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Newsletter #13
4-13-09

I have been a member of the Iowa House for only 3 months. While that is not very long compared to some more senior colleagues, I do think I can suggest a few ideas to improve the legislative process. I have always been taught and believe that the best viewpoints sometimes come from a fresh set of eyes. So, here are some ideas that I believe will help the legislative process for the people who should always be at the forefront of our decisions: the taxpayers of Iowa.

By law, the Iowa Legislature is in session for approximately 100 days starting on the second Monday in January. Approving the state budget, which is one of the most important duties for the Legislature, often is not accomplished until the final days of the session. It is commonplace for a vote on a particular budget to take place at 10:00 p.m. or even later. Now, is the Legislature trying to prove to Iowans that legislators are willing to put in long hours? Or is the Legislature simply disorganized? I would argue that our lack of organization is a direct result of a broken system. Budgets, bills, and laws need to be debated in the daylight for all Iowans to see. Many times there is nobody in the chamber other than legislators and staff. This is not the way it should be. The Legislature is doing a disservice to Iowans with this process.

The Des Moines Register reported last week a story regarding closed door and closed to the public meetings at the Statehouse. As reported by The Register, several major policy decisions have been made behind closed doors: elimination of federal deductibility, a \$700 million dollar bonding proposal, and a major overhaul in our health-care system. Too often, decisions are made by a select few legislators in the privacy of a backroom. The Legislature should pass a law that all meetings regarding specific public policy be open to the public.

One theme put forth by the Minority Party this legislative session has been truth and transparency. Iowans deserve both. Laws should not be debated in the middle of the night for no one to hear. Neither should meetings take place where both the public and the Minority Party are not represented. All points of view need to be expressed in all decision making at the Statehouse. This would improve the Legislative process for all Iowans.

Peter Cownie (R-West Des Moines), represents District 60 in the Iowa House of Representatives. The district includes most of West Des Moines in Polk County. He can be reached via e-mail at Peter.Cownie@legis.state.ia.us or by phone at 281-3221.