



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF IOWA LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

MAY 2008, SESSION WRAP-UP
JUDIE HOFFMAN, LOBBYIST



2008 SESSION ENDS

Many time people ask me why it is so hard for the Iowa Legislature to come to a close. I have seen the process many times and it is always chaotic and hard to describe. In some ways it is "hurry up and wait" while legislators go to caucus for hours and in other ways it is a whirlwind. So many final decisions are made in the last days or hours, it is hard to keep up. During this time legislators get tired and give up on getting all the things they want. The leaders on both sides of the rotunda, and the Governor move closer together to close the session. As you read this newsletter, you will see that many decisions were made close to the end.

Judie Hoffman

DECISION NOT TO USE TAXPAYER MONEY FOR ANOTHER CAFO STUDY IS GOOD

Although the legislature voted for a policy study on confined animal feeding operations, they acted correctly in not funding it with taxpayers dollars. Iowa has conducted many studies and then taken no action on the recommendations such as in 2005. It is time to strengthen our weak air standards rather than conducting a \$22.3 million study.

INCREASED PUBLIC FUNDING FOR FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES

It took a conference committee to get increased funding for family planning services in Iowa, but during the last days of the session \$750,000 was included in the budget. These funds will help 170,000 low income women in Iowa access contraceptive services and reduce their unintended pregnancies. Presently, Iowa ranks near the bottom of states in availability of contraceptive services. Also included in the budget was \$200,000 for crisis centers.

BOTTLE BILL, REDEMPTION CENTER GRANTS AND A NEW STUDY

There will be no expansion of the bottle deposit law this year. Governor Culver pushed for a change but wasn't successful. His first plan had many detractors. While his second plan was a good

one, it wasn't successful because no middle ground was sought. Legislators divide sharply between those who are strong supporters of the deposit law and those who are not supporters. Grocers strongly opposed the bill and are a powerful lobbying group at the Capitol.

On the next to the last day of the session, it was revealed that there would be up to \$1 million in the budget for redemption centers which will be eligible for grants of \$15,000. There will also be a study committee of 22 persons meeting in the interim to look at requiring curbside recycling in Iowa. The League will hold one of those positions. Some legislators are pushing curb side recycling rather than bottle deposits. Bottle deposits and curbside recycling are two very different issues and shouldn't be tied together as an "either or" proposition. We know that states that have bottle deposits recycle a much higher per cent of product than states that have just curbside recycling.

PAY DAY LOAN OFFICES WILL CONTINUE TO CHARGE HIGH INTEREST RATES



League will have to work on restricting pay day loans again next year. Attempts to limit loans at 36% were not successful. Consequently, loans that charge up to 400% on a 14 day secured loan will continue to be a debt trap for lower income working Iowans. The League asked for a 36% cap, the same amount as

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

the U.S. Congress places on pay day loans to military members. Many states have already placed a cap on these usurious loans so now even more companies are moving to Iowa because we have no restrictions.

Be sure to raise this issue with candidates before the fall elections.

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS TO BE HELD EVERY OTHER YEAR

Starting in 2009 school board elections will be held in odd numbered years rather than every year. This will save money for school districts. City, county and legislative races are already held every other year. Terms will go from 3 years to 4 years.

NUMBER OF CITY AND COUNTY ELECTIONS TO BE LIMITED

Special elections by cities, counties and school boards will soon be limited to 4 days a year. Iowa will join the many states that limit the number of days a city or county can hold elections. It is a needed change. In a recent 18 month period sixteen special elections costing \$334,059 were held in Polk County. Linn County held twelve elections costing \$106,602 during the same period.



CONSUMER BILL OF RIGHTS OR CONSUMER RIGHT OF ACTION

Iowa is the only state where a consumer can't go to court when wronged by a business. This makes it hard to obtain justice. As an example, if you hire a person to put a new roof on your house and they do a poor job, you have little recourse. Presently the only way to file a suit against a business that does an inferior job is through a class action suit filed by the Attorney General's (A.G.) Office. Obviously, the A.G.'s office can't begin to file all the fraud cases that occur in the state. A bill to right this injustice went nowhere this year, but with your help, we will succeed in passing it next year. Businesses fought

this bill very hard as they don't want to see changes. Be sure to raise this issue with legislators when you see them this summer.

MENTAL HEALTH IN PRISONS AND AFTER RELEASE

There wasn't much talk about funding a new prison in Fort Madison until the last few days of the session, but everyone knew the money would be available. The other areas of prison spending that got big increases were food, fuel and medicine. Some of the positive budget decisions were increased funding for:

- Offender reentry programs in Waterloo and Des Moines
- Operating costs for 26 additional Community Based Correction beds in Fort Dodge
- Operating costs for the Mental Health Residential Facility being build in Cedar Rapids.
- Expansion of Iowa Women's Correctional Facility to consolidate all women prisoners
- Expansion of Community Based Corrections in Waterloo and Ottumwa and Sioux City

IOWA TO HAVE A PAPER TRAIL ON EVERY VOTING MACHINE BY THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In 2007 LWVIA successfully helped pass a bill that requires every Iowa voting machine to provide a paper trail. This year we pressed to have all voting equipment purchased and ready for use by the November 2008 election. It took a great deal of cooperation on the part of the Secretary of State Mauro, Governor Culver, county auditors and the Iowa Legislature to arrange for the financing. These changes should increase confidence in the security of upcoming elections. We hope we never need an election recount, but if redo, this equipment will make it quick and easy.

Most counties will have their equipment up and running by the fall school board elections. Twenty-one counties already use an Optical Scan Voting System and have ballot marking devices in



(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

place for voters with handicaps. Some counties have optical scan machines, but just need new equipment for special voters. The rest of the counties will be acquiring all new machines.

OPEN MEETINGS AND OPEN RECORDS WORK DUMPED AT LAST MINUTE

After an unbelievable amount of work during the interim and during the session on improving Iowa's open meetings and open records law, everything came to a halt late Saturday morning on the last day of the session. The relevant bill had been scaled way back as it went back and forth between the House and Senate, but there was one good provision left. This was to establish a commission to investigate violations. During the last hours this was dropped.

VOICES

Legislators wrapped up the session early on Saturday morning, April 28 and by afternoon I had received a request for money from a legislator for the November election. Within three days of the session finishing, I received letters from both Democratic and Republican leaders requesting money. It is obvious that the upcoming election cycle is going to be very expensive. It would have been great to have **Voter**

Owned Iowa Clean Elections (VOICES) pass so we didn't need to have this money chase, but the bills were stalled in committees all session and no action took place.

GOOD CAMPAIGN FINANCE BILL

A positive campaign finance bill passed during the last hour of the session. The bill requires persons who have 527 PACS (made possible by a loophole in the Internal Revenue Code section 527) to reveal their supporters and spending. Representative Rants and Senator Gronstol both have such PACS and can donate funds to party members who are in difficult races.



SEPTIC TANK INSPECTIONS

It took two years, but we got this bill passed. Homes with septic tanks will now have to have their tanks inspected at the time of sale. Twenty-one counties have this regulation already, but the majority do not. This is a simple way to protect lakes, streams and underground water. It is not too much to expect Iowans to keep their sewage from contaminating our waterways. Defective systems must be repaired before a home sale can be completed.

THANKS

Thanks to everyone who helped push our legislative agenda by contacting legislators. A special thanks to Jeannette Bohnenkamp for mailing the Legislative Newsletter, to Selva Lehman for formatting the Newsletter and to Mary Huneke for keeping the membership lists up to date. If you know a League member who is not receiving the Newsletter, contact Mary at mary.huneke@gmail.com



The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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