

End of Session Legislative Update

Part 1

The legislative session for 2017 ended on April 22nd and I am happy to report it was a very full and productive session and many of the issues on which I have campaigned and worked, made significant and in some cases, historic, progress! I hope you can see that promises were kept and that we did what we said we were going to do and what we were elected to do!

Budget, Taxes, and Jobs

When I campaigned for office I said I would work for: fiscal responsibility and a balanced budget, lower taxes, and an economic climate favorable to more and better job and career opportunities

What we did:

Balanced the Budget: We made some tough decisions to produce a sustainable budget that was actually lower than the previous year's budget even after that had to be cut. This was a real reduction in government spending. At the same time we made sure the essential functions of state government were funded, upholding the priorities of supporting K-12 education, the workforce and community colleges, funding Medicaid, and protecting public safety and our court system. We are keeping in mind that revenues may continue to come in less than anticipated. We are doing the same as you have to do in your home or business.

Reformed Collective Bargaining: We rebalanced the 40-year old public employee collective bargaining law back in favor of the taxpayer, allowing governments to be better able to control costs and to allocate resources more efficiently.

Established an Income and Asset Verification System for Medicaid: This ensures Medicaid dollars go to help those who need it the most.

Removed Requirement for Project Labor Agreements: This protects the taxpayer by lowering construction costs for local governments and helps create jobs for Iowans by allowing them to be better able to compete.

Reorganized Road and Bridge Projects: This helps local governments legally avoid onerous federal regulations and thus lower costs of road and bridge projects.

Reset the Workers' Compensation Law: This brings fairness and equity to the 100-year old workers' compensation system and helps keep businesses competitive while still ensuring workers are protected.

Set a Uniform Minimum Wage: This eliminates the patchwork of varying minimum wages across the state and helps maintain a seamless business climate.

Lowered Statute of Repose: This helps reduce construction costs for businesses to help them be competitive while at the same time providing protections for home and business owners.

Reformed Medical Malpractice Law: This is intended to help drive down health care costs and medical liability insurance premiums and help attract physicians to our state while at the same time protecting injured patients.

Limited Livestock Nuisance Lawsuits: This limits damages in cases filed by disgruntled neighbors against law-abiding livestock producers who are using prudent, reasonable, and generally utilized management practices.

What we still have left to do: We must continue to build on the work we have done this past session. There is more to be done! We are hopeful the budget next year will be in better shape to implement tax reform. We are looking at ways to cut taxes and simplify the tax code in order to leave more money in Iowans' pockets and to make Iowa more economically competitive with other states. We are also still working out agreement between the House and the Senate on water quality funding that we are anticipating will pass next year. In addition in the House we passed a Convention of States bill which is a step towards imposing fiscal restraints on the federal government and limiting its power and jurisdiction. It awaits Senate action next year.

Education

When I campaigned for office I said I would work for: greater local control of schools and expanded educational choice

What we did:

Allowed Flexibility in K-12 School Funding: Schools can now use certain single-purpose funds that go unused for other purposes.

Established Home Rule for Schools: This gives school boards more flexibility in governing their schools in a way that better meets the needs of their students.

Common Core: Again this year I led efforts to restore local control of our schools with bills to unhook Iowa from the Common Core system of control over education by the federal government, but those bills did not make it out of committee. However, we established guidelines for the Dept. of Education to choose a statewide assessment that we hope will steer them away from choosing the Smarter Balanced Assessment, which is aligned to the Common Core.

What we still have left to do: While we made some good strides this past session there is a lot more to do! We need more control put back in the hands of parents and local schools and away from state and the federal government. In short, the Common Core issue needs to be addressed more fully. Also, due to a very tight budget, we were unable to expand the educational choices available to parents, to include strengthening online learning options and establishing Educational Savings Accounts, but will be looking at that again next year.

Pro-Life

When I campaigned for office I said I would work for: Pro-life legislation and defunding abortion providers

What we did:

Defunded Abortion Providers: For the first time since the '70's we cut off our partnership with abortion providers in Medicaid funding and in the Iowa Family Planning Network, which amounts to about half the taxpayer dollars abortion providers receive in Iowa, leaving more dollars for the many other more comprehensive women's health care providers in those networks. A truly historic turnaround!

Protected the Right to Life at 20-Weeks, Established a 72-Hour Waiting Period, Strengthened the Ultrasound Prerequisite, and Required Fully Informed Consent: This is the most comprehensive pro-life bill to ever pass the Iowa legislature in all of its history! Unfortunately, a lawsuit was filed and the Iowa Supreme Court immediately issued a temporary injunction against the waiting period and the ultrasound and informed consent requirements. We are working to defend our new law and end the injunction.

What we still have left to do: While this is a great start on protecting the life of the unborn, there is still much more to be done! I offered a "Heartbeat" Amendment (protection when the heartbeat is detected) and co-sponsored the Life-at-Conception bill but while both had strong support, they came a little short of passing out of committee. But we're gaining and will work at it again next year. Same for defunding abortion providers...we will continue to work next year to defund them in those streams of funding that comprise the other half of the taxpayer money they receive. We also still need a state law banning the sale of aborted baby's body parts, a bill I sponsored but did not make it out of committee. Again we're looking to next year.

Constitutional Rights

When I campaigned for office I said I would work for: expanding 2nd Amendment rights, ensuring election integrity, and protecting religious liberty

What we did:

Expanded 2nd Amendment Rights: This was one of the strongest protections of Iowans' 2nd Amendment rights passed in years! This included Stand Your Ground, parental rights to teach their children proper handgun use, permit privacy, streamlined permitting requirements, and protections in a declared state of emergency.

Protected Election Integrity: This requires a voter ID to be shown to be able to vote. Those eligible voters without one and needing one will be issued one free. This is a very necessary and common-sense measure that will protect our elections and make sure your vote means something.

Protected Private Property Rights: One bill we passed addressed the situation with Rock Island Clean Line. It adds merchant lines to the list of activities that are considered private economic development for which eminent domain cannot be used. In a separate bill, civil asset forfeiture is prohibited for property if there is no criminal conviction.

What we still have left to do: Much was accomplished but more remains to be done! We are working on a religious liberty bill to more fully protect our 1st Amendment freedom which we are looking at for next year.

Conclusion: I was very happy with the productive session we had where a number of important things were accomplished! I appreciate all the input and support I received from so many of you that made these accomplishments possible! Thank you so much! As you know there is much more that still must be done and we will be back next session to work on those things.

There are many other concerns that I worked on that are important and I will include them in my next newsletter. Please feel free to contact me if I did not cover something of concern to you.

Feel free to contact me with ideas, thoughts, and concerns. I want to hear what you are thinking and will listen to your input. Together we will work to make a difference for the future of Iowa.

Thank you again very much for all your support and for the honor of representing you!

Sincerely,

Sandy