



Representative Andrew Wenthe Statehouse News

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Capitol Comments

Over the last two weeks, we've seen the power of Mother Nature and the deep compassion of human nature. Our hearts continue to go out to those who were impacted by the storms hitting northeast Iowa last week. It has been tremendous to see so many individuals and organizations rally around those affected by the storms, through both donations and volunteerism.

I was proud to join a group of my coworkers from Upper Iowa University who assisted in flood relief clean-up in Lamont and Aurora last week. We were just a few of the many volunteers who appeared in communities hit hard by the storms. It's been said many times, but it does truly warm the heart to see our communities band together during trying times like these. Thanks to all who have helped to provide assistance to our neighbors in need; this is what makes Iowa such a great place to live.

In my conversations with area emergency management officials, Red Cross officials, Iowa's state agencies working together on storm relief, and the Governor's office, it was abundantly clear that the counties impacted most by the storm needed federal assistance. I conveyed this to members of our Congressional delegation and am pleased that on Friday, May 30 we received word from the federal government that Black Hawk County was declared a federal disaster area, along with Buchanan, Butler and Delaware Counties. The disaster declaration will aid recovery efforts by making individuals, government agencies and some

non-profits eligible for federal assistance.

Individual assistance from the federal government is now available for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster. Public assistance is also available to public entities and non-profits to rebuild damaged infrastructure.

For those affected by the storm, I also wanted to pass along some information from the Iowa Attorney General's Office about scam artists posing as contractors for disaster repairs. Unfortunately, there are some people trying to take advantage of people instead of helping. If you receive a solicitation at your door with a promise to help speed up the rebuilding process with advance payment or a big cash deposit, please beware, as it may be a scam artist. If this happens to you, please call the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 888-777-4590.

Some tips from the AG that can help you with contractors include:

- Get a written estimate and compare services and prices
- Check references.
- Use a reliable, licensed contractor, and check out a contractor before you sign a contract or pay any money. Check if the contractor is registered with

the Iowa Labor Services Division (800-562-4692, or 515-242-5871.)

- Ask for proof of insurance.
- Insist on a written contract. Never sign a blank contract or one with blank spaces.
- Get guarantees in writing.
- Obtain a local building permit, if required.

- Make final payments when the work is completed.
- Pay by credit card, if possible, or by check.

Also, emergency officials are requesting that anyone wishing to donate goods or services and help those impacted by the storm should call the Iowa Concern Hotline at 800-447-1985 with their contact information and donated good/service available. Officials are requesting that Iowans not personally deliver any donated goods

or services to the impacted area until they have been notified.

My prayers again to the families devastated by the storm and my thanks to the thousands of Iowans who are helping with storm relief efforts through volunteering or donating money.

If you any questions, please feel free to contact me at andrew.wenthe@legis.state.ia.us or call me at home, 563-427-4831.

Ranked #1 for Health Care for Kids

This week, Iowa received the top ranking on child health system performance. The Commonwealth Fund stated that Iowa has created children's health care systems that are accessible, equitable, and deliver high-quality care, all while controlling levels of spending and family health insurance premiums.

The findings are the result of a new scorecard issued by the Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation supporting independent research on health policy reform and a high performance health system.

The scorecard is the first report to assess how the health system is performing for children across five dimensions on a state-by-state basis. The five dimensions are:

- Access

- Quality
- Costs
- Potential to Lead Long, Healthy Lives
- Equity

Iowa was the only state to finish in the top quartile in all five of the primary measures used in the study. States vary widely in the quality of health care children receive according to the report issued by The Commonwealth Fund.

Despite Iowa's top ranking overall, the state has room to improve. Iowa ranked 2nd in the nation in the dimensions of access and quality. In addition, Iowa ranked 12th in the dimensions of costs; 17th in potential to lead long, healthy lives; and 19th in equity. The 2008 Iowa Legislature has

already taken steps to improve health care by passing a comprehensive bi-partisan bill, House File 2539, which expands access to health care for children and adults, lower health care costs, and expands prevention and wellness measures. Governor Culver signed the bill earlier this month.

Specifically, In addition, over the last decade, Iowa adopted policies to expand children's access to care and improve their quality of care. In particular, Iowa expanded SCHIP and mandated that all child health plans and local and regional children's health systems publicly report data on the quality of care. This analysis indicates that such policies make a difference.

Help With Insurance Claims When Disaster Strikes

Iowa Insurance Commissioner Susan Voss and her office stand ready to help Iowa victims of the recent tornado bearing storms. "We have already spoken to the major insurance companies in Iowa about their response and have urged them to act quickly to service their customers," said Voss. "We

know that they have already begun their claims process."

Iowa Insurance Division

Iowans needing help as they begin to file claims and work with their insurer may call the Insurance Division at 1-877-955-1212 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. After hours messages will

be returned the next business day. You can also go to the division's website at: www.iid.state.ia.us,

Insurance Company Tips

- Call your agent or insurer as soon as you can, with policy numbers if possible. Ask what documents, forms, and other data you need to file a claim. If you no

longer have these item, ask what substitutes are acceptable. If your insurer doesn't call or send an adjuster to your property within three days, call the Insurance Division.

- **Adjusters.** If you are contacted by someone calling themselves a public adjuster, ask to see their license before doing business with them. Company adjusters do not charge fees, but independent adjusters work for you for a fee.
- **Records.** Keep track of all costs related to the loss and copies of all of your paperwork and keep all receipts. Take photos or video of the damage.
- **Repairs.** Try to protect damaged property with temporary repairs, but don't have permanent repairs made until your insurer has agreed on the costs of the repairs.

- **Do not toss out damaged items** if you will be filing claims, unless your insurance adjuster approves.
- **If you cannot live in your home** due to the damage, ask your insurer if extra living expenses are covered. Give them your temporary location and information on how to contact you, in case an adjuster comes to assess damage.
- **If you are unable to negotiate an acceptable settlement** with your insurer, call the Insurance Division for assistance and advice.

Contractor Tips

- **You have the right to choose who will repair your home.** Your insurer may provide a list of pre-approved contractors, but as the policyholder, you have final say.
- **Get references and check them** before signing a contract. Also check with the Better Business Bu-

reau, or the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division (888-777-4590), to see if they have a good track record or to report suspected price gouging.

- **Get more than one estimate** with everything in writing. Be wary of upfront payment demands. If a contractor needs supplies, go with them and pay the supplier directly.
- **See if a contractor is registered** with the Iowa Division of Labor at: www.iowawoCheckifcontractorrkforce.org/labor/contractor.htm
- **If you can't cover all expenses,** contact your creditors and try to negotiate a payment plan.

The best way to protect yourself is to keep a diary of all conversations with insurance companies, creditors, or relief agencies.

Watch Out for Scams Using Fake IRS Emails

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is warning taxpayers about attempts to use federal rebate checks to defraud taxpayers with fake emails claiming to come from the IRS. The email tells you that you are eligible for a tax rebate for a specific amount, but requires that you click on a link to access a claim form. The form asks you to enter personal information such as Social Security, bank account or credit card numbers, which can be used to commit identity theft.

Identity thieves use this information to steal from your bank accounts, run up charges on your credit cards, apply for new credit under your name, or commit other crimes using your name.

The only way to get a tax rebate is to file your tax return. There is no separate application form. The IRS does not send unsolicited e-mails about tax matters to individuals, businesses or other taxpayers.

Other Current Tax Scams

Tax Rebate Phone Call: A caller claiming to be from the IRS says you are eligible for a larger tax rebate since you filed your taxes early. The caller asks for your bank account information so the IRS can direct deposit the rebate.

The IRS does not require taxpayers to use direct deposit. The only way to choose direct deposit is by filling out the proper section on your tax return. The IRS does not gather this information by phone.

Paper Check Phone Call: A caller claiming to be from the IRS says a check sent to you was never cashed, and the IRS needs to verify your bank account number.

Tax Exempt Email: A new refund scam is aimed at tax-exempt organizations that distribute funds to other groups or individuals. It has the name and supposed signature of the Director of the IRS's

Exempt Organizations division. It asks for account information.

Tax Audit Email: Another new email scam notifies the taxpayer that their tax return will be audited. The typical scam email is mass produced and not personalized, but this particular email scam may greet the recipient by name. It also asks for personal information.

Tax Law Email: This scam, sent to businesses and accountants, tells you to download information on tax law changes by clicking on a series of links to publications on businesses, estate taxes, excise taxes, exempt organizations and IRAs and other retirement plans.

The IRS believes this will download "malware" onto your computer to look for passwords and other data, sending it to the scammer, or it will give the scammer remote access to your computer.

What to Do

Do not click on an email link or open an email attachment to get to the IRS web site. The IRS Web site address is www.irs.gov.

If you get a suspicious email claiming to be from the IRS you can check an IRS list of scams at www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=155682,00.html

You may also forward the suspicious email to the IRS at

phishing@irs.gov. This will help the IRS to track the email to its origins and shut down the scam. You may not receive an individual response due to the volume of reports they receive each day.

River Enhancement Community Attraction & Tourism

This year, the Legislature created a new \$52 million economic development program for the creation and enhancement of community attractions and tourism opportunities along lakes, rivers, and river corridors in cities across Iowa. These attractions may include pedestrian trails and walkways, amphitheaters, bike trails, water trails or whitewater courses for watercraft, and any modifications necessary for the safe mitigation of dams.



over the next five years for river and lake front developments.

A recipient of moneys from this RECAT is not prohibited from receiving funds from the original Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) program. The Legislature also extended CAT for an additional three years, through fiscal year 2013, at \$12 million a year.

Under RECAT, an applicant can receive up to one-third the total cost of the project. The Department of Economic Development Board may also make a multiyear

commitment to an applicant or may award assistance for multiple projects to the same applicant provided the fund contains sufficient moneys.

The Department of Economic Development will be working out the details of this new financial assistance program. They will most likely promulgate emergency rules to make sure RECAT is implemented by July 1st. The program will probably operate similar to the CAT program.

After July 1st, communities can contact Alaina Santizo from DED at 515-242-4827 or alaina.santizo@iowalifechanging.com, or look at the DED website for more information on applications and other program details.

Public Health Receives Grant to Improve Quality

This month, The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced that the state of Iowa received a \$449,995 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The money will be used to improve the quality of public health as the state prepares for national public health accreditation.

In 2004, the IDPH began working in partnership with local public health partners towards accreditation. With 101 local boards of health and many local public health providers, IDPH feels it is

critical that a basic standard of care is guaranteed in Iowa. By partnering with local public health boards in setting standards, the results will benefit the health of all Iowans.

Iowa is one of 16 states chosen to participate in the RWJF national program called "Lead States in Public Health Quality Improvement: A Multi-State Learning Collaborative." The grant will be used for specific health-related projects, as well as efforts to improve the way public health services are delivered in Iowa. This could in-

clude, improving culturally appropriate health education and collecting and using health data.

Iowa's participation in the "Lead States in Public Health Quality Improvement" project will help the national public health community prepare for accreditation - an effort that will begin in 2011 and will help local and state health departments ensure they are providing quality public health services and programs.

Workers' Monument Dedication

In a ceremony outside the Workforce Development office in Des Moines, the Iowa Workers' Monument is to be dedicated this week. Iowa's work ethic is recognized around the country, and the importance of honest work is recognized in the monument.

The Legislature provided \$200,000 in funding for the monument during the 2007 session. In addition, the monument committee raised over \$500,000 for the design, construction, landscaping and upkeep of the monument. Iowa Community Colleges contributed

\$50,000 to the cause, and an artist advisory panel helped develop the design.

"It is important that Iowa takes an opportunity to recognize the importance of Iowa's workforce and show our appreciation for the work that has been accomplished by Iowans," said Iowa's Labor Commissioner Dave Neil.

When work was started on the memorial, Iowa was one of just thirteen states that did not have a workers' monument. The monument is a striking eleven foot tall by eleven foot wide balanced

square, created by four interlocking arms and hands.

It is a powerful universal image, dedicated to the energy and integrity of the workers of Iowa. Each arm supports the other, in the same way a diverse blend of people, from many back-grounds, come together to work and create the cultural and business base of Iowa. The monument is at the northeast corner of Grand Avenue and East Ninth Street, across from the State Capitol in Des Moines.

CRP can be used for Feedstock Needs

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced that they have authorized certain acreage enrolled under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to be available for hay and forage. The CRP acres can be used for this purpose once the primary nesting season ends for grass-nesting birds.

This will allow eligible farmers the opportunity to utilize the acres for feed and forage while maintaining the land for CRP. With the increase in prices for many field crops, supply has been tight for commodities and has impacted the livestock feed industry.

The USDA is estimating that up to 18 million tons of forage, worth \$1.2 billion, will be available for feed use. The land that is eligible is more than 24 million acres of CRP.

As part of this effort, the USDA is taking measures to preserve the CRP land and the program. Eligible land may not be hayed or grazed until after the end of the primary nesting season. In addition, some of the land must be reserved for wildlife and any land that is used under this authority must have a conservation plan.

In many instances, the removal of some of the grass cover will increase the diversity of the stand and provide long-term benefits for wildlife. However, the most environmentally-sensitive land enrolled in CRP will not be eligible.

Land that is enrolled in CRP will be subject to a site inspection to ensure compliance with a conservation plan. There will be no rental payment reduction for land

being used for hay or forage. However, a \$75 fee will be charged to process the required contract modification.



Signup for interested CRP participants will begin June 2, 2008, at local Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices. This

modification for critical feed use is only for 2008. All forage use must be completed no later than November 10, 2008.

Additional details including Fact Sheets, Maps and statistics are available at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation>.

Student Internship Programs

New internship opportunities have been announced by the Gov-

ernor's office and the Iowa Department of Economic Develop-

ment to link Iowa's students with local businesses. The internship

program was created due to concerns over a statewide workforce labor shortage. It is projected that there will be 150,000 unfilled jobs in 2012 as to the baby boomer generation retires.

There are 36 new internships available at 19 businesses for Iowa's students in addition to the awards already announced. The goal of the internships is to link Iowa's students to the labor force and get them acquainted with "real-life" work examples.

Internship Awards

The following businesses received internships:

- Submittal Exchange, LLC - Adel
- Advanced Analytical Technologies - Ames
- Proliant Health and Biologicals - Ankeny
- DISTek Integration, Inc. - Cedar Falls
- AdTrack Corporation - Cedar Rapids

- Virtualsets.com, Inc. - Council Bluffs
- Acument Decorah Ops. Camcar, LLC - Decorah
- Professional Computer Systems, Co. - Denison
- Athena GTX - Des Moines
- VentureNet Iowa - Des Moines
- Guardian Industries - DeWitt
- Dubuque Data Services - Dubuque
- Five Star Industries, Inc. - Knoxville
- ESCO Electric Company - Marion
- Ag Bio-Power - Tama
- Adamson Technologies, Inc. - Waukee
- Grasshorse Technologies - Winfield
- Acciona Windpower NA, LLC - West Branch
- Adv. Technology Group - West Des Moines

The maximum award is \$3,100 for any single internship or

\$9,300 for any single business. A business must provide matching funds of at least one dollar of non-state monies for every one dollar received from IDED.

The summer internships last a minimum of eight weeks, and only students within two years of graduation from one of Iowa's community colleges, private colleges or regent institutions are eligible.

Having an educated and skilled workforce is a top priority for the Governor, Legislature, and citizens of this State. In a 2004 study by the Knowledge Industry Partnership, an out-of-state student who interned in the city where their college was located was twice as likely to stay as those who did not.

The internship program is aiming to do exactly this and keep native Iowans in the state, as well. Since the program's inception, 71 companies have been awarded 142 internship awards.

For more information on the internship program, go to www.SmartCareerMove.com.

Enhanced Efforts to Collect Debts Owed to the State

The Legislature this year took steps to improve the state's debt collection efforts to help reduce some of the backlog of unpaid debt. The state currently has approximately \$476 million in outstanding court debt. Approximately \$138 million of the \$476 million is covered under some sort of payment plan. Of the outstanding debt, 65% are from criminal penalties, 23% traffic, 3% civil, and 9% is miscellaneous.

Senate File 2428 implements a process for the courts to age the debt, utilize the central collections unit of the Department of Revenue, utilize private collection agencies, and to write-off old debts that have not been collected after 65 years.

The bill also establishes a notification process to collect debts through various contact points with state government such as professional licensing and winners at gaming facilities.

The county clerks of court are directed to facilitate the collection of court debt. Debt includes all fines, penalties, court costs, fees, forfeited bail, surcharges, victim restitution, restitution of court-appointed attorney fees or expense of a public defender, or correctional fees.

The court debt is deemed delinquent if it is not paid within 30 days after the date it is assessed. If

paying by installment, it is delinquent 30 days after the payment is due.



Once the debt is considered delinquent the court may assign the case to the centralized collection unit of the Department of Revenue for a period of 60 days. The Department may impose a fee on the debt to reflect their cost of processing the debt. Any amounts collected by the unit are first applied to repaying the processing fee. The debt is satisfied only after all outstanding debts and fees are paid in full.

The county attorney or designee may collect court debt 60 days

after it is deemed delinquent. In order for the county attorney to receive a percentage of the amounts collected, they must file on or before July 1 a notice of full commitment to collect delinquent court debt and file on the first day of each month a list of the cases they are pursuing. The monthly list is also required to include the cases under an installment payment agreement.

The county attorneys are able to retain 40% of the funds collected for deposit into the county general fund. This does not include amounts owed for victim restitution, payments to the victim compensation fund, criminal penalty surcharges, drug abuse resistance education surcharge, the law enforcement initiative surcharge, and the county enforcement surcharge. The remaining 60% is paid to the clerk of the district court.

If a county exceeds the following collection thresholds, then of the excess, 40% is deposited into the county general fund, 12% is deposited with the office of the county attorney and the remaining 48% is paid to the clerk of the district court:

- a county with a population of over 150,000 - \$500,000
- a county of over 100,000 but not more than 150,000 - \$400,000

- a county of over 50,000 but not more than 100,000 - \$250,000
- a county of over 26,000 but not more than 50,000 - \$100,000
- a county over 15,000 but not more than 26,000 - \$50,000
- a county with a population less than 15,000 - \$25,000

The judicial branch may contract with a private collection agency for collection of court debt sixty days after it is deemed delinquent, if the county attorney is not collecting the debt. The judicial branch is required to solicit requests for proposal before entering into any contract.

Old Debt

If any portion of the court debt remains uncollected after 65 years from the date of imposition, the judicial branch is required to write off the debt as uncollectable and close the case file for the purposes of collection.

Gambling Setoff

The bill requires pari-mutuel and gaming facility licensees to access an electronic database established by the state for the names and social security numbers of debtors. This database is part of the Iowa Department of Administrative Service’s setoff debt collection program and the state court

administrator’s debt collection program. The pari-mutuel and gaming facility licensees are directed to withhold any winnings of \$10,000 or more to pay off the debt. The withholding of the winnings is considered a valid lien that is executed to repay the debt.

Licensing Sanctions

The bill expands the authority of the centralized collection unit (CCU) of the Department of Revenue and of licensing boards to share information to enhance debt collection. The CCU is allowed to issue a certificate of noncompliance to licensing authorities, which requires the authority to suspend or revoke a license or to deny the renewal or issuance of a license to engage in a business, occupation, profession, recreation, or industry. Before this step is taken, the CCU must notify the obligor of the potential sanction and allow 20 days for the person to schedule a conference with the CCU. These sanctions are triggered if the outstanding debt is \$1,000 or more.

The sanction can be avoided by paying the debt or through a written agreement with the CCU that places the person on a payment schedule, based on their ability to pay.

Out-of-State Tourism Marketing Grants

The Department of Economic Development (DED) has announced 23 new marketing awards, totaling nearly \$163,000, from the Regional Tourism Marketing Grant program. The program receives funding from state gaming revenue and is designed to assist communities in placing tourism advertising in out-of-state markets to attract visitors to Iowa.

“Iowa boasts a diverse array of tourism attractions and destina-

tions, and these grants will allow out-of-state visitors to experience all we have to offer,” said DED Director Michael Tramontina.

The grants, worth a minimum of \$5,000 to a max of \$10,000, were awarded to the entities listed below. The group’s overall advertising placement costs will exceed \$471,000 next year.

Amana Colonies Convention and Visitors Bureau - radio campaign in Madison, Wisconsin.

Bellevue Chamber of Commerce - billboards in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Greater Burlington Convention and Visitors Bureau - TV campaign in Quincy, Illinois, and online advertising on the Quincy Herald Whig Web site.

Chariton Valley Planning and Development - newspaper ads in northwest and west central Illinois and eastern Missouri.

Clay County Fair, Spencer - brochure insertion in Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota newspapers, radio campaign in Minnesota and South Dakota, billboards in Vermillion, South Dakota, and Jackson, Nebraska.

Clinton Convention and Visitors Bureau - online advertising on www.mystateline.com and a TV campaign in Rockford, Illinois.

Council Bluffs Convention and Visitors Bureau - TV campaign in South Dakota and Nebraska.

Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau - TV campaign in Kansas City, Missouri.

Downtown Partners Sioux City - billboards in South Dakota and Minnesota.

Dubuque County Historical Society - billboards in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Dubuque Convention and Visitors Bureau - Midwest Destination Guide ad insertion and a radio campaign in Chicago, Illinois.

Fairfield Convention and Visitors Bureau - Moline Dispatch/Rock Island Argus ad insertions, TV campaign in Quincy, Illinois, billboard in Missouri and online advertising at www.QCOnline.com.

Grinnell Tourism Group - Chicago Tribune ad insertions.

Grout Museum District, Waterloo - Group Travel Leader ad insertions.

Keokuk Area Convention and Tourism Bureau - billboards in Missouri.

Mason City Convention and Visitors Bureau and Clear Lake Chamber - ad insertions in 95 newspapers in southwest Wisconsin and northwest Illinois.

Okoboji Tourism Committee - billboards in Minnesota.

Pella Convention and Visitors Bureau - billboard in Illinois.

Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau - radio campaign in Chicago, Illinois.

Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area - ad insertions in AAA Living Illinois, Chicago Commuter, Journal and Topics, Northwest Quarterly and The Galenian.

Sleepy Hollow Sports Park, Des Moines - TV campaign in Kansas City, Missouri.

Western Iowa Wine Trail - billboard in Nebraska and TV campaign in Omaha, Nebraska.

Winneshiek County Convention and Visitors Bureau - ad insertions in Great Getaways 2009 (LaCrosse Tribune travel section), Go Guide 2009 (St. Paul Pioneer Press biannual travel guide) and Best of the River Valley 2009 (annual magazine travel insert in Wisconsin).