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The General Assembly

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The General Assembly

The Iowa General Assembly is the policy making branch of the Iowa government. It is the agency that determines what the government shall do and makes provisions for the executing of those activities. It translates into action the demands of the people. Any decision as to expansion or contraction of a state governmental function must come from the law makers.

The members of the General Assembly of Iowa are a representative group. They come from all parts of the state and have a wide range of occupational and vocational interests. Some of them are men of mature judgment and long service in legislative fields; others are young men with many hopes and high aspirations, but with little experience in public service. A few of the members are women, since the "male" qualification was removed from the Constitution in 1926. The members also typify a variety of religious, social, economic, and political interests.

The General Assembly consists of two houses—the Senate and the House of Representatives. From 1904 until the 1964 election there had been 50 members in the Senate and 108 members in the House. A temporary reapportionment plan in-

creased the size of the House to 124 and the Senate to 59, with the latter being again increased by the 1965 legislature. In 1967 the Senate will be composed of 61 members, who will be elected from 53 senatorial districts of the State. To be eligible for election to the State Senate, a person must be a resident of the district in which he is a candidate, and he must be at least twenty-five years of age. Senators hold office for a term of four years, about half being elected at each biennial election. Accordingly there is always in the Senate a group of men who have had legislative experience. Senators who are serving in the second session of the term for which they are elected are sometimes called "holdover senators." There are always Senators, too, who have been re-elected—having already served in two or more sessions of the General Assembly.

Under the temporary reapportionment plan the House of Representatives is composed of 124 members who are elected from 71 districts. Members of the House must be at least 21 years of age. Their average age, over a period of years, has been found to be a little more than 49 years. Members of the House are usually less experienced in legislative matters than are the Senators. Of the 124 members of the House in the 61st General Assembly, about 80 entered upon their duties without previous legislative experience.

In the 61st General Assembly there were 23

Republicans and 101 Democrats in the House. The Senate had 25 Republicans and 34 Democrats. On many issues before the Assembly, party lines are not tightly drawn, and the influence of minority members is effective in matters of legislation.

While a wide range of occupational interests is represented by members of the General Assembly, farmers and lawyers usually predominate. In the House and Senate in the 61st General Assembly there were 43 farmers and 25 lawyers. The term "farmer," however, is a broad and comprehensive one, seemingly including anyone who owns, operates, manages, or assists in the operation, management, or control of a farm.

In the Iowa House of Representatives, in 1965, there were two Negro representatives, probably the first time this racial group had ever been represented. More women successfully sought election to the Iowa General Assembly in 1964 than in any previous year, but no woman was elected to the Senate in the 1964 election.

The State Constitution provides that the Lieutenant Governor shall serve as President of the Senate. He may vote to break a tie upon certain motions, but since he is not a Senator he does not vote on legislative bills. This situation arises from the fact that while one section of the Constitution of Iowa provides that "The Lieutenant Governor shall be President of the Senate, but shall only

vote when the Senate is equally divided," another section declares that "no bill shall be passed unless by the assent of a majority of all the members elected to each branch of the General Assembly." The first provision permits the Lieutenant Governor to vote in case of a tie, but the second provision renders his vote of no effect in the passage of a law, since a law cannot be passed by a margin of one vote but must receive at least a constitutional majority in the Senate and in the House.

The influence of political parties is quite clearly apparent in the General Assembly. The Lieutenant Governor is the presiding officer of the Senate and the Speaker of the House is elected by the House from among its own members. Whichever political party has a majority in the House will name one of their members to the speakership—he having been nominated and elected somewhat as follows.

A few days before the date for the convening of the Assembly, the members-elect hold party caucuses at Des Moines, and each political party nominates candidates for Speaker, although it is generally conceded that the candidate named by the predominate party in the House will eventually be elected. In 1965 the Democrat members of the House proposed two candidates—Vince Steffen of Chickasaw County and La Mar Foster, Sr. of Cedar County. At the party caucus, Mr. Steffen was nominated and subsequently elected Speaker.

In accordance with the Iowa State Constitution, the General Assembly convenes on the second Monday in January in odd-numbered years. It may also be convened in extraordinary session upon the call of the Governor. There is no time limit to the length of the regular session, and it adjourns *sine die* whenever both houses, by concurrent resolution, conclude that a session has completed its work. The 61st General Assembly convened at Des Moines January 11, 1965, and continued for 145 days. During this time 1,420 legislative measures were introduced. Some 477 of these were enacted into law, amending more than four hundred sections of the *Code of Iowa*.

The question of salaries in legislative halls is frequently discussed. For many years legislators received \$1,000 for the regular session of the General Assembly—or approximately \$10 per day, with twice that sum for the presiding officers. Compensation during an extraordinary session is on a daily basis and is the same as the daily compensation which the member received in the regular session. In 1965 the base pay was \$30 per day per member. Under the new law the daily payment for members of the Assembly in 1967 will be \$40 and \$80 per day for the presiding officers.

The problems that come before the General Assembly, concerning which laws are passed, usually arise in the local communities. They are questions

with which the average citizen is concerned, and they deal with cities and towns, corporations, elections, flood control, motor vehicles, salaries, schools, taxation, veterans' affairs, and a variety of other topics. Frequently legislative measures are sponsored by groups of individuals such as members of the Farm Bureau, bankers, tradesmen, mechanics, or teachers.

If a citizen or a group of citizens in Des Moines, for example, are interested in securing legislation relative to a state-wide problem such as liquor control, or an appropriation for a new building at the state capital, they may confer with a Senator or Representative from that district. He in turn may prepare a bill dealing with the subject and present it in the house of which he is a member. The history of a legislative measure may vary widely, depending upon circumstances.

Rules of the General Assembly provide that every bill shall be introduced by one or more members of the House or the Senate, or by a standing or special committee, and shall at once be given its first reading. "Every bill and joint resolution shall have received three separate readings previous to its passage;" but no bill or joint resolution shall have its second and third readings on the same day, without a suspension of the rules, except on the last legislative day.

Much of the work of the General Assembly is done by committees and in 1965 there were only

15 in each house. In the 1963 session there were 42 committees in the House and 30 in the Senate. In the 61st session there were committees on such subjects as: appropriations, cities and towns, conservation and agriculture, county and township affairs, elections, judiciary, labor, liquor control, public health, public utilities, roads and highways, schools, taxation, and ways and means.

Because the General Assembly is composed of persons of varied experience, and because a wide variety of bills come before it, coordination and effective work is difficult at the beginning of the session. Committees require a great deal of time for a careful consideration of bills. As a result, the calendar near the close of the session is very crowded. To facilitate the work at this time, a sifting committee is appointed in each house, to which all legislative bills on the calendar are referred, except appropriation measures. Since all committees, including the sifting committee, are appointed by the presiding officer in each house, and since these committees virtually control legislation, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House are very influential.

When a bill is introduced into the Senate or the House it is referred to a committee for study and recommendation. It is also given a number and printed so that each member of the General Assembly may have a copy. When a committee reports a bill to the House or Senate, it may rec-

commend that the measure be passed, or it may submit amendments or suggest indefinite postponement. On the other hand, the committee may not report or make any recommendations at all, in which case the measure is usually lost—or as they say, it “dies in the committee.”

A bill brought to the floor of either house for consideration is freely debated by the members. The House of Representatives, which is located in the north wing on the second floor of the capitol, is equipped with a modern electric voting and recording machine, and each of the 124 members is supplied with loud-speaking equipment. Votes are recorded by pressing a button on each member's desk, and electric lights on the front wall indicate the votes—a green light signifies an affirmative vote, and a red light indicates a negative vote. At the same time that the vote is recorded, a photostatic copy is made to be preserved as a permanent record. In the Senate Chamber, in the south wing, voting is done by oral roll call.

When a measure has been passed by one house, it may be adopted and passed by the other without amendments, it may be amended or rewritten entirely, or it may fail to pass. If a measure is amended or changed in any way, such changes must be concurred in by the house in which the bill originated. In order for a measure to become a law, it must have passed both houses in exactly the same form, by a majority vote of all members

elected to each house. It must also be signed by the presiding officer in each house and presented to the Governor for his signature.

Under normal procedure the signature of the Governor is required upon all bills that are passed. However, if the Governor holds a bill for more than three days (the day he receives it, Sunday and holidays excepted) it becomes a law just as if he had signed it, unless the General Assembly by adjournment prevents the bill's return. Such bills are authenticated by the Secretary of State. In case of adjournment before the Governor has had three days in which to consider a measure, he may have 30 days in which to approve or reject it. If the Governor vetoes a measure, it can be passed over his veto by the approval of two-thirds of all the members of each house.

Before the General Assembly adjourns, a group of five senators and five representatives is appointed as a Committee on Budget and Financial Control. This committee functions between legislative sessions as The Interim Committee.

Laws passed during a session are compiled by the State Printer and published in a volume known as "Sessions Laws." These are made available to lawyers and other interested citizens throughout the state, so that all may keep abreast of the latest legislation. At regular intervals, normally every four years, the new laws passed are codified and published in the *Code of Iowa*.