Written by Lynn Campbell
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Governor Chet Culver completed action Thursday on all of the 196 bills approved by the 2010 legislature and maintained that he fulfilled a campaign promise made five years ago to uphold the Second Amendment when he signed a bill making Iowa the 38th "shall issue" state regarding weapons permits.

"I'm a man of my word," Culver said in signing the weapons-permit bill in a Statehouse ceremony, surrounded by legislative leaders and both Republican and Democratic legislators.

Senate File 2379 largely takes away the discretion of county sheriffs in issuing weapons permits. It was touted by supporters as standardizing the process in all of Iowa's 99 counties and was backed by the National Rifle Association, Iowa Sportsman Federation, and Iowa Carry, Inc.

Culver called the bill a "common-sense piece of legislation" that "strikes an appropriate balance." The bill does not mean automatic approval of a weapons permit, and sheriffs will still be able to deny permits to those who are perceived as a danger to themselves or the community, and those who are thought likely to commit a violent act with a firearm. However, it provides that Iowans start with an assumption that an application will be approved.

"I believe there doesn't need to be any conflict between the freedom to carry firearms and public safety," Culver said. "Instead, I believe that law-abiding citizens who are placed in situations in which their life and property are threatened should be able to protect themselves, and their families."

Five of the seven Iowa county sheriffs who vocally supported the legislation attended Thursday's bill signing.

"It's time for the standardization across the state," said Jones County Sheriff Mark Denniston. "The sheriffs that are here have been 'shall issue' ... We all have knowledge of other citizens in other counties that don't have the opportunity to get a permit if they so choose. We just all believe that they should have that opportunity."

Denniston said the issue of the new law taking away a sheriff's discretion has gotten blown out of proportion.

"I'm not going to change my ways if my heart tells me I shouldn't issue that permit; I'm not going to issue it," Denniston said. "Nothing's going to change for me. The people we have running around out here that shouldn't have firearms, they aren't going to come into us to get a permit anyway. If they want to carry, they're going to carry."

While Thursday's bill-signing had the appearance of bipartisanship, many groups had lobbied against the bill, including all of the state's law-enforcement associations: the Iowa State Sheriffs & Deputies Association, Iowa Association of Chiefs of Police & Peace Officers, Iowa State Police Association, State Police Officers Council, and the Iowa Police Executive Forum.

"Our statewide association was dead-set against this," said Muscatine County Sheriff Dave White, a supporter of the bill. He said the association opposed the measure because it felt it would erode the power of county sheriffs. "We're an organization with 99 members, and not everybody's going to agree on every issue. We had two statewide meetings to discuss it. ... The line was drawn. Today, our side won."

Other non-law enforcement groups that opposed the bill include the Iowa Gun Owners, Iowa County Attorneys Association, the Iowa State Association of County Supervisors, the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the Iowa Psychiatric Society, Teamsters Local 238, the League of Women Voters, and the Iowa Medical Society.

White said he's denied only six applicants the right to carry a concealed weapon in the past 15 months because of their criminal histories. Under the new law, sheriffs can still deny weapons permits, but must put the reasons in writing. There's also an appeal process.

Former IASB Leader Reveals Little to Oversight Committee but Denies Wrongdoing

Former Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) Executive Director Maxine Kilcrease made her long-awaited appearance Thursday before the legislature's Government Oversight Committee but said very little. She often cited her Fifth Amendment right to not incriminate herself, said a number of times that she didn't not have all the information in front of her, and refused to comment because of pending civil litigation.

One of the few answers Kilcrease did give related to open records laws. Representative Kurt Swain (D-Bloomfield) asked if expanding the open-records law to allow public access to the records of the IASB would impede its ability to function. (Culver last Thursday signed legislation requiring the IASB to comply with existing open-records and open-meetings provisions.)

"I do not think that that would cause a problem, notwithstanding, of course, the fact that it is a private non-profit," Kilcrease said.

The legislative committee met Thursday to further investigate alleged IASB misuse of taxpayer dollars, including charges that Kilcrease increased her salary without board approval, increased the salaries of other employees while others were laid off, and directed her attorney to withhold information from the IASB board.

Kilcrease appeared only after a subpoena from the committee was served on her last weekend. An attorney for Kilcrease on Tuesday filed a motion to quash the subpoena, but a district judge on Wednesday declined to intervene. Kilcrease's attorney, Sean Spellman, argued that statements made by lawmakers investigating the IASB infringed on Kilcrease's constitutional rights.

Spellman again stated his disapproval with the committee process Thursday, saying, "It is not appropriate for these matters to be litigated in this forum."

Kilcrease's attorney also told lawmakers that Kilcrease had a lawful contract with IASB, that she was improperly terminated, and that she did not break the law. He said that Kilcrease "inherited a disorganized and financially strapped organization that lacked guidance." However, Kilcrease later declined to answer questions by lawmakers on the state of the association when she took over on July 1, 2009.

"I'm disappointed because if I got this right, Mr. Spellman, you said that Maxine inherited financial problems -- a disorganized, financially strapped organization -- and I think some of our questions have been to those comments, and I'm not sure we've gotten answers on that," said Representative Vicki Lensing (D-Iowa City), co-chair of the Government Oversight Committee.

Among the questions that Kilcrease did not answer: if she returned her salary increase, whether she used IASB funds to travel, and whether she denied board access during an audit.

Also testifying were LeGrande Smith, IASB staff attorney; Mary Gannon, IASB attorney and lobbyist; Margaret Buckton, vice president of Iowa School Finance Information Services; and Larry Sigel, president of Iowa School Finance Information Services.

Smith and Gannon both received large pay raises under Kilcrease's watch that were not negotiated or reviewed by the IASB board. Smith saw his salary increase from $145,000 to $165,000, while Gannon's went from $96,000 to $125,000. Both said they weren't surprised with their raises because they knew Kilcrease was doing a review to bring IASB salaries in-line with those of similar groups in other states.

"I didn't think it was strange because she said she was conducting a top-to-bottom review," Smith said. "I certainly wish I would have questioned it now."

Obama Takes on Wall Street, GOP in Ottumwa Town Hall

President Barack Obama used a town-hall meeting in Ottumwa this week to advocate for Wall Street reform and criticize U.S. Senate Republicans for repeatedly blocking debate on the bill.

"Senate Republicans unanimously blocked efforts to even begin debating reform," Obama said. "They won't even let it get on the floor to be debated. To even oppose talking about reform

before the American people and having a debate, that's not right."

Later in the week, Republicans relented and debate was allowed to begin in the Senate.

"We can't let another crisis like this happen again," Obama said of the financial crisis.

Obama also delivered a defense of the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act and federal health-care reform.

"We've cut taxes, 25 of them," Obama said to the crowd of about 2,100 at Indian Hills Community College. "I just want to make clear here what we did. People try to score political points by attacking the Recovery Act."

Obama said one-third of the federal stimulus package was tax cuts, while another portion extended unemployment benefits and made COBRA cheaper. "It's tough enough losing your job," he said. "It's a lot tougher if you lose your job and your COBRA payments ... are more than you could ever afford."

The president claimed that under the federal stimulus, 2.5 million people went to work who wouldn't have otherwise been employed. He said the package prevented America from slipping into a depression. And he described the action as an aggressive response to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

"Let's face it, some of the steps we took were unpopular," Obama said. "No one wanted to fix the financial regulation system. That's not what we ran on. Some of the things we did were the right thing to do to make sure the situation didn't get worse."

Obama also stopped in Fort Madison and Mount Pleasant during his trip, and spent a night in Des Moines.

GOP Rallies Ahead of Obama's Visit

About 200 flag-waving, sign-holding Republicans gathered in Ottumwa's central park to hear an anti-government, anti-health-care-reform message on the eve of Obama's visit to Iowa.

The crowd carried umbrellas and endured chilly temperatures, a drizzle, and technical glitches at the 75-minute rally. Participants ranging from senior citizens to toddlers announced their appreciation for the message with applause, hoots, and hollers.

"We may be wet; we may be tired; we may be overworked, overtaxed, and overregulated, but we are not intimidated," said Ottumwa opthalmologist Mariannette Miller-Meeks. "I may be a short Mariannette, but I am nobody's puppet."

Miller-Meeks joined the other three Republican candidates for the Second Congressional District -- Rob Gettemy, Steve Rathje, and Chris Reed -- in delivering a scathing review of U.S. Representative Dave Loebsack (D-Mount Vernon) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Reed said it was time to "stop this out-of-control train."

"I'm not going to Washington, D.C., to bring home the bacon," Rathje said. "I'm going to D.C. to cut the waste and bring jobs home."

Republican Party of Iowa Chair Matt Strawn said there's been a continued assault on Americans' personal and economic freedoms, and it's time to elect principled conservatives. A petition circulated during the rally asks Obama to honor the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Miller-Meeks said the Republican response to Obama's message should be the response often given on the television game show *Deal or No Deal*.

"When President Obama comes here tomorrow, what are you going to say?" she asked the crowd.

"No deal!" the crowd responded.

Labor, Government Leaders Remember Fallen Iowa Workers

Culver said during Iowa Workers Memorial Day that the 48 Iowans who lost their lives in workplace accidents this year were like every other Iowan that goes to work every day, "except one day these Iowans did not come home."

Culver presented the families of fallen workers with a small cross, a paperweight, and a proclamation, as 48 white crosses with the names, ages, and hometowns of the lost workers stood in a strip of grass nearby. "Behind that number are people, men and women just like you and me," Culver said.

Joe Walsh of Iowa Workforce Development said the event Wednesday afternoon in the shadow of the Capitol serves as an important reminder that worker safety is paramount for the agency, and he also noted that more workplace inspections are being done now than at any other time in the state's history.

But Mark Cooper, president of the South Central Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, called for grassroots efforts to increase funding for worker safety and to increase penalties for workplace-safety violations.

"Not every workplace accident can be foreseen, but the vast majority can be prevented," Cooper said.

Ken Sagar, President of the Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, noted that the mining accident in West Virginia that killed 29 workers earlier this month grabbed headlines but said every

worker death should be major news.

"When one worker here or there passes away it doesn't make headlines, and there's something wrong with that," Sagar said.

This weekly summary comes from IowaPolitics.com , an online government and politics news service. Reporter Andrew Duffelmeyer and other correspondents contributed to this report.