



Iowa Legislature notebook

April 28, 2007

House OKs plates for kin of war victims

Some Iowans who have had family members die in war would be eligible for special license plates under legislation that was approved Friday.

Surviving spouses, parents, children or siblings of an armed forces member who died while on active duty during war may order a special gold star emblem plate under Senate File 586, which was approved Friday by the Iowa House.

The proposal now goes to the governor.

Iowa's special license plates typically cost between \$15 and \$25 more per year. Extra money generated from the star plates would go to help improve Iowa's roads.



Catchall revenue bill excludes 'iPod tax'

The Senate agreed with the House on Friday to leave what critics had described as an "iPod tax" out of a catchall revenue department bill.

Earlier in the session, the Senate included a provision that would have raised \$4.3 million or more annually by applying the 5 percent state sales tax to digital material that has been downloaded from the Internet: songs, audio books, cell-phone ring tones, movies and computer software.

The House refused to go along with the proposal and on Friday, the Senate relented.

Transportation needs would be studied

A bill creating a legislative study of Iowa's transportation revenue needs was approved by the Legislature on Friday.

State transportation officials warn that Iowa faces a multi-billion-dollar shortfall over the next 20 years in making essential improvements to its network of roads.

House File 932 creates a TIME-21 (Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the Twenty-First Century) Fund.

A House-Senate study committee would meet over the summer or fall to come up with recommendations by Jan. 15, 2008, for raising road improvement money that would be deposited into the new fund.

House bill lets drivers set up payment plan

Iowans with suspended licenses would be able to make payments on the fines they owe under a plan approved Friday by the Iowa House.

A Des Moines Register investigation published in January found that the rate of driver's licenses suspended, revoked or barred has doubled in Iowa in a decade, with nearly 146,000 new sanctions in effect in 2005. Almost two-thirds of the sanctions in Iowa in 2006 were brought on by people failing to pay court fines and fees.

The state has failed to collect \$438.7 million in fines and fees - a record amount, according to the Register's findings.

A provision in House File 641 allows offenders to establish a payment plan so the state can better collect the millions of dollars owed in fines.

The bill now goes to the governor.

Bill OK's more debt for building projects

Iowa universities will take on \$131.4 million more in debt to launch several key projects under a proposal approved Friday by the Legislature.

House File 920 would allow the Iowa Board of Regents to take on the debt. The state currently pays \$24.3 million to the repay previously authorized debt. That allocation was anticipated to decrease during the next 16 years, but under the proposal approved Friday, the payments would be maintained to cover the payments for the additional debt.

The projects mostly include new construction or renovation to old buildings. The University of Iowa will get \$35.9 million; Iowa State University, \$53.9 million; and the University of Northern Iowa, \$17.6 million.

A total of \$24 million will be used for fire and environmental safety, maintenance and campus security improvements at buildings deemed necessary by the regents.

The bill now goes to the governor.