

Environment focus of legislative forum

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WATERLOO — Protecting Iowa's environmental health is also tied to the state's economic well being, lawmakers said at a legislative forum Saturday.

The environment was the topic of the Black Hawk County legislative forum at the Area Education Agency 267 building. Sen. Bill Dotzler, D-Waterloo, said the issue isn't just "touchy-feely." For younger, creative people the state is trying to recruit to come to Iowa, outdoor recreation is a big draw, he said.

"It's clear that people want Iowa's rivers and streams cleaned up," Dotzler said. "Iowans want to go out and use those resources and we've got to do a better job cleaning it up for them."

A state program Resource Enhancement and Protection funds environmental initiatives. The program is marking its 25th year this year. The four lawmakers at the forum,

Dotzler, Rep. Bob Kressig, D-Cedar Falls; Rep. Anesa Kajtazovic, D-Waterloo and Sen. Jeff Danielson, D-Cedar Falls, all promised to work to increase REAP funding.

The program is authorized to receive \$20 million each year but the state legislature sets the actual funding and it has not gotten full funding in the history of the program, Kressig said.

"There's a difference between saying 'yes, I want clean water' and doing something about it," said Kajtazovic.

Jeri Thornsberry, member of the Black Hawk County Soil and Water Conservation District commission, said the number of state soil technicians has dwindled from 79 to 34.

Danielson said that lack of funding and technicians has led to industries doing their own analysis.

"It's the fox guarding the henhouse," Danielson said.

Other topics brought up at the forum included

abortion safety and concerns about telemedicine.

The Iowa House passed a law banning doctors from prescribing abortion-inducing drugs from remote locations, typically using a video link. The practice is used to provide abortions to women in rural areas where access to healthcare providers is limited.

The lawmakers each affirmed their support for abortion rights. Danielson added the law and current court case involving telemedicine could have a broader effect on the use of the state's telecommunications technology.

"This could unravel the significant

telecommunications investments," he said.

Supporters of medical marijuana asked lawmakers to support legislation this session setting state policy for its use. Brooke Rice spoke about her niece who had to move to Colorado for treatment for seizures. Corah Webber spoke about her troubles finding relief from symptoms for Lyme disease.

Dotzler voiced his support for a policy.

"There's no reason the state of Iowa shouldn't go forward with it in my view," he said.

Sen. Joe Bolckcom, D-Iowa City, said he plans to introduce a medical marijuana bill this week.

Prairie du Chien



Bald Eagle Appreciation Days
FEB. 21-22
Fri 7-9 pm & Sat 9-4
Hoffman Hall, 1600 S Wacouta Ave
Friday evening programs at local hotels.

- Live Bald Eagle Programs
- Birding Experts on Hand
- Live Raptor Programs
- Children's Activities