Legislative Tracking Tool Gets New Look

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The 2013 legislative session is upon us, and staff will be using the legislative tracking tool to keep members informed on the status of legislation that is important to counties. The tracking tool has had some changes made during the interim to make it compatible with newer software. Now is a good time for ISAC members to familiarize themselves with these changes.

To find the tool, go to the ISAC website, www.iowacounties.org. On the right hand side of the page, under "Inside ISAC Government Relations" there is a link entitled "ISAC Legislative Tracking Tool." Click on that link, and it will take you to a page entitled "Interactive Web-Based Tool." If you click on "ISAC Legislative Tracking Tool" again, the tool will open. ISAC staff uses this tool very often, so we have it bookmarked. This way time can be saved by skipping these initial steps and going straight to the tool. You can also type in the direct address of http://affiliatesiowacounties.org/bills/.

The tool defaults to display all of the bills introduced during this session. At any point in your review of the tracking tool, if you click on the bill number, the tool will take you to a copy of the bill on the General Assembly's website.

The filtering features make this tool truly unique and useful. From left to right across the top of the tool, you can first search by type of bill: House File (HF), House Study Bill (HSB), Senate File (SF), or Senate Study Bill (SSB). Staff generally does not input the various types of resolutions unless they are relevant to ISAC members. The next search that is available is by number. If you know the number of the bill that you want to bring up, type it in. If you add the type of bill to your search, only one bill will come up, if you just use the number, you may get as many as four bills (HF, HSB, SF, SSB).

Next you can sort by title. This is not fool proof since it depends on what title staff inputs, but it can be very helpful. For example, if you want to see what legislation has been introduced that relates to "Property Tax," type that in and click on "Search." All of the bills that have that word in the title will appear for your review.

The next column is the description column that allows staff to add key comments that might help explaining what a bill does if the title is not self-explanatory. Staff will also input successor and companion bills into this column which allows you to know if a bill is a successor to one previously filed or if there is a companion bill in the other chamber. With all of the number changing that goes on, this can help you make sure you are looking at the most recent iteration of a bill. Companion bills are important since they offer an additional opportunity for a bill to remain "alive" after the second funnel. If companion bills have made it out of committee in their house of origin, they do not have to be passed and out of committee in the other chamber in order to remain viable.

The next two columns allow you to sort by staff assigned to the bill or affiliate. Most likely, you will be using the affiliate sort. If you click on the "Affiliates" header, the bills will be placed in alphabetical order by affiliate. You can also search by affiliate by clicking on the search icon and typing in the affiliate name. There are still changes being made and we hope to have a drop-down box that allows you to select from the different affiliates.

The next column documents ISAC's position on a bill. If ISAC is registered on a bill, it will be documented as either F (for), A (against), or U (undecided). If we have not registered, but want to keep track of a bill, it is designated as Tr (track). Many bills are NA (not applicable to ISAC) and many are sent FYI to various staff and affiliates. These are bills that staff are seeking input on as to whether we should have a position or track. We always appreciate members letting us know if a bill that is designated "NA" or "FYI" needs to have a different position. We do not always catch the nuances of a particular bill, and it helps to have as many eyes as possible on the mass of bills that are introduced.

The next three columns track the status of bills in the process. If you search for "passed" in the House Status and Senate Status columns and "signed" in the Governor's Status column, you will get a list of all bills that have made it through the process. During session, bills that are on the Governor's desk, but not signed are designated as "pending."

The last column, "Comments," can be very useful. Bills that die in one of the funnels, are withdrawn, or that are substituted by a subsequent bill are so noted.

Please take the time to familiarize yourself with this tool before the session starts. Your input during the process is invaluable to ISAC staff. If you have any questions regarding the legislative tracking tool, please contact Tammy Norman at tnorman@iowacounties.org or 515.244.7181.