address. The rules adopted this week strike such references to become gender neutral. While we don’t have a female governor yet, it never hurts to be proactive and prepared in case the situation should arise.

WAS THE \$1 PACK INCREASE IN CIGARETTE TAXES A LIE?

A couple of years ago the Legislature approved a \$1 per pack tax increase on cigarettes and other tobacco products in Iowa. At the time legislative supporters of the idea and the Governor said all the revenue generated from this new tax would be set aside for health care. They created a new “Health Care Trust Fund” that was supposed to house the money generated from the tax and use it on health care.

While the transparency of this fund is debatable, no one can deny the true use of these dollars today as the Governor’s proposed budget eliminates the Health Care Trust Fund and directs all the cigarette tax revenue into the General Fund.

I would applaud the Governor coming clean with Iowans in the budget process and showing that indeed all these dollars were not previously directed to health care, but at the same time we have to remind Iowans what they were told when the tax was passed, that it would lower health care costs and spending. Not the case according to the Governor’s budget recommendation.