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Week in Review

Although Iowa experienced a polar vortex with record-breaking cold temperatures this week, the third week of session had a notably “busier” feel. Many committees canceled due to the weather, other committees pressed on; presentations from guest speakers, subcommittees were held on various bills, and committees started assigning and caucusing on various bills. Notably, there was no appropriations bills introduced for the Medicaid supplemental bill, as well as the state school aid bill (a number that must be decided within the first 30 days of session).

Budget Subcommittee Speakers

Budget subcommittees had several speakers present on the Governor’s proposed budget, several programs already funded, or programs that certain interest groups hoped to be funded.

On Thursday, the Health and Human Services budget subcommittee heard testimony from Des Moines University (one of two Iowa medical schools) regarding a program that received \$250,000 in funding last year to form a public private partnership with NAMI to integrate mental health screenings in all specialty areas. The initial year was focused on starting up the program but in August the program will officially launch. Additionally, program directors from Unity Point/Broadlawns and Mercy presented on the state-funded psychiatric medical residency programs. Although the program lost funding for one year, it has been funded over the last few years and was recommended in the Governor’s budget. The University of Iowa presented on their proposal to have four rural-focused psychiatric residency slots at the University; this proposal was funded in the Governor’s budget.

Iowa Economic Development Authority Director and the Iowa Finance Authority Director, Debbie Durham, presented before the joint Economic Development Budget Subcommittee. She discussed all the ways Iowa is working to become an attractive place to attract workforce and new residents. She talked about the need to reevaluate Iowa’s welcome centers and leverage “opportunity zones” to encourage more capital investment in low-income areas. Director Durham also discussed the Main Street Iowa program, Iowa Energy Plan, and how the state is solidifying its status as a leader in the bio industry. Her presentation can be found [here](#).

House District 55 Contested Election Update

On Monday, the House conducted its first floor work when it voted to accept the report of the House District 55 Contest Committee and voted against the contest challenge from Kayla Koether. The committee report said that “the relief sought by the contestant is not supported by Iowa Code Section 53.17, and further lacks support in Iowa Administrative Code 721-21.14 (53), and further in the legislative history surrounding the adoption of [HF 2273](#) in 2016.” The vote was partisan with Rep. Bergan voting “present”.

As reported last week, this race was extremely close, coming down to a handful of votes. The contest was requested by challenger Koether and hinged on whether 29 unopened ballots should be counted. Representative Holt said that most county auditors understood that intelligent bar code did not include bar codes placed on the envelope. He said that administrative rules are meant to implement legislative intent and that legislators meant intelligent bar codes to refer to a specific system. Holt said that more than 1,000 ballots were excluded in other Iowa counties for a lack of a post mark or an intelligent bar code and that it would be unfair for legislators to treat 29 voters in Winneshiek County differently.

Governor Reynolds State Tour and LG Trade Mission

This week, Governor Reynolds continued her “Condition of the State” tour around the state. She spoke and attended events in Albion, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids and Tipton on Wednesday, was in Davenport and Muscatine on Thursday, and in Fort Dodge, Webster City and Mason City on Friday.

Lieutenant Governor Gregg and Secretary of Agriculture Naig will be part of an international trade mission to Columbia and Panama, from February 3 to February 9. They will be accompanied by Economic Development Authority officials and a number of Iowa agricultural organizations. Secretary Naig said, “One of my top priorities is to focus on expanding markets for Iowa’s crop farmers, livestock producers, and agribusinesses. I look forward to joining Lt. Governor Gregg and Iowa farmers on this trade mission to market Iowa’s brand and quality agricultural products.” Iowa exported over \$80 million in goods to Colombia last year, and exports to Columbia increased significantly in 2018. Columbia is the eleventh largest agricultural export market for the United States. Panama is a crossroads and strategic partner for US exports.

Bill in Iowa Senate would override city ordinances on fireworks

A Senate committee is scheduled to consider a bill next week that will ensure that fireworks may be set off anywhere in the state on Independence Day. “There is nothing more patriotic in America than fireworks on the 4th of July,” said Senator Jake Chapman, a Republican from Adel who is backing the move to undo city and county ordinances that have restricted or banned fireworks displays on July 4th.

The legislation would also forbid local rules restricting where retailers may sell fireworks. Companies that sell fireworks say that kind of statewide uniformity is essential. Jim Henter of the Iowa Retail Federation suggested during a Senate subcommittee meeting on the proposal that there’s a hodge-podge of regulations now. “We’ve had folks that had to go through full-blown DCI background checks just to sell them for a couple of weeks, fingerprinting, permits, etc. and that’s just one community,” Henter said. “And we have had other communities that have said: ‘Hey, we’d love to have you in here, love to have you selling.’” Henter also pointed to some ordinances restricting where fireworks may be sold within city limits. “It is crazy for us to sit here and look at a product that we can legally sell and you have to move it to an industrial zone,” Henter said. “We cannot sell it in our stores.”

Cities and counties as well as fire fighters and law enforcement groups oppose the bill, citing safety concerns. Robert Palmer of the Iowa League of Cities said local ordinances on fireworks should be maintained. “We’re the best ones at the local level to know where they should be safely used,” he said. “That logic applies on July 4th as well as it does on July 3rd.” Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert said there were 12-hundred 9-1-1 calls in the capital city on Independence Day this past year. “Most of these calls come into us as ‘shots fired’ trips, which calls for a two-person response, an emergency response,” Wingert said, “and you get there and then you have to make the determination: Was it ‘shots fired’ or was it fireworks? It’s very resource intensive.” Jonathan Lund, the fire marshal for the City of Des Moines, said first responders see an increase in fires and injuries when fireworks are for sale in the state. “The injuries and the destruction that’s associated with those, obviously we’re concerned about that,” Lund said.

A senate subcommittee advanced the bill late Thursday afternoon, making it eligible for debate in the Senate Commerce Committee next week.

In the News

1. [Principal Financial Warns of More Layoffs After Challenging Quarter](#)
2. [Red Cross Says Blood Supply has Dropped; Donors Badly Needed](#)
3. [Three Nominated for Iowa Supreme Court Vacancy](#)
4. [U of IA President Makes Case for \\$18M Appropriation](#)
5. [Growth of Electric Cars Could Jeopardize Iowa’s Road Use Fund](#)
6. [“Good Shot” at Legalized Sports Betting This Year](#)
7. [Sports Book Bill Likely to Allow Mobile App for Betting](#)
8. [Governor: Trained Workforce Shortage is Iowa’s Biggest Economic Barrier](#)