

The Senate Side

January 20, 2008

by State Senator John Putney

On January 14th, the 2008 session of the 82nd Iowa General Assembly officially gaveled in. This is the “short session” and is only suppose to last 100 days. Senators have been busy during the interim with study committees, meeting with constituents and preparing for this session. We are now back in Des Moines and ready to work.

The first week of session is typically heavy on pomp and circumstance. I have had an opportunity to reflect on the upcoming session and the challenges that our state faces. We enter this session with nearly \$600 million of promises made by the Majority (“built-ins” carried over from last year’s budget) and very little new revenue. Many of us in the “real” world scratch our head and ask how can you make a budget work with a \$350 million shortfall.

Then, we have another critical problem facing us: transportation infrastructure.. It has been estimated that Iowa will need approximately \$4 Billion over the next 20 years to address the critical needs of our roads and bridges. That is \$200 Million/year. I believe that the projections are creditable and I strongly believe that we need to begin tackling the problem, immediately. We need to finish Highways 30 and 20, we need to repair our aging bridges and roads, we need to expand certain corridors to encourage businesses to come to Iowa and, perhaps, even remain here. If we don’t address these transportation needs now, I believe it will be very detrimental to the growth of Iowa’s economy in near future years. The 2007 legislature established the TIME 21 (Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the 21st Century) Fund and authorized a study, review, and recommendation for generating revenue for this fund.

There are many potential sources of funding for transportation infrastructure and most of them are constitutionally protected through the Road Use Tax Fund. In other words, the funds generated through sources such as license fees, gas tax, etc. cannot be used for anything but transportation. There are many options being studied and obviously, there will be some real challenges ahead but, we need to get started. Unfortunately, this is another election year and political courage will be hard to find.

Your thoughts on the issues facing the legislature this year are important to me. Please contact me at: 515-281-3371 or john.putney@legis.state.ia.us.