

June 3, 2008

FORD: E-mails, forums help to keep me informed

*By Rep. Wayne Ford
House District 65*

Since the legislative session ended, I have received many e-mails regarding issues that people in my district want me to consider in the next session. In addition, I received a great deal of feedback from the two community forums I held at Grand View College and Drake University.

One issue that came up is the smoking ban that will go into effect on July 1. I smoked for over 30 years and quitting cold turkey was difficult.

Since I stopped smoking five years ago, I know I am healthier and the people around me are, too. That is one reason I voted for the ban. Individuals who work in the food service industry have a 50 percent greater chance of dying from lung cancer because of exposure to second-hand smoke.

This bill will protect 90 percent of all workers in Iowa, especially those who work in restaurants and bars. Is the bill perfect? No, but it is a good start in protecting the health of Iowans.

The second issue that I received a great deal of feedback on was the environment and renewable energy. Even in the city of Des Moines, there is concern about hog confinement facilities and their impact on our air and water. It is why I support tougher controls over these facilities.

People in House District 65 also are concerned about the high cost of energy and gasoline. In Iowa, we have a win-win situation. As we expand research and development of renewable fuel, we are not only freeing ourselves from the dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels, we are creating new industries and new jobs. Whether it is wind energy or bio-fuels, the benefits to Iowa are great.

I am pleased that community colleges, which I have supported over the years, will be leaders in making sure Iowans are trained for this exciting job growth industry. I will continue to work to make sure that these training programs are available to students and workers in my district.

I recently received an e-mail from a constituent concerned with the limitations placed on Medicaid patients in regard to prescription drugs. As a diabetic, I understand how important the proper medication is to one's health.

Not every medication works the same for every individual and it is important that insurance and/or Medicaid pay for the drugs that work for a patient, not just the cheapest drugs. I have asked House leadership to consider looking into this subject this summer.

And finally, I hear and I have concerns about "clean elections." It is well-documented that the most money given during political campaigns comes from some of the wealthiest ZIP codes in America. In a democracy, every citizen has the right to vote. We need to make sure that every individual vote is equal and not influenced by the size of one's checkbook.

I will hold forums this summer and fall so that more citizens of House District 65 have the opportunity to express their views and concerns to me.