



State Representative Andrew Wenthe

Statehouse News

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Inside this Issue

- 2** Legislative Session Begins
- 3** Health Care Commission Reports
- 4** Governor Releases Budget Recommendations
- 4** Governor Announces Education Priorities
- 5** Veterans Home master Plan Funding
- 6** Governor Culver Tells Iowans to "Lighten Up"
- 6** State of the Judiciary Stresses Equal Justice, Youth
- 7** State Parks 2020 Initiative
- 7** Governor Proposes Expanding Iowa's Bottle Deposit
- 8** Ways to Address Worker Shortage Proposed
- 8** Generation Iowa Releases Report
- 9** Early Care Best Practices Recommendations
- 9** Freedom of Information Law Proposals
- 10** Iowa is "Camera Ready" for Film Projects
- 11** December Ice Storms Receive Presidential Declaration

For additional information, check our website at: www.iowahouse.org or www.andrewwenthe.org.

Contact Andrew at:
State Capitol Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

PO Box 123
Hawkeye, IA 52147
563-427-4831

Capitol Comments

I am happy to report that the 2008 legislative session is off and running in your State Capitol. The legislature faces several challenges in the 100 days to come, but as I have said before, I truly believe that in these challenges there exists great opportunity for the State of Iowa. My colleagues and I are eager to work in a bipartisan manner on the issues that are important to Iowans.

My committee assignments are unchanged from last year, allowing me to serve on Agriculture, Appropriations, Economic Growth and Natural Resources. I also serve as the Vice-Chair of the Education Appropriations Subcommittee. I enjoy the work we do on these committees, and believe the issues we address are very relevant for House District 18.

On Tuesday, Governor Culver presented his Fiscal Year 2009 budget to a Joint Assembly of the General Assembly. As you probably know, Governor Culver requested that all agencies and departments submit status quo budgets to him as he prepared his budget. The Governor's budget, while not perfect, continues to put the focus on the issues that I believe matter most to Iowans; affordable health care, strong education, and job creation. The House and Senate will now roll up our sleeves and get started on our budgets, with appropriations subcommittees beginning their work next week. It is our responsibility to pass a balanced, responsible budget that supports Iowa's priorities while keeping our fiscal house in order. That is exactly what I intend to work toward during this session.

Governor Culver also touched on an issue that is not typical for these types of addresses, but that is important to Iowans nonetheless. The Governor called for a return to civility under the Capitol dome, challenging both Democrats and Republicans to work together when possible and to respectfully disagree when there are truly differing viewpoints. Iowans are sick of "slash and burn" politics of the past, where what divides us is highlighted for the sole purpose of political gain. As Governor Culver said, "If we approach our efforts with the same spirit of optimism, honesty, and hard work, that every Iowan knows, we will be successful. And when we do this, citizens will look back at our efforts, and say, 'We have a government as good as our Iowans deserve.'" I am committed to working with all of my colleagues to promote civility and integrity in our state government.

Even in the first week of session, I was happy to welcome several visitors from District 18 to the Capitol. A delegation of Fayette County veterans dropped by to advocate for continued support, employees and participants of the Fayette, Bremer and Black Hawk FaDSS programs shared their stories with me about their program, Dave Mohlis of Denver, representing the Iowa Police Association, advocated on behalf of Jerry Rabiner's Boy's Ranch and Treatment Center in Ft. Dodge. Finally, Harry Ruth and Jeff Elliot with the East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative were in Des Moines to talk about the energy needs we have in rural Iowa and how they are helping to promote production and efficiencies.

As always, I welcome you to come visit me under the gold dome. It means a lot to me to have people

from home visit to express their opinions, advocate for issues they are passionate about, or simply take

a tour of our beautiful Capitol. I hope to see you here soon!

Capitol Visitors



On Tuesday, January 15th Representative Andrew Wenthe met with Vickie Holmes, Billie Rael, and Alva Bush from Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Program (FaDSS). FaDSS staff and participants came to the Capitol to advocate for the program.



On Wednesday, January 16th was Veterans Day at the Capitol. Veterans enjoyed a tour of the Capitol Building and spent time meeting with State Representatives. Shown here in the House Chambers is State Representative Andrew Wenthe of Fayette County with Veterans from the American Legion (Art Sullivan, Jake Blitsch, Richard Barnes, Jeff Clark and Neil Schwake).

Legislative Session Begins

The 2008 session of the Iowa General Assembly is now underway. The 100 day session began with speeches by Legislative leaders, followed on Tuesday by the Condition of State address by Governor Chet Culver. Those speeches highlighted the successes of last year and urged Legislators to continue those commitments while working to provide additional help for Iowa's hard working, middle class families.

Opening day was highlighted by the return of Representative Ray Zirkelbach, who as spent the last two years serving in the Iowa National Guard, most of it in Iraq.

House Speaker Pat Murphy gaveled in the new session and

outlined our 2007 achievements including raising the minimum wage, making Iowa a leader in renewable fuels, expanding access to quality pre-school to more four-year olds, helping small businesses afford health care, raising teacher salaries so we can keep quality teachers in Iowa, keeping state university tuition increases to the lowest amount, three percent, in almost three decades and increasing funding for REAP and other environmental programs.

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy asked Legislators to work together so that we can continue to make positive changes in the lives of Iowans. He urged members to put people before politics and to "disagree without being

disagreeable." He added that we are posed to maintain the progress made in 2007 while still balancing the budget.

Governor Culver's Speech

Governor Chet Culver addressed the General Assembly on Tuesday, providing the annual Condition of Iowa speech. Culver began by assuring Iowans that the "condition of our state is strong."

Governor Culver also highlighted the accomplishments made in 2007 and then outlined his goals for this year. These included improving health care, the environment, and the looming workforce shortage.

In concluding his speech, Culver said, "Let's ensure 2008 is a year in which our civility and our constituents are our focus. Let's give it our best effort, tone down the partisan rhetoric, get the peo-

ples' work done, and end the session as friends."

The Governor also presented his budget recommendations for the next fiscal year, which begins in

July. The Legislature will now consider those proposals as we develop the budget before adjourning.

Health Care Commission Reports

Earlier this month, the Legislative Commission on Affordable Health Care Plans for Small Businesses and Families released its recommendations to the Iowa Legislature. The Commission, which was created as part of House File 909, the Health and Human Services budget bill, has met monthly across Iowa since June 2007. The Commission was charged with reviewing, analyzing, and making recommendations to the Legislature relating to the affordability of health care for Iowans.

The Commission focuses their recommendation around four main areas: affordable coverage for all – starting with children, patient-centered medical home, state wide telehealth system, and cost containment.

The Commission recommends that the Iowa Legislature in 2008 develop and implement an affordable plan for covering all children and fully funding Medicaid and Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa (*hawk-i*). This will be done by providing additional financial assistance to cover the children already eligible for Medicaid or *hawk-i*, and to expand coverage to the remaining children whose parents do not qualify for either program. Currently, there are approximately 44,000 uninsured children in Iowa.

In addition, the Commission recommends establishing the structure necessary to implement affordable health care coverage for all Iowans through creation of the Health Care Exchange, a quasi-public, private agency that will develop, oversee, and implement

health care coverage for all Iowans. The Health Care Exchange will lead health care quality, safety, and cost reduction initiatives, and create a transition plan until coverage for all Iowans is financially feasible.

Secondly, the Commission recommends that every Iowan should have a certified patient-centered medical home, which emphasizes preventive care, wellness programs, and chronic disease management to reduce costs and increase quality of care. A medical home is an evidence based concept that will be certified by following the recommended guidelines of the National Committee for Quality Assurance. Medical homes require that all providers establish personal relationships with patients and provide comprehensive evaluations and continuity of care over time. Processes and a team approach must allow patients to be seen promptly, receive coordinated medical care, have their chronic diseases managed, and have their medical information collected electronically.

The Commission also recommends that the State of Iowa create a statewide telehealth system using the Iowa Communication Network and private health care systems. This statewide system will deliver a mechanism for transmitting digital data on patient care and develop the standards necessary for use of that mechanism by all health care professionals in Iowa.

Finally, the Commission recommends controlling costs in a number of ways. The cost of health

care is very high and continues to rise. The Commission believes that Iowa can reduce costs by having shared responsibility between patients, payers and providers. The Commission encourages all Iowans to take a more active role in their health by eating better, exercising more and working with their medical provider to stay healthy. For payers, such as insurance companies, shared responsibility includes working with the state to resolve issues of insurability, rescissions, preexisting condition exclusions and portability. For providers, shared responsibility includes the creation of a system disclosing prices and performance quality. This will allow patients to become informed and force medical providers to improve quality and reduce costs.

The Affordable Health Care Commission set very large goals for the Iowa Legislature to work on this session. Due to inaction by the federal government, proponents of the recommendations say the time to act is now, or the problem will get worse for middle class families. Opponents of the recommendations say that the costs are too high to address in full. Leadership in the majority party and the minority party and Governor Culver have said that health care is a priority for the 2008 legislative session.

To read the full report, click on the following PDF link: <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/lsadocs/IntReport/2008/IPPAF000.PDF>.

Governor Releases Budget Recommendations

Governor Chet Culver presented his budget request to a joint session of the Legislature on Tuesday. The Governor proposes a \$6.4 billion budget for fiscal year 2009, leaving a \$5.5 million ending balance.

The Governor's fiscal year (FY) 2009 budget, which will begin on July 1, continues to build on efforts from this year to attract and retain quality teachers, expand access to preschool, increase access to health care to children, and develop the state as a leader in renewable energy.

The Governor's general fund recommendation is an increase of \$540.2 million over this year, fiscal year 2008. Approximately \$178.5 million in growth to the general fund budget is due to the elimination of seven off-budget funds and the shift of these expenditures back to the general fund. After adjusting for this transfer, the budget growth is 6%, an increase of \$361.7 million. The growth in the FY 09 budget is comparable to the average increase in the general fund budget over the last two years, 8.7% and 7.2% respectively.

The Governor's budget increases the transparency of the state government budget by moving off-budget operational costs into the general fund, targeting infrastructure funding for true infrastructure costs, and taking another step in shifting funding for property tax credits back to the general fund.

The proposed budget provides \$159.9 million in funding for the property tax credits, the same amount as last year. However, the Governor increases the amount funded from the general fund from \$28 million to \$78.2 million in FY 09 and funds the remaining \$81.7 million from the FY 2008 ending balance.

Tobacco Settlement

The Governor is proposing to securitize the remaining 22% of the settlement won from tobacco companies a number of years ago with anticipated proceeds of \$232 million. The Governor says \$165 million of the bonds issued would be tax exempt and used strictly for depreciable asset capitals and \$67 million would be taxable and deposited into the general fund.

The restricted capital funds will be the primary funding source for providing \$20.6 million to fund the Iowa Veterans Home master plan; \$68 million for expansion of the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women; \$10 million for a community treatment resource center; \$33.4 million for community-based corrections expansions in Waterloo, Sioux City, Ottumwa, and Des Moines; and \$20 million for the new state office building.

Prison Replacement

The Governor is proposing issuing \$131 million in prison revenue bonds to renovate and expand the outdated state penitentiary in Fort Madison. The Governor is proposing to repay the bonds from fees in the Prison Infrastructure Fund. Currently, \$9.5 million in court fines and fees are dedicated to the fund and approximately \$8.4 million is being used to pay existing bond debt for bonds to construct the Fort Dodge and Newton prisons. Those bonds will be retired in FY 2016.

Governor Announces Education Priorities

Governor Culver released his budget recommendations for education in his second year of office. Included in his budget were commitments from last year's session and a few increases to programs he campaigned on.



Student Achievement and Teacher Quality

The legislature committed \$75 million for teacher salaries as part of the Student Achievement and Teacher Quality law. This is the second year of increases to teacher salaries with the goal that Iowa will reach the national average within four years.

Allowable Growth

Allowable growth is recommended to be 4% again for the

2009-2010 school year. This would make per pupil funding \$5,768, an increase of \$222 over the 2008-2009 school year.

Early Childhood

The Governor's recommendation for pre-school education includes the already committed \$15 million for second year grantees and \$17.1 million in preschool foundation aid for the first year grantees. This is the second year of a four year plan to provide access

to all four year olds to quality pre-school programming.

Model Core Curriculum

During the 2007 session, the Legislature passed a voluntary model core curriculum that each school district needs to consider teaching as part of their curriculum. The Governor is recommending \$2.59 million for the implementation of this curriculum into school districts and an additional \$10 million for local professional development.

Senior Year Plus Program

Governor Culver recommended a \$3.5 million appropriation for the implementation of a new Senior Year Plus program.

The program allows high school seniors to take freshman level college courses. It is designed after the Senior Year Plus Program already in place in Virginia. This was also part of the Governor's campaign plan.

All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship Program

Governor Culver has recommended an increased appropriation for the All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship that he campaigned on and delivered last year. The recommended amount is \$4 million, which is a \$2.5 million increase over last year. This scholarship is a needs-based, one-time scholarship for students attending a regent university or community college.

Higher Education

The Governor has recommended that community colleges receive an increase of \$3.5 million, for a total appropriation of \$177 million. The Regents Universities recommendation was for an increase of \$8.3 million plus funding for salaries.

The Governor is also recommending an increase of \$704,400 in college work study money to \$1 million in FY09. This will get us closer to Iowa law, which sets work study at \$2.75 million. Several years ago, work study received no funding.

Veterans Home Master Plan Funding

Governor Culver presented his Condition of the State address this week and released his budget recommendations for fiscal year (FY) 2009. Governor Culver included in his budget \$20.6 million for the Iowa Veterans Home's master plan for new construction and renovation of buildings. This additional appropriation, if approved by the Legislature, will help the Veterans Home demonstrate to the Veterans Administration and Congress that Iowa has appropriated all the state matching funds needed to complete the project when the federal portion is approved.

The Veterans Home master plan is projected to cost \$100 million total. The plans call for four phases of development to occur. Phase 1 calls for the construction of a new 132 bed nursing home facility and a 60 bed pavilion. Phase 2 would build a second 60 bed pavilion. Phase 3 calls for remodeling

the Sheeler Building and constructing a new main entrance to the campus. Phase 4 calls for building a third 60 bed pavilion and the demolition of the Heinz Hall.

The \$20.6 million appropriation will be added to the \$16.9 million the Veterans Home has set aside over the last several years for this major project. This will complete Iowa's match (approximately \$37.5 million) toward the \$100 million project. The federal matching funds are anticipated to provide approximately 65% of the project funds.

Operating Cost Changes

Governor Culver's budget adjusted the Veterans Home's operation budget to account for this new appropriation for infrastructure. For several years now, the Veterans Home has been allowed to carry a larger operation budget so they could dedicate a portion of the



funds toward their infrastructure master plan proposal.

The Veterans Home received \$16.7 million in general fund appropriations in FY 2008. The Governor is recommending \$12.7 million in FY 2009, but since they will no longer need to set aside funds for their infrastructure plan, he intends to allow \$3 million of FY 08 funding to carry over to be used in FY 09. The Governor also anticipates the Veterans Home will receive another \$2.2 million from the \$88 million salary adjustment fund he has proposed. The Veterans Home will have a total of \$17.8 million for operating expenses for FY 09, which is approximately \$1.1 million more that they received in FY 08.

Governor Culver Tells Iowans to “Lighten Up”

This week, during Governor Chet Culver’s Condition of the State speech to the Iowa Legislature, he highlighted the importance of wellness and prevention. Governor Culver asked all Iowans to join him and Lt. Governor Patty Judge to participate in the “Lighten Up” Iowa 100 Day Challenge to help lose weight and increase physical activity. “Lighten Up” Iowa is a team based weight loss and physical activity program that will assist you and your teammates in making positive changes that lead to a healthier lifestyle. To learn more about “Lighten Up” Iowa, call 1-888-777-8881, or visit their website www.lightenupiowa.org.

In addition, Governor Culver spoke about increasing physical activity in the public schools. According to Lt. Governor Judge’s Commission on Health and Wellness, 50% of Iowa’s kids are overweight and 20% of those kids are morbidly obese. As a result, Governor Culver recommended that the State of Iowa establish a minimum standard of physical activity in the schools. He would also like to collaborate with the American Diabetes Association and other groups to create a statewide focus on wellness for the children of Iowa.

Speaking about chronic diseases, Governor Culver said he will initiate a state employee’s chronic disease management program.

This will put trained professionals to work coaching state employees and their families about how to best eliminate or reduce the effects of the five most common chronic diseases, such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes.

Lastly, to support these initiative and others across Iowa, Governor Culver proposed increase funding to the Iowa Department of Public Health for new community health initiatives, including a Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness that will sponsor a statewide initiative to support physical fitness in the schools and communities.

State of the Judiciary Stresses Equal Justice, Youth

Chief Justice Marsha Ternus delivered her State of the Judiciary speech this week. Her address stressed the need for equal justice in the judicial system and the special needs of children who are within the judiciary system.

Equal Justice

Chief Justice Ternus stated that equal justice is a two part necessity. First, there must be access to justice. Second, justice must be impartial.

The Chief Justice indicated there were four areas that must be addressed to assure access to the judicial system. She said the judiciary must be adequately staffed, electronic filing should be used for efficiency, tools must be available for self-represented litigants, and

language barriers must be overcome in Iowa’s courts.

Children

Last year Chief Justice Ternus focused on children in foster care, and this year she thanked the Legislature for their work in this area. Chief Justice Ternus then suggested it is now time to turn the focus to youth in Iowa’s juvenile justice system.

The Chief Justice noted that while the restorative justice model has helped thousands of young Iowans, more needs to be done to serve this population. She suggested the court system needs more juvenile court officers and support staff; two additional judges, including one exclusively focused on juvenile court; additional funds to help children with mental health



issues; and a statutory change to allow juvenile consent decrees to be for 2 years instead of the current 1 year maximum.

Finally, Chief Justice Ternus indicated the judiciary is working to expand the use of drug courts. She noted that often alcohol and drug addiction are the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency, and the problem solving approach utilized by drug courts is often advantageous over the punitive measures imposed through conventional means. Using federal grants, Chief Justice Ternus indicated the judicial branch is adding two drug courts for adult offenders and three family drug courts to the current ten Iowa drug courts.

State Parks 2020 Initiative

An initiative is starting in Iowa with a goal of restoring Iowa state parks to their premier status by the year 2020, which will be the 100th anniversary of Iowa's state park system. This initiative is being called State Parks 2020. Iowa's first state park, Backbone, was dedicated in 1920.

A group of Iowa citizens, led by former Governor Terry Branstad and former Congressman Neal Smith, has formed to create an advocacy group to support the State's efforts in enhancing Iowa state

parks and to help raise the private dollars that will be needed. This group will also support the efforts of local "friends" groups of state parks, but will maintain a broader focus on the collective state park system rather than individual parks.

Gerry Schnepf, Executive Director of Keep Iowa Beautiful and also a member of the steering committee, presented information to the House Natural Resources Committee this week on their work to date. The group is just starting to meet. The current twenty-nine

members are leaders in their field and are interested in improving and preserving our parks for the future.

Over 14 million people visit Iowa's state parks annually. Iowa's park system includes 56 state parks and 12 recreation areas, encompassing 60,000 acres of land and including 32 lakes and 37 beaches. In addition, there are 23 state parks/recreation areas that are managed by county conservation boards.

Governor Proposes Expanding Iowa's Bottle Deposit

Governor Chet Culver is proposing doubling Iowa's current bottle deposit law to 10¢ a container, and expanding it to include bottled water, teas, juices, and energy drinks. Currently, only bottles or cans containing carbonated soft drinks or alcoholic beverages are covered under Iowa's 5¢ bottle deposit law.

In his Condition of the State address to state lawmakers this week, Governor Culver said, "After 30 years of Keeping Iowa Beautiful and keeping bottles and cans out of our ditches and landfills, I believe expanding the bottle bill is an idea whose time has come." Iowa's 5¢ bottle deposit law was enacted in 1978.

Under his proposal, the consumer will get back 8¢ of the 10¢ deposit. One cent will stay with the local recycling or redemption centers and one cent will fully fund Iowa's Resource Enhancement and

Protection (REAP) program at \$20 million. This program funds projects that enhance our natural, cultural, and recreational resources.

Governor Culver is also proposing the State collect the money from the unredeemed bottle deposits which currently stay with the bottle distributors. In total, he estimates his proposal will generate an additional \$34.7 million annually to the State's general fund.

Environmental Funding

Governor Culver is maintaining funding at \$2.9 million for water quality monitoring, \$8.6 million for lakes restoration, and \$5 million for local watershed improvement grants to improve water quality.

He is recommending \$1 million for a field-based odor study, with hands-on research by experts at Iowa State University. This recommendation is in response to a proposal developed by the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture and

Land Stewardship, and Iowa State University which called for a 5-year, \$22.8 million program to provide incentives for producers to use odor-mitigating technologies within their livestock operations.

Governor Culver is recommending \$8 million to complete the State's first resort park near Rathbun Lake in southern Iowa. This money will pay for an activity center, day-use shelters, and 28 family/group cabins. Honey Creek Resort State Park will open this summer and will include a 105-room lodge, aquatic center, convention center, 18-hole golf course, boat docks, boat ramp, and 9.7 miles of multi-purpose trails.

The Governor is also recommending \$750,000 for continuing infrastructure improvements at Volga River Recreational Area, and \$500,000 for continued improvements at Carter Lake. He had item-vetoed these two appropriations last year saying he would re-evaluate this funding after reviewing their first year of progress.



Ways to Address Worker Shortage Proposed

The Governor has proposed several ways to address the looming possibility of a shortage of workers. Many of the proposals were suggested by the Legislative Interim Committee or through the Governor’s Task Force on Worker Shortage.

Iowa needs to be proactive on the issue since the number of Iowans reaching retirement age will soon increase to 10,000 workers per year without a similar increase of people in the workforce. In addition, we need to find ways to keep our young people in Iowa and better utilize people not active currently in the workforce.

The Governor’s proposals include the following:

- **Statewide Vacancy Surveys.** There is funding in the Governor’s budget for a workforce needs assessment to identify which occupations will face the most severe workforce shortages, and where most of the retirements will occur.

- **Statewide Standard Skills Assessment.** Iowa’s workforce would be evaluated statewide for their work readiness. This would assist in making job placement programs more efficient.

- **Lifelong Learning Accounts.** The Governor would have the State Treasurer establish Lifelong Learning Accounts so Iowans can invest in their own job training and career advancement. People will be able to upgrade their skills to meet the needs of those sectors of the economy where new jobs are being created. The program would not require any increase in funding since there would be no state match to the program, and it would be administered through the Treasurer’s Office.

- **New Iowan Centers.** New Iowan Centers would receive an increase in the Governor’s budget to offer workforce development one-stop services to persons who

are new to Iowa, businesses and communities.

- **Offender Re-entry.** To increase chances that individuals will not return to prison, and to address the worker shortage, the Governor is recommending funding for an offender re-entry program. This would be a partnership between Workforce Development and the Department of Corrections to improve offender’s ability to find and retain productive employment in Iowa, and make them aware of employment opportunities.

There may be additional items that the Legislature may consider as the report from the Generation Iowa Commission is evaluated. Last year, the Legislature established this commission made up of young adults to address issues in keeping young Iowans in the state.

Generation Iowa Releases Report

The Generation Iowa 15-member commission released their first recommendations to the Legislature. The purpose of the commission was to find solutions to Iowa’s “brain drain.” Iowa ranks 6th in the nation for recruiting students to attend college from out of state but more than 4,000 students leave Iowa after graduation each year. By 2012, there will be 150,000 vacant jobs from baby boomers retiring, creating a “jobs surplus” and worker shortage. These vacant jobs will need to be filled by the young people who are currently leaving Iowa.

The four month research overwhelmingly points to Iowa’s wage

gap. Iowa’s wages fall 15 percent behind the national average. The commission proposed strategies to keep young people in Iowa and reduce Iowa’s wage gap.

Two top priorities came out of the 63-page report. The first was to create a new state tax credit to help reduce student debt. This would be a roll-over tax credit based on Iowa residency in a 10 year window for individuals ages 35 and under who have earned a bachelor’s degree within the previous 10 years. The second priority is a repayment assistance program for student debt for those entering high demand professions. Iowa ranks 6th nationally for average student loan debt

with an average debt of \$24,990 for the class of 2006.

Besides financial concerns, the commission emphasized that young Iowans need to have a better attitude about the state. Iowa’s affordable living, safe communities and good quality of life should be better represented by a word-of-mouth campaign.

Although the report has been released, the Generation Iowa Commission will still be holding public forums throughout the state and will be helping to move legislation forward.

Early Care Best Practices Recommendations

The interim committee on Early Care Best Practices had a final meeting this week to consider recommendations on early care after reviewing the information received during the previous two meetings.

The committee was charged with “reviewing the best practices for Iowa’s early care system of programs, services, support, or other assistance made available to a parent or other person who is involved with addressing the health and education needs of a child from birth through age five.”

Final comments were discussed and considered with approval of five recommendations for the Legislature to consider. The following is an overview of the recommendations:

- The joint appropriations subcommittees on Education and on Health and Human Services should support the work of the Community Empowerment Office to accredit home visitation programs using

research and evidence based practices.

- The State Empowerment Office; departments of education, human services, and public health; Early Childhood Iowa; and other interested parties shall collaborate to provide a recommendation to the Governor and General Assembly for developing and implementing a data system that can be used with all early care programs receiving public funding.

- The State Empowerment Office; departments of education, human services, and public health; Early Childhood Iowa; and other interested parties shall collaborate to provide a recommendation for implementing a common application form for families applying to participate in publicly funded early care programs and services.

- The State Empowerment Office, Department of Public Health, Iowa Hospital Association, and other interested parties should be requested to provide a proposal to the Joint Appropriations Subcom-

mittees on Education and on Health and Human Services for implementation of a system in which Iowa hospitals secure permission from parents for making a referral for a newborn home visit to be made and for a state office to serve as the clearinghouse for making the referral to a local program in the area where the parents reside.

- In order to ensure consistent availability of early care programs and services statewide, the state should identify sustainable regular funding sources to support early care programs and services.

An official copy of the recommendations will be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration in the next few weeks. For more information on this interim committee, visit the legislative website at <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/asp/Committees/Committee.aspx?id=215>.



Freedom of Information Law Proposals

The Freedom of Information Interim Committee recently met for the third time to discuss proposed legislation amending Iowa’s open records and open meetings law.

The committee has been working with several interested individuals and groups to draft legislation for the entire General Assembly to consider. Professor Arthur Bonfield, of the University of Iowa, compiled the recommendations made by the committee into one piece of legislation. The committee reviewed this proposal at its last meeting and will hold one final

meeting to approve the draft legislation.

The interim committee is the result of complaints to legislators from concerned citizens and groups that Iowa’s open records and open meetings laws were not being closing followed by some governmental bodies. The Legislature responded to these concerns by appointing the committee.

Enforcement of the laws has been a primary concern by both citizens and Legislators. The committee addressed this concern by recommending a that new agency be created, responsible for enforcing

the open records and open meetings laws.

Public Information Board

The new agency, the Iowa Public Information Board, would be made up of five members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

Responsibilities of the board include:

- Receiving complaints alleging violations and seeking resolution of the complaints through mediation and settlement.

- Issuing subpoenas enforceable in court for the purpose of investigating complaints and to facilitate the prosecution and conduct of contested cases before the board.
- Issuing orders and, after appropriate board proceedings, determining whether there has been a violation of the law.
- Imposing civil penalties.
- Providing training opportunities for custodians of governmental records and government bodies as well as other persons subject to requirements of the open records and open meetings laws.
- Making information available to inform members of the public about the public's right to access government information as well as procedures to facilitate the process.
- Reporting annually to the Governor and General Assembly. The report is to include the number of complaints received, board proceedings, investigations, hearings

conducted, decisions rendered, and other work performed by the board.

- Making recommendations to the General Assembly relating to public access to government policy.

Other Changes Proposed

The proposed legislation also includes the following provisions:

- Creates an exemption to the public records law for tentative, preliminary, draft, speculative, or research material, prior to completion.
- Limits personally identifiable information in personnel records of individuals who are officials, officers, or employees of a government body.
- Expands the definition of meeting under the open meetings law to address meetings held by electronic communications.
- Adds language to include "walking quorums" under the definition of meetings in the open

meeting law. This is the practice of a few members meeting, with members rotating in and out so that a quorum is never officially achieved.

- Repeals criminal sanctions and increases civil penalties. Criminal penalties make enforcement more difficult because criminal statutes must be narrowly construed. In addition, the privilege of self-incrimination applies. Civil penalties would be not less than \$1,000 or more than \$2,500.

One Final Meeting

The committee will hold one final meeting (date and time not yet determined) to officially approve the proposed legislation.

Iowa is "Camera Ready" for Film Projects

The state has put the Iowa Film, Television and Video Project Promotion Program into action by approving awards for two movie projects filmed in Iowa. The incentives boost Iowa's growing film industry.

The Department of Economic Development (DED) has approved awards for two movie projects filmed in Iowa, "Sugar" and "Duck Farm No. 13." Combined, the two productions spent approximately \$1.3 million in Iowa, allowing them to qualify for about \$325,000 in tax credits.

Sugar, shot primarily in the Quad Cities in 2007, is receiving pre-release accolades and honors. The film will be featured at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival,

which runs from January 17-27 in Park City, Utah.

This baseball movie centers on a fictional Dominican baseball player named Miguel "Sugar" Santos who, after watching Field of Dreams, is inspired to make his way into minor league baseball. He lands in Iowa to play for the Swings of the Quad Cities. One of the film's producers, Jeremy Kipp Walker, was a co-producer of "Half Nelson," and worked on the film "Maria Full of Grace."

Duck Farm Number 13, shot in McGregor, is a film based on two small town girls and a middle aged woman looking for love in all the wrong places. The cast, crew and setting are distinctly Iowan, since the writer-director, the executive producer, and the producer all have

ties to Iowa or currently live in Iowa. Twelve other Iowans make up the rest of the cast.

Training Grant

A \$50,000 Targeted Industries Training Program grant for the Iowa Motion Picture Association (IMPA) was also awarded this month. This will be used to train entry level production crew for in-state work and train additional workers to provide a sufficient workforce to serve multiple out-of-state projects for production in Iowa.

The IMPA plans to hold five regional trainings and would like to train at least 50 additional workers in early 2008. IMPA also expects to work with Iowa community c

colleges and OneSource Training on this project.

December Ice Storms Receive Presidential Declaration

Governor Culver received confirmation that Iowa has received a Presidential disaster declaration for public assistance, which means state and local government and eligible non-profit agencies affected by last December's ice storms and severe weather will be eligible to receive federal disaster aid.

The Governor received notification from the Federal Emergency Management Agency that federal aid was approved for the following 30 counties: Adair, Adams, Appanoose, Cedar, Clarke, Clinton,

Davis, Decatur, Fremont, Iowa, Jefferson, Johnson, Jones, Keokuk, Linn, Lucas, Madison, Mahaska, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Page, Ringgold, Taylor, Union, Van Buren, Wapello, Warren, Washington, and Wayne counties.

Federal public assistance funds are available to public entities and select non-profit agencies to rebuild damaged infrastructure that may include roads, bridges, culverts, and other public facilities or to cover costs of emergency work during the ice storms of December, 2007.

The Governor also received word that Iowa received a hazard mitigation declaration for the entire state. With this funding, Iowa will be able to minimize the impact of future natural disasters by taking steps now to strengthen our existing infrastructure.

For more information on federal disaster assistance, visit www.fema.gov/assistance/process/index.shtm or www.iowahomelandsecurity.org.