

Significance of Work

More often than not the importance of a General Assembly's work is obvious, if only because the effects are almost immediate. But on occasion there is the exception — the legislature which adopts some legislation which can be judged for its immediate effects and some calling for changes of such long-range implications that it can be judged only in the light of history.

Such was the 61st General Assembly. Certainly it was the youngest, the costliest, the most inexperienced, and the most controversial in many a decade. It was also without doubt the least bound by tradition, the least inhibited, and the most venturesome — venturesome enough to dive headlong into unexplored legislative waters that those before had tested only with their toes. How else would you explain that this legislature's work would have to be judged by both standards of measurement — immediate and long-range?

For the fact is that much of this legislature's work was setting in motion proposed changes in the State's fundamental law — the Iowa Constitution. No Iowa Legislature since the middle of the last century had proposed as many as eight amendments of such sweeping import.

As outlined in the previous chapter, these ranged from legalizing bingo games and teaming candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor on party tickets, to a new formula for apportioning legislative seats and annual sessions of the legislature. These proposals cannot go into effect unless approved by the 1967 legislature and ratified by the people. But the mere fact that they were proposed and passed the first time by the 1965 legislature made it somewhat unique. Naturally, the significance of this kind of legislation can be honestly judged only after the passage of time.

But even if this legislature had not made these long-range proposals, it could stake a claim to recognition for its work that can be judged on a short-range basis.

It rated "A," for example, in the area of school legislation. Adoption of a bill requiring all areas of the state to be in a 12-grade high school district by July 1, 1966 was long overdue and was landmark legislation. It will have far-reaching effects for it paves the way to the day when assessments of property values will be uniform throughout the state. This, in turn, will make for a uniform base leading to more equitable distribution of school aid and of some other types of state aid.

Whether you agreed with what was done or not, it rated at least an "A" for courage in adopting a withholding tax, abolishing capital punish-

ment, limiting billboards on Interstate highways, passing a uniform commercial code bill, as well as refusing to repeal the right-to-work law or to change the law limiting use of public school buses to public school pupils. This legislature also could point with traditional pride to making a start toward property tax relief with its increases in appropriations for school aid and for agricultural land tax credits.

True, it dodged the sticky problem that looms larger with each passing legislature — the overhauling of the state's antiquated tax structure. But, even here, it made a start by appropriating \$50,000 for a study to form the basis for recommendations to the 1967 legislature.

Even though this legislature differed from its predecessors in some ways, it was no different in one respect — the reception it got from the state's press. As usual, its performance rated "superior" with some, "poor" with others and all shades in between with still others, as noted in these editorial excerpts:

The Democrats, to their credit, brought up and aired a number of topics which had not been talked in the legislature for many years. But the outcome of these discussions was not progress, but rather confusion — *Ames Daily Tribune*.

The only time a session can be judged accurately is after the people have lived with its work for awhile. What the people ultimately think will show up in the next legislative election — *Sioux City Journal*.

Remember the Money Tree in children's fiction? . . . The story was timely, because the Iowa legislators were just winding up their session with a big play on the Money Box. They used its magic to ferret out more than \$50 million extra from Iowa taxpayers. — *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*.

It will take the courts many years to untangle the activities of the legislative session. . . . The overwhelming majority of Iowans do not realize what the legislature they elected in 1964 has done to them. — *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*.

By and large, the record of the 1965 General Assembly balances out fairly well. It could have been somewhat better. It could have been a great deal worse. — *Davenport Times-Democrat*.

. . . there was justification for voting an all-time high state budget. . . . The legislators faced record needs for funds. It can be said in (their) defense . . . that this demand . . . comes from taxpaying voters. . . . If the people want more handouts from the legislature they must expect higher taxes. — *Boone News-Republican*.

. . . the 1965 legislature made its mark on history because it dared to attend to some matters that long have needed to be attended to, matters its immediate predecessors were moving in on but couldn't quite work up what it takes to attend to them. For that this legislature will be long remembered. — *Cedar Rapids Gazette*.

The legislature's record . . . is one of some commendable accomplishments, marred by a few glaring failures . . . but this carping aside, it did succeed in taking a number of actions which will earn it a niche in the annals of Iowa. — *Spencer Daily Reporter*.

Personally (we are) pleased with the work of the legislature. They did many things which have long needed doing and laid the groundwork for many other things. — *Shenandoah Sentinel*.

Some things were done that needed to be done, admitted. . . . Biggest failure (was) to bring relief to property tax owners in Iowa. — *Ottumwa Courier*.

The legislature made an effort to update Iowa's government and to enable it to meet better the challenges and the opportunities of the decades ahead. At least four years will be required to complete these changes and many more years will be needed to evaluate them. In making the effort the General Assembly served the state well. — *Iowa City Press-Citizen*.

The Republicans hadn't been doing very well on revising the state legislature, in line with population changes, until the high court hit them. But the Democrats in the Iowa House haven't learned much from that experience. They want to, as many in the rural areas warned — take things over, hook, line and sinker. And that is wrong too. — *Creston News Advertiser*.

. . . this legislature set the state on a new track. It broke through tradition-encrusted patterns of a half century or more, and its changes will be felt far into the future. . . . On balance, the 1965 legislature should be accorded praise for a constructive and progressive set of acts. — *Des Moines Register*.

. . . Iowans generally have been shocked by the slapdash spending and the resulting impetuous taxing effort to keep income up to outgo, which have characterized the just ended session Every available source of income has been sought out and milked. — *Atlantic News-Telegraph*.

. . . The plus and minus achievements . . . are now subject to inspection, but on the two counts of property tax relief and reapportionment, the legislature made a failing grade. — *Centerville Iowegian*.

Gov. Harold Hughes didn't give one inch in his fight for a constitutional amendment that would have permitted division of counties into legislative districts. He lost in the closing hours . . . (but) . . . to many he gained stature in the defeat. — *Mason City Globe-Gazette*.

Governor Hughes, who dominated the session through his vigorous leadership . . . tasted both victory and defeat. The legislators followed his advice in avoiding major tax increases, they refused to change drastically Iowa's labor laws as the Governor promised his labor supporters. — *Marshalltown Times-Republican*.

The *Waterloo Daily Courier* simply listed as "constructive actions" new laws in the areas of school district reform, gas tax increase, constitutional amendments, area vocational-technical schools, abolishing secrecy, permanent reapportionment and education, and lauded the legislature for refusing to change (1) a use tax law, (2) the right-to-work law and (3) for refusing to repeal the guest statute. It branded as "failures" the legislature's "sloppy committee work," refusal to pass (1) a legislative subdistricting amendment and (2) a civil service bill. The *Courier* also deplored passage of a "hazardous" voter-registration and another boosting local taxes.

The *Courier* touched on a legislative sore point in mentioning the boosting of local taxes. For the

legislature, by increasing firemen's pensions and taking certain other actions automatically forced increases in local property taxes, which left local school, city and county officials no choice.

Politicians of the two major parties saw the legislature's performance through different sets of glasses, judging from their observations. Using a set of Democratic glasses, Governor Hughes called it a "constructive" legislature that made "enduring contributions to Iowa's future." But Republican State Chairman Ray, using a set of glasses furnished by his party, described it as a legislature that left Iowans "overburdened with new taxes at every level of government."

As for the legislature itself, it was willing to rest its case with the people, content that it had enacted much overdue legislation its predecessors had only talked about but never got around to adopting. And there the case rested — with the 1966 elections just around the corner.