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A MESSAGE FROM OUR LOBBYIST

**LEGISLATIVE SESSION HAS COME TO AN END
AND SO WILL MY STINT AS THE LWVIA LOBBYIST**

The 2009 Session came to a close after a marathon 72 hour gathering. Many unusual factors played a role this year. There was a great deal of focus on the damage caused by the floods and tornadoes of 2008, the federal economy, stimulus money from Washington and the question of whether to bond or not. On top of that, there was the Supreme Court decision on same sex marriage that came down a few weeks before the session ended. Despite all these special issues, I am happy to report that the legislature dealt favorably with many 2009 League priorities.

Thanks to everyone for all your help during this session and all the other sessions that I have worked as your lobbyist at the Capitol. **Never underestimate the impact you can make by contacting your elected officials, by writing a letter to the editor or speaking out at legislative forum. DEMOCRACY IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT.**

Judie Hoffman
Lobbyist

LEGISLATIVE REPORT FOR THE 2009 SESSION

IMMIGRATION

League adopted a national immigration position just a year ago and we used that position to bring about much needed changes for legal immigrant children. We were successful in getting increased employer penalties for child labor violations and the state labor commissioner will have more authority in dealing with age violations.

The legislature also passed a provision to expand health insurance eligibility for legal immigrant children. It will allow Iowa to implement a new federal law that removes the 5 year wait for legal immigrant children to become eligible for HAWK-I. The same health care bill also made it possible for almost all children in need of health care to become eligible.

EQUAL PAY PROTECTION FOR WOMEN

It was fun to attend the bill signing for legislation which provides equal pay protection for women in Iowa. Women now must be paid the same wage as men for the same work. Currently Iowa is ranked 37th out of 50 states for gender wage equity. In too many cases Iowa women are being paid less than men for doing the same work.

The bill, called the Lilly Ledbetter bill, is based on federal legislation. It brings Iowa into compliance with federal wage discrimination laws.

Iowa's law will provide protection for women in work places with as few as 4 employees. The federal bill provides protection down to just 15 employees.

GENDER BALANCE ON LOCAL BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

There will be greater gender balance on local boards and commissions as a result of this bill. Iowa state government boards and commissions have followed "gender balance" practices since 1987. Now city and county boards will also be gender balanced. Since most boards are made up of an odd number of members, in all cases, there won't be the same number of men and women on boards and commissions, but the numbers will be more balanced. Presently women make up approximately 20% of the persons serving on city and county boards and commissions across the state. There is a good faith exemption that if after 90 days an applicant of the right sex can't be found, another person can fill that position. All present members of boards can finish their appointment. The bills goes into effect in 2012.

ELECTION BILLS

County auditors will now be able to convene a special precinct election board to count absentee

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ballots on the Monday before the election. This will make it easier to provide election results in a more timely manner.

City elections that have no competitive races can now start at noon.

A bill dealing with post election audits LWVIA supported passed the House, but failed in the Senate. Work should continue on this issue next year.

CONSUMER RIGHT OF ACTION

Iowa is no longer the only state without a consumer right of action. Until now individual Iowans could not bring cases against businesses in Iowa despite the fact that the Attorney General's office was receiving 4000-5000 complaints a year. It allows consumers who have been wronged by deceptive businesses to sue and to get their legal fees paid. It will particularly help older and more vulnerable citizens.

It was disappointing that a number of professional groups were exempted such as insurance companies, attorneys, a variety of licensed health care professionals, architects, engineers, insurance agents, banks, and credit unions. Fortunately, many of these groups do a good job of monitoring themselves.

PAY DAY LOANS

Unfortunately, as hard as we tried, this legislation did not move forward. Pay day loan operations are a debt trap for the majority of their customers. Iowans take out many more pay day loans on average than citizens of any other state. The federal government capped the interest rate at 36%

for servicemen and women, but not for other citizens. Some states have banned pay day loan companies and other states that have simply never allowed these operations to come into their state. THERE IS ALWAYS NEXT YEAR.

COMPREHENSIVE RECYCLING TASK FORCE

A bill to appoint a state recycling task force was approved. The group is expected to make recommendations for creating and enhancing comprehensive sustainable recycling programs no later than January 1, 2010. It requires the Governor to appoint the voting members, one of which will be a League member.

FLOOD PREVENTION PRIORITY

The Legislature established the Iowa Flood Center at the University of Iowa where they will work with the DNR and the DALS, to develop models for physically based flood frequency estimation and real time forecasting of floods, including flood plain mapping.

They also allocated \$35 million for watershed and water quality grants for flood prevention projects and soil conservation practices and \$7 million for soil and water conservation projects..

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