

LET'S TALK TOURISM

Travel Federation of Iowa

Capitol News - #7 (April 12, 2009)

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Is This Week the Last Week?

In the previous issue, we told you it would be the last issue until the Legislature was adjourned. At the time, legislators were intending to be completed for the year prior to the Easter weekend. That did not happen, and since we have at least another week to go, we have prepared a brief update. The next update will be after adjournment, but keep an eye out for issue alerts!

First, rundown of TFI's Top Three Issues:

1. Iowa Tourism Budget

As you recall from the last update, the Economic Development Budget is pretty dismal as is the case with many parts of the state government budget. As you'll see in the description of the DED budget bill ([SF 469](#)) in the Bill Tracker, the bill currently has about a 9.2% budget cut for the department when compared to last year. The bill also has a 7.65% cut to the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, a 6.7% cut to the Regents economic development programs, and 4.3% cut to Iowa Workforce Development.

Still unknown is what the Infrastructure will look like. It will probably become public on Monday or Tuesday of this week. The Infrastructure Budget typically contains funding for the Iowa Values Fund, Vision Iowa/Super CAT, trails, rail infrastructure and several other programs important to TFI members.

2. School Start Date

At this point, it appears unlikely that House leadership will allow a vote to occur on the school start date compromise amendment to HF 732, the Department of Education Bill. The amendment would have eliminated all school start date waivers and moved the earliest start date to the fourth Monday in August - so the earliest the start date would ever be is August 22 and the latest is August 28.

Due to your advocacy, it appeared that we may have mustered enough votes to pass the amendment. Our sources have told us that school boards requested

instead that leadership go ahead and kill the whole bill rather than potentially allowing the amendment to pass. As such, HF 732 died with the second funnel deadline this past week.

While it is easy to be discouraged by this, DON'T BE! This signifies we have turned a corner on this issue and are getting legislators to really understand the lunacy of school boards' actions on this. The Iowa Association of School Boards absolutely refuses to want to work out a compromise on this and the closer the earliest start date gets to July, the more our argument resonates with people. Keep talking to your legislators about this! Don't let up!

3. TIME-21 and the Gas Tax

Early this coming week, we will probably learn what will happen with bonding this session. The Governor has asked the Legislature to commit \$56 million per year for 20 years to secure \$750 million in bonds for several infrastructure projects, including roads. The Legislature is unlikely to go the whole way, but will definitely negotiate with the Governor and pass something this week. A gas tax increase could be part of it, but not likely.

Some Other Remaining Issues

Film Tax Credits

Legislation ([HF 818](#) and [SF 480](#)) to enhance the film tax credit program seems to be on its way. We have been working on this with DED since before the session began and are hoping this legislation makes the final jumps this week toward enactment.

One potential downside is that the Senate is currently working on a separate bill ([SF 483](#)) with the House and the Governor's office that will CAP THE AGGREGATE AMOUNT of many of the economic development tax credits, including the Film Tax Credit program. They are currently proposing an overall cap of \$175 million which shouldn't hurt programs next year, but when the economy turns around and things start picking up in Iowa, the cap could become a major impediment to economic activity. It would be unfortunate if economic activity were to be limited by a state imposed cap on economic development tax credits.

Historic Tax Credits

Legislation ([SF 481](#) and [HF 819](#)) to increase the historic tax credit cap from \$20 million to \$50 million has stumbled many times this session, but now appears it may be in good shape. As you'll see in the bill tracker, the proposal would restructure the historic tax credit to enable part to be used for disaster rehab and for other purposes, when needed.

Gay Marriage

Unless you have been trapped under a rock for the past week, you are probably aware of that on Friday, April 3rd, the Iowa Supreme Court announced its decision saying that it is unconstitutional to deny gays in Iowa the ability to marry. This past Thursday, hundreds of people on both sides of the issue came to the Capitol to rally for their views. State Troopers were called in to quiet the heterosexual-only marriage supporters who started chanting in the galleries (a no-no at the Capitol). Some legislators tried unsuccessfully to use House procedural rules to enable a vote on a constitutional amendment on the issue. This issue is not going away and will likely continue to cause a lot of protests at the Capitol in the closing moments of the session.

Iowa became one of four states in the country to allow gay marriage, the others being the New England states of Vermont, Connecticut and Massachusetts. The UCLA Law School has done a number of studies on the economic impact of same-sex marriage on a variety of states. You can view their Iowa report at <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=uclalaw/williams>.

The TFI Bill Tracker List is Available at:

<http://www.ialobby.com/CPCBillTracker/tabid/59/Default.aspx?cid=TFI>

Remember - The bill tracker contains several functions that we are still refining. You can view individual bills along with our description in the list by pressing the "Details" link below the bill title. Additionally, you can go directly to the bill's listing on the Iowa General Assembly's website by clicking on the bill's number. If your goal is to get the full bill list and copy and paste it for your own use, you can do that by clicking the "Print All" link at the beginning of the bill list.

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