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# Lawmakers hope for better in '08

By Kenneth Lowe, JG/T-C Springfield Bureau

SPRINGFIELD — State lawmakers who represent East Central Illinois have closed the books on a messy 2007 legislative session and are now turning to new initiatives they hope to push in 2008.

From higher speed limits for trucks to addressing the state's budget problems, area lawmakers say they hope to leave the lingering problems that bedeviled the General Assembly and Gov. Rod Blagojevich in 2007 behind.

State Rep. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, said his goal for the year will be to ignore the infighting that slowed the 2007 session and focus more on proposals suggested by his constituents.

"As long as this fight continues, you have to hunker down and get things needed by people in this district," Rose said. "I'm not going to worry about who ends up king of Chicago."

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Rose plans to propose allowing judges to double the sentence of someone who kills an infant in cases of shaken baby syndrome, and in the case of someone who kills a police officer in the course of fleeing the officer.

Rose also plans to push a proposal to freeze the property tax on the homes of the elderly in the event the homes are rebuilt after being destroyed in a natural disaster. Rose explained the type of situations that

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arose to prompt the proposal.

"If you have a tornado that goes through your house and you're 85, suddenly you get a new house and that property tax hits and it's huge," Rose said.

State Rep. Roger Eddy, R-Hutsonville, said a big concern for his district is the money needed from a state construction plan.

"We have got to get to the point in my district where we acknowledge the fact that Strasburg still doesn't have their school and we have 23 schools that have not been funded," Eddy said.

Eddy said this year he will continue to be an advocate of alternative fuels and ethanol.

"I have a bill that provides for franchises with a major oil company to use E85, because now there are rules that disallow them from even having an E85 pump," Eddy said.

State Rep. David Reis, R-Willow Hill, said he will address the looming shortage of farm veterinarians by introducing legislation that would grant scholarships to veterinary students who promise to practice in rural areas after graduation.

Reis also said he will propose a compromise in the battle over highway speed limits for large trucks. Currently the speed limit for semis is 55 miles per hour on rural interstates, while all other traffic is 65 miles per hour. Several attempts at starting a uniform speed limit for both cars and trucks have met with failure in the legislature.

"We're going to go in with a compromise at 60 miles an hour," Reis said. "That will allow people to look at traffic accidents and a few years down the road we can see if we can in fact bump it up to 65."

Reis said he will also continue his efforts at mandating having photo identification in order to vote.

"We think it is necessary to hold elections that are safe and fair and not riddled with fraud, and that requiring a photo ID is something that should be done," Reis said.

Sen. Dale Righter, R-Mattoon, said the largest problem to overcome in 2008 will be the state's fiscal situation, particularly with Medicaid.

"We owe more money to (healthcare) providers than we ever have in this state's history," Righter said. "Meanwhile, the governor keeps pushing expansions for public assistance for healthcare."

Another concern for Righter is continuing work on the FutureGen energy plant slated for construction in Mattoon. The facility — a joint project between the U.S. and other governments and organizations — aims to create a zero-emissions energy plant.

"We need to push forward and pressure the federal government for a commitment to fund the FutureGen project as it was designed," Righter said.

Reis said that besides new laws, he's looking forward to some common sense in the 2008 session.

"It's just not healthy where we're at right now," Reis said.

Lawmakers are scheduled to return to action Feb. 13.

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