



Representative Andrew Wenthe

STATEHOUSE NEWS

January 28, 2010

Capitol Comments

This week the House has been hard at work to help Iowans in need. Given the difficult economic times facing our state and nation, we have focused our efforts on legislation that will promote the well-being of some of Iowa's most vulnerable citizens.

The full House passed a bill protecting cancer patients from losing coverage for routine procedures simply because they choose to enter a clinical trial. These clinical trials benefit all Iowans because they lead to the discovery of critical information that can help other Iowans with cancer. This legislation will hold insurance companies accountable and help cancer patients and their doctors decide on the best cancer treatment available without worrying about losing their health insurance. This issue is often a roadblock to getting people to participate in clinical trials that offer hope for many with cancer, and the measure should help boost participa-



Andrew met with members of the North Fayette Mentoring Program, Donna Fink and Charity Condit

tion and improve cancer research.

The House approved legislation that will allow military families to breathe a little easier during a deployment by providing unemployment benefits to a spouse who is forced to leave their job due to relocation. This is just the beginning of legislation we hope to consider this session to help military families and veterans. I look forward to considering bills that will also protect spouses from withdrawal penalties if they must leave college mid-term and directing state agencies to help them transfer teaching certificates or professional certifications to their new home state.

I would also like to remind my constituents of the existence of Anti-Gouging legisla-

tion, protecting the citizens of Iowa from unfair prices. Demand patterns can shift as a result of the recent bad weather streak we have been experiencing. However, no amount of ice, snow, or wind can legally lead to a disaster for your wallet. The Iowa Consumer Fraud Act prohibits its price gouging following a disaster declaration. This legislation was spurred by exorbitant prices being charged after widespread flooding in 1993, and keeps the citizens of Northeast Iowa safe even in the worst of conditions.

I received visits from several organizations and advocacy groups who are working hard for those in need. I spoke with Easter Seals clients during their visit to Des Moines, and as a long-time supporter of this terrific organization that supports disabled Iowans it was a pleasure to welcome to the Capitol. Mentoring Day was held

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Rep. Wenthe was happy to meet with Easter Seals advocates and clients. It is always nice to visit with those individuals Easter Seals is helping, and Rep. Wenthe is a proud supporter of this

at the Capitol this week, and I was honored to meet with several of my constituents, including Donna Fink, North Fayette Mentoring Coordinator and Cassie Peterson, Valley Community Coalition, Certified Prevention Specialist and Mentoring Coordinator, who are hard at work for the children of Northeast Iowa.

In other Statehouse news, the Governor released his plan for the budget in 2011. The Governor recommends a budget that incorporates many of the cost saving initiatives proposed by his office and the Legislature to reduce the cost of state government. The Governor is proposing a general fund budget that expends \$5.32 billion, which is less than the budget three years ago. His priorities mirror those

of the middle class who want a responsible state budget that doesn't raise taxes and focuses our limited resources on creating good-paying jobs, maintaining quality schools, and ensuring quality health care for more Iowans.

The next step is for the Legislature's seven budget subcommittees to review the plans and make their own recommendations. The budget subcommittees have a difficult task in front of them this year before bringing their recommendations to the House Appropriations Committee, on which I serve as Vice-Chair. Despite the challenges, we are com-



Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District members Paul Hoeger, Rick Trotter, Joyce Trotter, and Bill Bennett with State Representative Andrew Wenthe on Wednesday, January 27, 2010. Commissioners were on hand to discuss ongoing conservation efforts in Northeast Iowa

mitted to working together to develop a state budget that focuses on the priorities of Iowans without raising taxes.

Several college groups were here this week, including students from the University of Northern Iowa, as well as the Student Senate from Hawkeye Community College. I also was pleased to talk to Jill Dashner, Assistant Bremer Co Attorney, Oelwein Police Chief Jeremy Logan, and Steven Dewey, Chief Financial Officer, Financial Decisions Group of Sumner. I really appreciated these individuals taking the time to visit me at the Capitol and for sharing their professional insights.

As always, I would appreciate hearing your opinion on any issue before the legislature. You can contact me anytime, and I also encourage you to go to my website, www.andrewwenthe.org, and participate in this week's online poll. This week's question has to do with a proposal before the



Dr. Gail Moorman-Behrens, Director of Teacher Education at Upper Iowa University, visited the Capitol to hear a presentation by Van Meter and Clayton Ridge, School Superintendents, regarding innovative approaches utilizing technology in education

Rep. Wenthe gets a visit from student leaders from Northeast Iowa Community College.



House Transportation Committee to ban texting while driving. I look forward to having your input and hope to see you at the Capitol or back in District 18 soon!

Supporting Military Families

The Iowa House took another step to support veterans, military members, and their families this week.

House File 2110 provides unemployment insurance benefits for the spouses of military personnel forced to leave their job due to a mili-



tary reassignment or a spouse called to active duty.

The benefits will be paid out of interest on the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund and will not be paid for by employers.

Currently, at least 35 other states provide unemployment insurance benefits to spouses of military personnel who left employment, due to no fault of their own, and relocated because of a military assignment

in another area.

The bill is the first in a package of initiatives to help military families and veterans. Other initiatives under consideration this year to help families facing relocation include protecting spouses from withdrawal penalties if they must leave college mid-term and directing state agencies to help them transfer teaching certificates or professional certifications to their new home state.

HF 2110 will now go to the Senate for consideration.

Accountability Measures for Lobbyists

Many Iowans want to know what special interests are spending to obtain passage or cause defeat of legislation. The Iowa House has made that easier to find out through new ethics laws governing lobbyists and clients.

The measure, House File 2109, will improve accuracy and transparency in the activities of lobbyists and their clients. The bill will also give the House and Senate Ethics committees more authority to deal with companies and organizations that lobby state government.

One change will require compa-

nies and organizations that lobby the Legislature and Executive Branch of state government to file reports on what they spend. Citizens will be able to go to the legislative website and find out how much Company A or Organization Z spends each year.

In addition, companies and organizations hosting receptions must now file reports in advance of the event. They will then have 28 days following the event to file a report on what they spent. These reports will also be available on the legislative website.

This change was prompted after Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement filed a complaint against an organization that failed to file their report in a timely manner. Now, with the pre-event filing, any citizen will be able to tell who is holding events and whether they have filed the necessary post-event report.

The bill now goes to the Senate, where it is expected to pass.

Lobbying information can be found on the website at www.legis.state.ia.us/Lobbyist.html.

Expanding Access to Health Care

Building on an initiative to expand access to affordable health care, legislators outlined a plan this week to help Iowans get primary care closer to home.

Senate File 2092 creates a new Regional Provider Network under the IowaCare Program. This will allow low to middle income adult Iowans to obtain primary care through the

regional provider network, which already provides health services to rural communities across Iowa.

The current IowaCare Program is a limited benefit program for individuals who cannot afford health insurance but who do not qualify for Medicaid. Residents of Polk County may only access care at Broadlawns Medical Center. All other Iowans can

only obtain care at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City.

The bill intends to fix a longstanding criticism of the IowaCare Program and assist local providers by reducing the amount of uncompensated care. The bill is in the Senate Human Resources Committee for consideration.

Governor Proposes Lean Budget for Fiscal Year 2011

This week, Governor Culver released his budget plans for the state fiscal year 2011, which begins July 1, 2010. With Iowa still struggling due to the effects of the lingering national recession, the Governor proposed a lean budget that reflects the priorities of Iowans – helping middle class families, balancing the budget without raising taxes, maintaining quality schools, and creating good-paying jobs.

The Governor recommends a budget that incorporates many of the cost saving initiatives proposed

by his office and the Legislature to reduce the cost of state government. The Governor is proposing a general fund budget that expends \$5.32 billion, which is less than the budget three years ago.

The Governor is proposing additional investments in the state's infrastructure with \$150 million for I-JOBS in order to create jobs and make Iowa more attractive to businesses relocating. The Governor also wants to continue assistance to those communities affected by the floods and tornados of 2008.

The Governor's plan maintains the

2% increase in funding for each student attending Iowa's K-12 school system. He also restores \$100 million in the reduction in funding schools experienced in this budget year.

The Legislature's seven budget subcommittees have completed their second week of meetings. The Governor's recommendations will now be considered in that deliberative process that is expected to continue through much of the Legislative session, in order to produce a balanced budget.

House Votes to Help Participants in Cancer Trials

Health insurance companies will be required to pay for routine care of cancer patients while in clinical trials, under a bill passed unanimously by the House.

Health insurers say they already cover these costs; but policies differ, disputes happen, and coverage is still denied.

This leaves cancer patients confused and fearful that their insurer will drop them if they join a clinical trial.

Regrettably, this makes them re-

luctant to participate in cancer trials and impedes cancer research. This hurts all Iowans who stand to benefit from more cancer research.



House File 2075 will put cancer patients' minds at ease and make it easier to enroll them in clinical trials by assuring them that their insurer will cover routine care. The bill only

applies to cancer trials approved by the National Institutes of Health and if the patient is referred by two oncology specialists.

The bill applies to both individual

and group insurance plans, but not necessarily to all Iowans. Many larger employers have self-funded health plans and the federal Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) exempts self-funded plans from state insurance regulations.

Those Iowans whose health care costs are paid by the federal Medicare or Medicaid programs or by the U. S. Veterans Administration already have similar coverage.

HF 2075 will now go to the Senate for its consideration.

Iowa Receives Green Jobs Grant

Iowa has been awarded a three-year, \$5.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to expand Iowa's growing green economy sector and develop the skills necessary in the workforce to succeed in this new economy.

Iowa's grant will target renewable energy and efficiency. The overall goal of the grant is to bring

state resources together to further develop the national green economy.

Iowa will focus on sustainable job growth in the energy sector, and training workers with portable skills that provide opportunities and movement within the green sector.

Over the last three years, Iowa

has become a world leader in renewable energy. We are 1st in the nation in ethanol production, 2nd in the nation in wind energy production, and 2nd in the nation in biodiesel production.

Key partners within the Energy Sector Grant include the Gover-

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nor's Office, Iowa Office of Energy Independence, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Association of Business and Industry, Iowa Association of Community College

Trustees, Iowa Department of Education, Master Builders of Iowa, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, Iowa Utility Association, Iowa Federation of Labor AFL-CIO, International Brotherhood of Electrical

Workers, Central Iowa Works, Siouxland Tri-State Regional Innovation Project, Center for Industrial Research Services, Institute for Decision Making, and Kirkwood Community College Outreach Services.

Distracted Drivers Hot Topic at State and Federal Level

Presentations on distracted drivers were heard by the House Transportation Committee this week, and U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood banned texting for commercial drivers.

Distracted driving is defined as the driver diverting attention away from activities critical for safe driving. Obviously, the longer and more frequently that a driver's eyes are off the road the more dangerous the situation.

According to information from the National Safety Council Group, 800,000 people in the country are

using a cell phone at any one time. Each year, there are 1.6 million crashes in the country attributed to the use of a cell phone. Of that 1.6 million, 200,000 are caused due to a driver texting.

Federal Texting Ban

Secretary LaHood, through federal rules, made it illegal for some commercial vehicle drivers to text while driving. The ban applies to interstate commercial drivers and commercial van drivers. Federal government employees are already banned from texting while driving when they

are using government-provided cell phones or cars, or when they are using their own cell phone or car to conduct government business.

The rules concerning commercial drivers went into effect on January 26, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will be working on details of the rules. Violators could be faced with civil or criminal penalties of to \$2,750. Studies done by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute show that a truck driver who texts is 23% more likely to have a crash.

Anti-Gouging Law in Effect Following Winter Storms

Iowa's severe winter weather causes not only snow, ice, and wind. Another undesirable element also appears - the scammer. Iowa's Attorney General, Tom Miller, is reminding Iowans that price gouging is considered an unfair practice under the Iowa Consumer Fraud Act when a disaster declaration is in effect for a county.

Iowa's anti-price-gouging rule is in effect for Adair, Audubon, Car-

roll, Cass, Clarke, Crawford, Harrison, Mills, Monona, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, Sac, Shelby, and Taylor counties. The rule was adopted in 1993 following widespread flooding when exorbitant prices were charged even for port-a-potties.

According to the Attorney General, price gouging is the practice of taking advantage of disaster victims by substantially raising the prices, without justification, for needed

goods or services. In other words, it occurs when the price is raised above what is normal immediately prior to the disaster.

Price gouging covers, but is not limited, to water, food, medicines, and materials, goods, or services needed for clean up or repair. Complaints can be taken to local authorities or to the Attorney General's Office -- 515-281-5926, or toll-free at 1-888-777-4590.

Companies Assisted to Bring New Jobs to Iowans

Iowa's premiere job creation fund, the Grow Iowa Values Fund, continues to provide assistance to create jobs. The Department of Economic Development (DED) Board announced assistance to help create 135 jobs and retain an additional 24 jobs, with total capital investment of nearly \$40 million.

ConAgra in Council Bluffs

ConAgra Foods Packaged Foods, LLC will be upgrading their facility in Council Bluffs, which was originally built in 1955. The project was awarded tax benefits from the Enterprise Zone program to support the creation of three new jobs and retention of 15 jobs. The capital invest-

ment is estimated at \$38.5 million for this project, which is expected to be in full production by the end of 2012.

Des Moines Company Expands to New Markets

Palisade Systems, located in Des Moines, will be increasing their workforce to expand into two new

markets. The DED Board approved an award of \$65,000 to create 23 new jobs and retain three current positions.

Ames Firm Launches New Software

Product

WebFilings LLC of Ames was awarded \$500,000 to support the launch of their web-based application to improve the drafting proc-

ess of Securities Exchange Commission filings for public companies. The award will support the creation of 61 new jobs and retention of six positions.

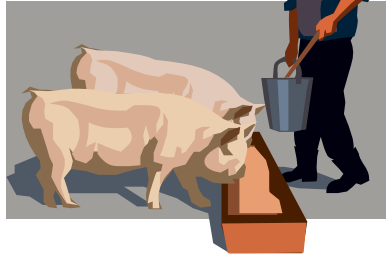
DNR Creates New Livestock Database

In an effort to provide more government accountability and transparency, three years ago the Legislature appropriated money

to the Department on Natural Resources to create a user-friendly and efficient animal feeding operation da-

tabase. The department has recently announced the database is complete and available online.

The department said people can now search by owner's name, the facility identification number, or geographically. It can also be



searched by watershed, county, or region. The public will be able to access information about the more than 8,000 facilities the department tracks.

The database covers primarily those operations large enough to require approval for a construction permit. It also covers mid-size and larger operations that need a manure or nutrient management plan. While the database includes information on some of the smaller facilities in the state, not all small open feedlots or confinements are tracked in this system.

Another benefit to the database is it

will make it easier for producers to check and make sure information about their facility is accurate. They can also look for the month their manure management plans are due and when the last original P-Index plan was submitted to the department.

The database is at <https://programs.iowadnr.gov/animalfeedingoperations/>.

The department wants to make sure they have accurate information on the database. Producers who find an error in the information about their facility should notify their regional DNR field office.

Main Street Challenge Grants Announced

The Department of Economic Development announced that \$822,000 in HUD Challenge Grants will be awarded to 14 Iowa communities through a fund administered by the Iowa Downtown Resource Center and Main Street Iowa. The funding will be distributed in the form of grants, training, and technical assistance to the selected Main Street programs.

The grants will benefit local improvement projects, including remodeling, installing a geothermal system, and converting an old post office into a winery. The total combined capital investment is nearly \$10.4 million.

The challenge grants have now been awarded to 69 projects in 33 different Main Street communities. Matching funds for the program are provided through the state's economic development budget, and the program is funded through an appropriation from the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). See photos of recipients at www.iowalifechanging.com

The 2010 list includes the following projects:

Dubuque Main Street	Riverworks Bldg. Main St.
Main Street West Union	North Vine St.
Main Street West Branch	Historic Post Office W. Main St.
State Center Develop. Ass.	City Hall E. Main St.
Story City Chamber	Cook Family Dentistry, Broad St.
Cedar Falls Main Street	Bruhn Bldg. Main St.
Bloomfield Main Street	L. H. Leon Bldg., Washington St.
Hamilton County S.E.E.D.	Shorthorn Bldg., Main St.
Main Street Waterloo	Montgomery Ward Bldg., Commercial St.
Main Street Washington	Bodywrx Fitness Center, Iowa Ave.
Woodbine Main Street	Watson Gas Station, Walker St.
Main Street Mason City	J.E.E. Markley Bldg., Federal St.
Cedar Rapids Czech Village-New Bohemia	Suchy Bldg., 3rd St. SE
Davenport Hilltop Campus Village	McButts Tavern, Harrison St.

under "Recent News" on Wednesday January 27, 2010.