

**Peter Cownie**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
*Sixtieth District*  
Statehouse: (515) 281-3221  
e-mail -  
peter.cownie@legis.state.ia.us



**COMMITTEES**  
Appropriations  
Economic Growth  
Education  
Labor

**HOME ADDRESS**  
686 58<sup>th</sup> Place  
West Des Moines, IA 50266  
Home: (515) 664-8341

**House of Representatives**  
State of Iowa  
*Eighty-Third General Assembly*  
STATEHOUSE  
**Des Moines, Iowa 50319**

**APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE**  
Economic Development,  
*Ranking Member*

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Just like Iowa taxpayers being kicked out of the Iowa House last week, it is time for the Iowa Legislature to kick itself out of the Capitol. Tempers are flaring. Tax hikes are being debated and racial slurs are being uttered on the House floor. It is time to go. However, before this occurs, I want to examine a fundamental difference between how the Legislature and Iowa families address our budgets.

That fundamental difference is what a “cut” to a budget constitutes in hard times. A real cut is when something is eliminated. The Majority Party has made the decision to cut 8.5% across the board instead of selectively eliminating wasteful spending altogether. I want to give you a few examples of where I think 100% elimination of a program or appropriation is both necessary and appropriate. The Majority Party has been presented an additional \$215 million in budget cuts from the Minority Party. These cuts are logical and deserve passage. Keep in mind that the Legislature is dealing with an approximate \$800 million gap between spending and forecasted revenues. Some of these items are relatively “big” and some of these items are relatively “small” in the big picture of the budget. However, also keep in mind that your tax dollars pay for these items.

First, what about selling the fleet of state vehicles and leasing them instead? Some of this is a one-time saving. However, this would save the state \$34 million. How about reducing an appropriation for unused office supplies in the state? This would save Iowans \$10 million. What about eliminating “phantom” employees in the state? “Phantom” employees are funded, but unfilled full-time employees in state government. By eliminating these positions the state would save \$25 million. Next, let’s look at an example of “extras” that our state vehicles are required to have: bug shields, stereos, and speakers. This is an \$87,000 appropriation.

Do you think 8.5% of those bug shields, office supplies, unfilled jobs, and state cars should be cut or should entire appropriations be cut? I think when we are dealing with an \$800 million dollar spending gap that an appropriate cut would be 100%.

Families are making cuts every day due to the economic downturn. Summer is just around the corner, which means summer vacations for families are coming up soon. Many Iowa families are not going to be able to take summer vacations due to cuts in their pay, the loss of their jobs, or personal losses in the markets. That vacation will be eliminated. If a family normally goes to Clear Lake for a week in the summer, they will probably not take 8.5% off of the trip. They just will not go altogether. The Legislature should remember these real-life scenarios when making its decisions.

Peter Cownie (R-West Des Moines), represents District 60 in the Iowa House of Representatives. The district includes most of West Des Moines in Polk County. He can be reached via e-mail at Peter.Cownie@legis.state.ia.us or by phone at 281-3221.