



Statewide Smoking Ban

We took the first step toward banning cigarette smoking in all but a handful of public places, with passage of House File 2212 this week. This legislation, managed on the House Floor by Rep. Tyler Olson of Cedar Rapids, may go down as one of the most significant public health measures ever enacted in Iowa. Experts estimate that 440 non-smokers die each year in Iowa as a result of second-hand smoke. Smoking and second-hand smoke also hits the budget pretty hard; Iowans spend a billion dollars each year in health care costs to treat smoking-related illnesses, including \$300 million in in the state budget for Medicaid.

The discussion in the Legislature involves two different ways to restrict smoking in public areas. Under current Iowa law, smoking is prohibited in most shops, offices and restaurants, unless specific smoking areas are designated; smoking need not be restricted in taverns that do not serve food.

Moreover, current state law prohibits local communities from enacting ordinances that are more restrictive than state law. (This was underscored a couple years ago, when the city of Ames adopted an outright ban on smoking in restaurants between 6:00 a.m. and 8:30 p.m., and the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that the Ames ordinance overstepped state law.) One proposal under discussion would simply give local governments the option of enacting ordinances that are more restrictive than state law. The Iowa Senate approved a modified "local option" measure last year, but it died in a House committee.

The other proposal, adopted in various forms by 23 states, including Illinois, Minnesota and South Dakota, places a statewide ban on all smoking in specified public areas. That's what the Iowa House approved this week, prohibiting smoking in bars, restaurants, workplaces, retail areas and most other public areas, with a few exceptions including veterans halls and casinos.

While I feel that either proposal is better than current law, the statewide ban has some points in its favor. First of all, the House-passed statewide ban will protect over 99 percent of Iowa workers from second-hand smoke, which is better than I'd ever expect from a local option law. Secondly, a statewide ban puts every community on the same level playing field. I know some folks are upset by the casino exemption in the House bill, but it's the only way we could get enough votes to pass the statewide ban. It's not a perfect bill, but 99 percent is pretty good.



One of my goals as Speaker of the Iowa House of Representatives is to keep community leaders and organizations informed about the issues facing the Iowa Legislature.

Legis.News is my way of giving you a brief insider's look at what is happening at the State Capitol. I hope you will find it interesting and informative.

Pat Murphy

Lottery Games to Help Veterans

Legislation approved by the House Veterans Affairs Committee directs the State Lottery to create two additional scratch and pull-tab games annually, with the profits dedicated to veterans, their spouses, and dependents. The Lottery estimates that these additional games would generate approximately \$3 million annually.

The bill dedicates the lottery ticket profits from these two games into the Veterans Trust Fund, until the fund reaches a balance of fifty million dollars or more. Until the trust fund reaches a \$50 million balance, the Veterans Affairs Commission is only allowed to spend the interest, which may be allocated for a variety of expenses such as travel expenses for wounded veterans, educational expenses, unemployment assistance, health care, counseling, honor guard services and other services for veterans. Any balance in the trust fund above \$50 million (which will likely take over 15 years to accumulate) will be appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for departmental programs.

Protecting Returning Veterans' Jobs

Another bill to help veterans, handled by Rep. McKinley Bailey, was signed by the Governor. House File 2065 clarifies that returning troops are entitled to their previous job with no loss of seniority, status or compensation. This issue came up after a returning member of the Iowa Air Reserves contacted legislators concerning a loss of employment following active duty. Federal law already protects veterans job security, but enforcement is slow. This is certainly not a widespread problem, but legislators want to be certain that it never happens in Iowa.

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