

2010 Session Summary

The legislators exited the Capitol on Tuesday, March 30. They trimmed 21 days off of the normal election year session of 100 days. Here is a summary of some of the major highlights of the 2010 session.

Budget: The Legislature appropriated \$5.28 billion for the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2010. This amount does not include federal stimulus dollars (\$328 million) and funds from the state cash reserve account (\$267 million).

Government Reorganization: The major bill of the session was the government reorganization bill, SF 2088. This legislation will result in cost savings and greater efficiencies for state government. The bill was supported by both parties, passing the Senate (41-2) and the House (98-1). It was signed by the Governor March 10.

What Didn't Pass?

Often what didn't pass can be more meaningful than what did pass. Here's a list of bills that stalled out during the session:

Open Meetings/Open Records (HF 777): First introduced in 2009, this bill was amended several times and has been back and forth between the houses. It passed the House (99-0) late in the 2009; only to have the Senate refuse to take the bill up. In 2010, the Senate amended it to implement a new Iowa Public Information Board which would not only investigate violation complaints, but would have broad rulemaking authority. It passed (35-13). It returned to the House, where it died at the end of session.

Mandatory Employee Sick Days (SF 2337): Mandating a costly amount of paid sick leave to be made available, this bill drew opposition from the business community and failed to pass.

Fair Share/Right-to-Work (HF 2420): This bill would have required state, non-union employees to reimburse the union for services provided such as collective bargaining.

What Did Pass?

Several interesting bills passed—some in the waning days of session:

Non-Profit Interim Study Committee: In one of the final bills of the session, the Legislature requested an interim study committee “...to study the inclusion under the open meetings and open records laws of nonprofit organizations that are supported in whole or in part with public funds or revenues derived from public fees, that were established by, or are operated by, governing boards whose memberships were or are substantially comprised of state or local elected officials or appointees of governmental bodies.” The interim committee will report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 15, 2010. How far reaching the recommendations of the interim committee won't become evident until the report is submitted later this year. MRES lobbyists will be monitoring the interim committee meetings.

Veterans Holiday: HF 2197 requires employers give veterans a paid or unpaid day off on Veterans Day. The bill passed both chambers and will be signed by Governor Culver.

Power Fund Appropriation: The Iowa Power Fund, the state's renewable energy research fund, was appropriated \$21.6 million. It was scheduled to receive \$25 million.

Texting: One of the most talked about bills of the session dealt with texting while driving. The bill prohibits all drivers from texting while driving and drivers under 18 cannot use a cell phone while driving. The fine will be \$30.

Utility Disconnect – Military Personnel: SF 2297 passed and requires the IUB to adopt rules stating that a public utility furnishing gas or electricity shall not disconnect service to a residence in which one of the heads of household is a service member deployed for military service, prior to a date ninety days after the end of the service member's deployment, if the public utility is informed of the deployment.

Nuclear Power Study: HF 2399 allows MidAmerican Energy to study the feasibility of building a nuclear power plant in Iowa. The bill also allows MidAm to charge customers for the study. The surcharge is expected to add approximately .35 cents per month to each customer's bill. It passed both Houses and is waiting for the Governor's signature.

Electric Power Agency - Joint Financing (SF 2313): This bill removes the current provision requiring voter approval for a city to join another entity to finance electric power facilities. The bill also removes the prohibition of submitting the same or similar proposal to the voters sooner than one year from the date of the election at which the proposal was defeated. In addition, the bill provides that an electric power agency may be organized under Code chapter 476A as a nonprofit corporation, limited liability company, or as a separate administrative or legal entity pursuant to Code chapter 28E. It passed the Senate and the House with no opposition. It was signed by the Governor March 2.

The End

Overall, in terms of electric energy legislation, it was a successful session. The few energy bills that would have had large negative impacts on municipal electric utilities died early in session. However, now comes the interim. MRES will keep a close eye on the open meetings/public records study committee. Also, we will watch for studies, reports, proposals, or even rumors that could lead to future legislation that would negatively impact our municipal utilities.

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