

## Controversial Issues During Fall Veto Session

December 22, 2010

### ***Controversial Issues Receive Vote During Fall Veto Session***

Several controversial pieces of legislation received a vote before the entire House during the second week of fall veto session. Among the items discussed were proposals to legalize medical marijuana and civil unions. I have received a lot of feed back both in support and opposition to these issues, and took into consideration all of the constituent's remarks before casting my final vote on each proposal.

Medical marijuana can become a very emotional issue for many. I have heard a number of stories from those inflicted with serious illness and their family members who feel that the legalization of medical marijuana would greatly help them cope with their sickness and pain. However, I have also heard from a number of organizations including law enforcement, medical professionals and other officials who say the facts clearly demonstrate that legislation of this nature carries far more risks than rewards.

Among those risks remains the fact that marijuana is still a controlled substance, a substance that we want to ensure remains out of the hands of our children. Experts say there is alternative medication available which can achieve the same benefits as marijuana for patients. The legalization of marijuana, even for medicinal purposes, means that more of the drug will be available, and the more the drug is available the greater the chance it will slip into the hands of youths. There is also a problem with distributing marijuana for medical purposes. The legislation that was voted on allows medical marijuana patients to grow their own plants instead of the normal process for medication which is distributed by a pharmacy. This creates a number of problems such as regulation of what chemicals are included in the plant, who will have access to it and regulations on patients under the influence of the substance. The last thing we want is a slippery slope that leads to the problems which California has witnessed due to the medical marijuana boom.

My other big concern is with regards to employer liability. The medical marijuana legislation, Senate Bill 1381, states that employers can not refuse employment to job seekers due to their use of medical marijuana. I clearly understand that employers can not discriminate based on medical needs, but we must also consider basic safety and increased costs to job providers. Do we want to allow medical marijuana users to operate heavy machinery? How much will workers compensation costs and liability insurance increase for employers due to this legislation? Those are all questions that must be answered before considering such significant changes and they remain unknown at this point, which is why I had to vote against medical marijuana. The legislation failed to receive enough support for passage, and could be considered again in early January.

Another highly controversial and very emotional issue that was dealt with this week was the legalization of Civil Unions. Senate Bill 1716 would have allowed couples of the same and opposite sex a number of the same protections and responsibilities that are granted to married couples. I remain opposed to civil unions as I see this as a step toward gay marriage, which a majority of area constituents have repeatedly voiced their opposition to.

I firmly believe that the definition of marriage remains between a man and woman. In many cases homosexual couples can already attain the rights included within this civil union legislation under other legal means. If this bill were to become law it could force religious institutions to recognize beliefs which they do not support. Religious adoption agencies would thus be required to ignore their religious beliefs when gay couples seek to adopt children from their care. If they refused, they would surely face stringent legal consequences.

I firmly believe in equality for all and absolutely do not feel that sexual preference would ever warrant any type of discrimination. Heterosexual and homosexual individuals should and will always be afforded the same protections under law, but religious institutions also reserve their right to free speech and the ability to exercise those rights as they choose.

The civil union's legislation was approved by the House and Senate, and awaits Governor Quinn's signature to become law.

Illinois House members will return in early January for a number of session days to take up other proposals. One topic which was silently absent from discussion during veto session was the budget. It is likely that during the January session days, as lame duck lawmakers approach the end of their term, there could be a number of controversial budget issues taken up for a vote. Things such as a tax hike and additional borrowing could be on the table. Also likely to be taken up for a vote will be a large scale gambling expansion proposal that received Senate approval on Wednesday. The measure would authorize five new casinos throughout the state, increase gaming positions at existing casinos and allow slot machines at horseracing tracks. Keep an eye on early January as we could see some very significant proposals come up for a vote.

## ***A Great Man Who Will Always be Remembered***

It was a sad month for the people of Western Illinois and the entire state, as we lost a great leader, a great father and an overall outstanding person with the passing of State Representative Rich Myers. I had the pleasure to get to know Rich very well over the years, both in our capacity as legislators but also as good friends. We share a Senate district and worked together on a wide variety of issues for Western Illinois, and I must say that there was never a time that Representative Myers didn't look at issues from both sides and do

what he felt was in the very best interest for the people he represented.

Rep. Myers served his country in the U.S. Army reserves, was a successful farmer and businessman, but above all else he was a family man and a great father. On many occasions Rich would talk of his wonderful wife, Chris, and how proud he was of his daughter, Alison. Where Rich Myers dedication toward serving his constituents was always an upmost priority, the true light of his life and what made him such a gifted and talented individual was his family.

The Illinois House lost a great legislator, but more importantly the people of Illinois lost one truly outstanding person. We will certainly miss you Rich, the House floor just won't be the same without you. My condolences go out to Rich's family and friends, and I ask you all to keep them in your prayers during this difficult time.

***Jil***

***Merry Christmas and Happy  
Holidays to all this Holiday Season***