

Iowa Politics Roundup: State-Revenue Estimate Boosted by \$300 Million

Written by Lynn Campbell
Friday, 15 October 2010 12:56

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All three members of the state's Revenue Estimating Conference said they are "cautiously optimistic" about the economy as they voted to increase the estimate of Iowa's state revenues this fiscal year by nearly \$300 million since their last estimate in March.

The new projection for Fiscal Year 2011 is \$5.76 billion, a 2.2-percent increase over last year. The panel also made its first revenue estimate for fiscal year 2012 of \$5.95 billion, which would be a 3.3-percent increase over the projection for the current year.

"There are still concerns about unemployment levels," said state budget director Dick Oshlo, one of the three members of the conference. "Coming out of a recession, these are positive numbers, and we are heading in the right direction."

State Representative Scott Raecker (R-Urbandale), ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, said the improved revenue estimates will narrow but not eliminate the projected \$1-billion budget gap in Fiscal Year 2012. He argued that the current budget is still balanced on the backs of property taxpayers and one-time money. He also said the latest estimates don't take into account the impact of proposed changes in federal tax cuts, which he said could cause Iowa to take a \$200-million hit.

The official revenue estimate for Fiscal Year 2012, which the governor and lawmakers must abide by when they return in January to craft the state budget, will be made by the Revenue

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Estimating Conference in December.

At Boswell Fundraiser, Biden Predicts Democratic Control of Congress

Vice President Joe Biden declared in Des Moines that “reports of the death of the Democratic Party have been greatly exaggerated,” touted efforts by the Obama administration to turn around the economy, and said Democrats didn’t count on millions of dollars coming in for Republicans in the last month of the campaign from “secret sources.”

“On November 3, the day after the election, the Democrats are going to control the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate,” Biden said in a 42-minute speech at an October 12 fundraiser for U.S. Representative Leonard Boswell (D-Des Moines). The event was attended by about 200 people with a minimum ticket price of \$150.

Biden said the president is “breaking his neck” to help create jobs and help small businesses, claiming that Republicans have done nothing but vote against tax plans by Democrats. He also said the administration is seeking to build a new green-energy sector.

The vice president said Karl Rove’s “secret millionaire group” is raising money to battle Democrats, and he noted that an Iowan helped to start the American Future Fund to do the same. He also challenged the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to prove that it is not using foreign money to spend on American elections, and he said that by obtaining foreign money for Chamber operations, it frees up other money to spend on political campaigns.

“I don’t have anything against Karl Rove personally,” Biden said. But he contended that Rove and his friends were “architects of the policy that drove us into this hole.”

Biden urged Democrats to get their base out and to compare their party to the Republican alternative. “We have worked too hard, folks, to walk away from this,” he said. “We have to buck up. This election is more important than the one where you elected us. We have finally turned this supertanker around, and it is headed home to port.”

Vilsack Predicts 2010 Democratic Success

Former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack this week came to Des Moines and touted his own history as something that current Democratic Governor Chet Culver can replicate.

“I remember in 1998, I was 23 points behind at this point in time in the election,” Vilsack said in an interview in Des Moines. “But we got engaged, we got excited, we got passionate. We went to the polls in record numbers, and we won that race. I see the same kind of thing happening here in November of 2010.”

Vilsack became Iowa’s first Democratic governor in 30 years when he won that 1998 election, in an upset win over former Republican U.S. Representative Jim Ross Lightfoot. Vilsack, who said his campaign had no money but had volunteers getting the message out to voters, took over state government after 16 years under former Governor Terry Branstad, who is seeking the office again this year.

Both Culver and Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Roxanne Conlin, who have trailed their Republican opponents by double digits in most polls this year, have publicly compared their situations to Vilsack’s. The former governor furthered that notion and worked to energize the Democratic base this week during a visit to Iowa.

“Polls are designed to encourage people to sit at home and not fight back,” Vilsack said. “I think it’s important for Democrats to recognize that they can’t stay off the field here, they can’t sit on their hands, they can’t assume that things are over.”

Vilsack, who himself dealt with several rounds of state budget cuts during his eight years as governor, this week said Culver has managed the state well during tough times. That praise came despite some public clashes that Vilsack had with Culver when he was governor and Culver was secretary of state.

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Vilsack, who's currently the U.S. secretary of agriculture, was in Des Moines this week for the World Food Prize. He also took part in one of Organizing for America's house parties Tuesday night in Des Moines, during which President Obama spoke to supporters via live webcast.

Republicans Close Gap in Early Voting

The advantage that Democrats had over Republicans in early voting is shrinking.

Numbers released Thursday by the Iowa secretary of state's office show that Democrats have requested 115,017 absentee ballots. That's 1.2 times as many ballots as the 92,128 requested by Republicans.

Before early voting started, Democrats had requested three times as many ballots as Republicans.

As of Thursday, Iowa Democrats have voted and returned 60,156 absentee ballots, which is roughly 1.5 times as many ballots as the 41,321 returned by Republicans. In last week's tally, Democrats had returned more than twice the number of ballots as Republicans.

Secretary of State Michael Mauro announced that the number of absentee-ballot requests processed for the 2010 general election has surpassed the early-voting totals from previous midterm elections.

As of Thursday morning, 249,513 Iowans have requested an absentee ballot, and 119,430 have been returned. In the 2006 general election, 242,385 Iowans voted absentee. In 2002, 242,357 voted absentee.

Still Too Early for 2012 Decision, Pawlenty Says

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During an appearance in Sioux City, two-term Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty said it's still too early to make a decision on running for president in 2012.

"Obviously people ask a lot about 2012, and that's something that I'm going to decide early next year," Pawlenty said.

Pawlenty was the featured speaker at a pro-family reception and fundraiser in support of the Iowa Faith & Freedom Coalition, a conservative political group.

In his speech, Pawlenty spoke regarding his vision for the role of faith in government. In referring to the Declaration of Independence, he said: "It doesn't say we're endowed by our state legislator; it doesn't say we're endowed by our member of Congress; it says we are endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights ... and so we know that these are blessings, these are grants from not Congress or from the government, but from our creator."

Steve Scheffler, president of the coalition, said that while Pawlenty does line up well with the group's political stances, this event was not an endorsement of any candidate.

Pawlenty's speech took aim at the policies of the current Congress and administration, while outlining his vision for the direction of the country.

In addressing the current economic situation, Pawlenty said, "We need to do all that we can at the state level and the national level to get this back on track, and we're going to do it not by growing the government but by having private-sector entrepreneurs and small-business leaders say, 'I've got the confidence, I've got the belief that this is a good time and this is a good environment in which to deploy capital, take risks, invent, innovate, dream, design, build buildings, add employees, buy equipment, conduct research, commercialize it locally, and do all of the things that it takes to keep a private-sector economy growing.'"

"Unfortunately, we have a president and a Congress that sees it the other way, and you can't be

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pro-job and anti-entrepreneur.”

Pawlenty’s stop in Sioux City was part of a two-day visit to Iowa that included stops in Council Bluffs, Sioux Center, Hamilton County, and Ames.

Testing Waters for 2012 Bid, Santorum Says Bush Let the Country Down with Bailout

Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum said Wednesday that his sixth campaign visit to Iowa was intended to help local Republican candidates in the upcoming election and to test the waters for his own potential 2012 presidential bid. And he asserted that President George W. Bush let the country down when he signed off on a \$700-billion bailout of Wall Street.

“George Bush let the country down because he didn’t know enough when he made that decision,” Santorum said. “He blew it on that one.”

Santorum spoke Wednesday afternoon at a Cedar Rapids country club as part of a two-day visit to Iowa.

When asked by an audience member how he would have handled the bailout of General Motors and Ford, Santorum said he was opposed to all of the recent bailouts, including the Troubled Asset Relief Program, the bailout of Bear Stearns, and government assistance to two ailing motor-vehicle companies.

Santorum said he would never support another bailout, arguing that it was part of an underlying philosophy that is moving the country in the wrong direction. He said this included a culture fostered by the government of getting the general population hooked on entitlements that the country can no longer afford.

“We have made promises to generations of Americans that we have absolutely no way of financing,” Santorum said.

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Santorum railed against the policies created by the Democratic majority and the Obama White House, focusing on the increase of government spending and influence on American life after the bailout of Wall Street and the passing of the health-care-reform bill.

It was for this reason that Santorum said he felt compelled to continue trying to campaign, even though he is not running in this election.

“We all understand how important this election is,” Santorum said. “This is the most important election in my lifetime, and I’m not even running. You have the opportunity to make a huge difference here in Iowa.”

Before he gave his speech, Santorum was open that he is considering a presidential run in 2012. “I’ve made no bones about the fact that I’m kicking the idea around,” he said.

Charges Filed Over Allegedly Illegal Campaign Contributions

Special prosecutor Lawrence Scalise on Monday charged two executives from Peninsula Gaming, the head of Webster County Entertainment, and a Davenport lawyer with making \$25,000 in illegal campaign contributions to Culver’s re-election campaign. The charges were filed in Polk County District Court.

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