

## Iowa Politics Roundup: Legislature Swiftly Approves New Political Map

Written by Lynn Campbell  
Friday, 15 April 2011 10:24

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It was the first bill called up in the morning on the first day lawmakers were eligible to vote on a new map of congressional and legislative districts.

After it was taken up, the Iowa House took only a few minutes to approve the map on a 91-7 vote.

The Senate quickly followed suit, swiftly approving House File 682 on a 48-1 vote and sending it to Governor Terry Branstad.

The new map will have sweeping implications on Iowa's political landscape for the next decade. Some incumbents will be pitted against one another, others will move, some will hang it up, and newcomers will see an opportunity to run for political office.

Senate President Jack Kibbie (D-Emmetsburg) called the plan "amazing," noting that there's only an 84-person deviation from one congressional district to another and that the boundaries do not cross county lines.

Kibbie said he anticipates that Iowa will be the first state in the nation to approve its new congressional and legislative boundaries reflecting population shifts from the 2010 U.S. Census.

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“Iowa sticks out like a sore thumb with all the states in the nation with the way we do redistricting,” Kibbie said. “This plan treats Democrats and Republicans, I say, equally. This plan has fewer senators thrown together, fewer House people together than the 1980 plan, the 1990 plan, or the 2000 plan.”

“It is indeed a fair plan,” agreed Senate Minority Leader Paul McKinley (R-Chariton). “The call for

term limits is fulfilled by those of us going into new districts and trying to sell our thoughts.”

Senator Sandy Greiner (R-Keota) was the only “no” vote in the Senate.

The seven voting against the bill in the Iowa House were all Republicans: Clel Baudler of Greenfield, Mark Brandenburg of Council Bluffs, Royd Chambers of Sheldon, Mary Ann Hanusa of Council Bluffs, Jeff Kaufmann of Wilton, Renee Schulte of Cedar Rapids, and Annette Sweeney of Alden.

The map reduces Iowa from five congressional districts to four. It pits Democratic U.S. Representatives Bruce Braley of Waterloo against Dave Loebsack of Mount Vernon in the First District.

Minutes after final legislative approval of the new map, Loebsack released a statement officially announcing his candidacy for re-election in Iowa’s Second Congressional District. He said he and his wife, Terry, will move from Mount Vernon to Johnson County, in hopes of continuing to represent a district that includes 14 of the 15 southeast-Iowa counties Loebsack has represented since his first election in 2006.

The map also puts Republican U.S. Representatives Steve King of Kiron and Tom Latham of Ames together in the Fourth Congressional District.

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The map also pits 27 Iowa House members against a fellow incumbent and would create 14 open

Iowa House districts with no incumbent. In the Senate, 12 senators would face off against fellow incumbents unless one chooses to move. Some senators who were elected to 4-year terms will have their terms cut short by the new map.

Unlike other states – in which the redistricting process is partisan – Iowa's map is drawn by the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency, without consideration of incumbent lawmakers.

### Plan to Legalize Internet Poker Delayed

A gambling bill on Thursday cleared the Senate Ways and Means Committee 9-6, but the bill would no longer make Iowa one of the first states in the nation to legalize Internet poker.

Instead, Senate File 458 would now have the Iowa Racing & Gaming Commission produce a report that would look further into the issue and what it would mean in terms of state regulation, additional gaming, and underage gaming.

"It does not legalize online poker play," said Senator Bill Dotzler (D-Waterloo), the bill's floor manager. "It just asks for a report."

Backers of legalizing Internet poker said that about 150,000 Iowans are taking part in Internet poker illegally every day, and the revenue is currently benefiting offshore Internet-gambling companies.

Also under the bill, a casino that has established itself for at least eight years and has successfully passed two referendums would no longer be subject to an automatic county referendum on its gambling license in the future. That part of the bill would be retroactive to 1994.

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Yet another part of the bill would allow direct-deposit wagering on horse racing as it's done in 20 other states.

“Through direct-deposit wagering, it allows us to capture money that is being lost across the country because currently, if you want to bet on the Kentucky Derby, you have to do it through Kentucky or 20 other states’ programs,” Dotzler said. “This way, we create one here in Iowa, and they can bet on Iowa horses right here instead of using some other state.”

Initial proposals to end live greyhound racing in Iowa or subject Iowa’s casino floors to the state smoking ban did not have the votes and were not offered as amendments Thursday.

The Iowa Conference of United Methodist Church, the Iowa Catholic Conference, the Iowa Faith & Freedom Coalition, and The Family Leader are among those registered against the bill. At least a dozen other lobbyists, many representing gambling interests, have registered as “undecided” and have yet to take a public position on the bill.

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### **Legislative Leaders Says Agreement Must Be Reached Next Week for April 29 Adjournment**

Legislative leaders said Thursday they’re close to an agreement on a bill that would create a Taxpayer Relief Fund, provide supplemental appropriations for indigent defense, and supply money to eliminate the waiting list across the state for mental-health services.

However, they would also need to reach agreement on several other key areas of the budget and on tax relief if they hope to adjourn by April 29 as scheduled.

“There’s some pieces that have to fall into place before the middle of next week,” said House Speaker Kraig Paulsen (R-Hiawatha). “If that can happen, we still have a shot of getting out of

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here on April 29. But if we don't have those things resolved pretty early next week, then I think probably that starts to slip away a little bit."

Paulsen said it takes about 10 days after decisions are made to move the paperwork necessary in the legislature to get it all done.

An agreement is expected to be announced early next week on Senate File 209, which has been in a House-Senate conference committee since early March. The final bill is expected to create a Taxpayer Relief Fund that's been a priority of House Republicans.

"I think you'll see us shortly reach resolution on a couple of those issues, and I think that will kind of become the model for the rest of the session; then we'll be able to move fairly quickly," said Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal (D-Council Bluffs). "I think it's still quite possible we can get done on time."

Paulsen said that under the proposed agreement, state money beyond what was estimated by the Revenue Estimating Conference would go first to the cash-reserve fund and economic-emergency fund, then \$60 million would go to a Taxpayer Relief Fund. That's significantly less than the more than \$300 million that would have initially gone to the fund as advocated by Republicans.

"We agreed to a limit on it," Paulsen said. "It goes towards making sure that those dollars, those ending balances, aren't just automatically turned around and built into following budgets. That's addressing the concern that we were trying to address."

It has not yet been determined how the money would be used. But Democrats, who have criticized the Taxpayer Relief Fund as a "slush fund," now acknowledge that the legislature probably will create the fund this year.

"I think that's likely," Gronstal said.

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Commercial-property-tax relief is expected to be part of the end game as lawmakers work to wind down the 2011 session. The Democratic-controlled Senate on Wednesday approved its version of the plan.

“It’s too small,” Paulsen said. “I think we can do better than that.”

But Gronstal maintained Thursday that the Senate Democratic plan, which would start at \$50 million and grow incrementally to \$200 million if revenue growth is at least 4 percent, is superior to the more expensive plans proposed by House Republicans and Governor Branstad.

“We like the House approach, but that’s \$500 million that we don’t have,” said Gronstal.

Another issue is school funding for the 2011-12 school year. School officials have repeatedly called for the legislature to make a decision on allowable budget growth for schools. Districts are required to certify their budgets by Friday.

However, House Republicans and the governor still appeared set at no growth as of Thursday, while Senate Democrats were still insisting on a 2-percent increase in per-pupil spending for schools.

“We continue to be at two; they continue to be at zero,” Gronstal said. “But clearly, we have enough resources to do better than zero for our kids in Iowa.”

Other controversial bills still hang in the balance as the session winds to a close: one that would allow MidAmerican Energy Company to charge customers up-front for a proposed nuclear power plant; one that would ban abortions from 20 weeks of pregnancy; and one that would ban Iowa farm workers from taking undercover pictures, video, or audio of animal agriculture operations.

Gronstal said there are many people continuing to work on those issues. It remains to be seen

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whether those bills, all of which have generated plenty of controversy and comments, will ultimately be approved this year. In the past, some of these sorts of policy pieces get placed into budget bills that go to conference committee.

*This summary was compiled from reports by [IowaPolitics.com](http://IowaPolitics.com).*