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Statehouse News

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Wenthe Sworn In

On Monday, I officially began working in the 82nd General Assembly when I was sworn in as State Representative. I have begun work on my committees: Agriculture, Appropriations, Natural Resources, and Economic Growth also serving as Vice Chair of the Education Appropriations subcommittee. It is important for me to stay in touch with all of the residents of District 18, so stay tuned for more weekly newsletters like this and check out my new blog at www.desmoinesregister.com!



Governor Vilsack's Final Address

On Tuesday, Governor Tom Vilsack delivered his eighth and final Condition of the State Address to the General Assembly. This Friday, Governor-elect Chet Culver will be officially sworn-in as Iowa's next Governor.

As part of his final address, Governor Vilsack touted his accomplishments in his eight years as Governor.

Governor Vilsack said that from 1999 to 2007, Iowans put education – from birth through maturity – first in line for our resources. We strengthened the crucial 0-5 years with programs like Iowa Strong Start, while continuing to work in partnership with the state's teachers and school districts to make Iowa an even better place for lifelong learning.

We are the best at producing ethanol, soydiesel and renewable fuel and the rest of the nation is looking to us for leadership. He noted that some 83 counties in Iowa have used the Iowa Values Fund, in combination with other funds and efforts, to help retain, grow, and attract business. And the

Vision Iowa Fund provided \$300 million in awards for public and private investment in major community attractions.

He noted that an overwhelming majority of Iowans agree that access to health care should be a right, not a privilege, especially for the youngest and oldest Iowans. Since 2000, more than 21,300 elder Iowans are living more independently through alternatives to nursing homes, saving millions in taxpayer dollars. The percentage of Medicaid enrollees using home- and community-based services for their long-term care has increased from 29% to 47%. And the enrollment of children in Hawk-I increased from 2,104 children in fiscal year 2000 to 20,673 at the start of fiscal year 2007.

Iowans have also agreed that our state has unique and authentic qualities. Governor Vilsack urges legislators to continuing the programs he started on quality of life include the Great Places program and enrich Iowa libraries. He also said we need to continue our efforts of reversing decades of decline on our water resources.

Minimum Wage Bill on Fast Track

The first bill introduced in the Iowa House will increase the Iowa minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.20 on April 1, 2007, and to \$7.25 on January 1, 2008, a total increase of \$2.10. The minimum wage has not been increased since September 1, 1997, almost ten years ago.

House File 1 also increases the 90 day training wage from \$4.25 per hour to \$5.30 on April 1, 2007, and to \$6.35 on January 1, 2008, also a total increase of \$2.10.

The District of Columbia and 29 states have higher minimums than the \$5.15 federal minimum, including states surrounding Iowa: Illinois (\$6.50 – to \$8.25 by 2010), Minnesota (\$6.15), Missouri (\$6.50 – automatic inflation adjustment), and Wisconsin (\$6.50).

Penalty Moratorium

Some businesses, especially smaller businesses, may have difficulty implementing the increase by

this April 1st. Therefore, until July 1, 2007, if an employer fails to comply with these changes, the Division of Labor will seek back wages and interest but no additional penalties.

Who Benefits?

An analysis of 2005 U.S. Census Bureau data by the Iowa Policy Project (IPP), says that a minimum wage increase to \$7.25 will mean:

- 257,000 Iowans – 18% of all Iowa workers – will get a raise.
- 128,000 earn less than \$7.25, but an additional 130,000 earn just a few dollars more and would also get an average 60¢ raise as employers adjust their pay structures.
- 75% are adults over age 20.
- 58% are female.
- 42% work full-time and 34% work 20 to 34 hours per week.

- 20% are parents to 94,000 children, who will also benefit.
- 45% work in retail or the leisure and hospitality industry.

Helping Support Families

Increasing the Iowa minimum wage will help workers better support and make a decent life for their families.

This is only one part of our ef-



fort to help working families. Other ideas include expanding the state earned income tax credit, increasing the dependent exemption credit, and improving access to affordable health insurance and child care for working families.

More Work Needed to Improve Education

Within Governor Vilsack's final Condition of the State Address, he reviewed work that was started in his administration to improve student achievement, teacher salaries, and access to quality pre-school. House Democrats have developed our own "Plan for Prosperity" that will take additional steps to improve Iowa's education system.

We plan to raise teacher salaries, improve access to quality child care and pre-school, ensure challenging curriculum through highly qualified teachers, and provide affordable college tuition.

Teacher salaries currently are in the bottom third of the nation, ranking 41st. In order to attract and retain the best and brightest teach-

ers, legislators are looking at raising Iowa teacher salaries to the national median over the next five years.

The focus of the early years, birth to five, in a child's development and education has gained new momentum in the House. A subcommittee has been created to specifically address early childhood education issues. The focus will be on quality child care, increasing the number of children who have access to high quality pre-school programs, establishing a quality rating system and providing assistance through professional development and parent support.



Challenging curriculum that is delivered by highly qualified teachers is part of the continuous plan for Student Achievement and Teacher Quality (SATQ). This means having teachers certified in the areas they teach as well as getting the professional development and support they need to be successful.

Higher education is becoming more and more unaffordable as tuitions at community colleges and state universities are growing faster than family's incomes. We want to slow the growth rate of college tuitions and restore financial programs, such as work-study, to help make a college education more affordable.

Vilsack Encourages Growth in Renewable Energy

Governor Vilsack reminded Legislators in his Condition of the State address that Iowa is first in the country in the production of ethanol and bodies and third in the country in the production of wind power. Additional initiatives are in place to reduce energy consumption in state buildings by 15% by the year 2010.

Iowa's energy future is at the mercy of oil companies and volatile foreign governments. However, Iowa is uniquely positioned to develop energy alternatives such as corn-based ethanol, cellulosic ethanol, soy-based diesel, biomass, and wind energy. Production of these energies can create thousands of good jobs, ease the burden on mid-

dle-class pocketbooks, and provide more national security through less reliance on foreign oil.

House Democrats will work aggressively to create new business opportunities and good jobs while lowering energy costs for Iowa families, farmers, and small businesses. We will bring together the best academic, research, and business minds to give us direction on alternative energy policies. Our goal is to establish Iowa as "The Green State" – nationally and internationally recognized for its energy leadership.

Our "Plan for Prosperity" contains the following:

- Develop the nation's first bio-refinery for the next generation of ethanol technology.
- Significantly increase the amount of electricity generated from renewable energy sources.
- Make Iowa a national leader in the manufacturing of equipment and technology for the production of alternative energy.
- Create a public/private partnership to commercialize alternative fuels research and technology.
- Secure Iowa's food supply against infectious diseases and bioterrorism.

Chief Justice Ternus's Address Focuses on Children

Chief Justice Marsha Ternus, the first woman to serve as chief justice of Iowa's Supreme Court, gave the State of the Judiciary this week and focused on the needs of children. The Iowa Supreme Court and the Judicial Council embarked on a mission to make court oversight of child welfare cases a top priority.

Chief Justice Ternus noted that the one judge/one child model will be one of their most momentous improvements. While this will result in court decisions that are better informed and more consistent, more importantly, the child sees that same judge the entire time that they are in foster care.

Chief Justice Ternus asked that the Legislature provide additional resources to the juvenile courts. These resources are necessary for

the courts to give the child welfare cases the attention that they deserve.

A final, but very important request, was to increase the hourly rate for court-appointed attorneys who handle juvenile cases. The startling fact is that the state pays more to attorneys to represent drunk drivers than the attorneys who represent the children in need.

Technology & the Courts

It's not always as simple for the courts to move to the latest and greatest technology, due to many, and sometimes complicated issues. For example, how much information about a case can and should be available online?

Chief Justice Ternus reported that the courts are gearing up for one of their most ambitious under-

takings – the transformation to a



completely paperless court system. A pilot project will be implemented in two counties later this year. A paperless court system will allow judges, court staff, lawyers, litigants, and others to have immediate and simultaneous access to court files. In addition, local governments won't need as much warehouse space for paper files.

Chief Justice Asks for \$3.7 Million Budget Increase

In her address to the General Assembly, Chief Justice Marsha Ternus's budget comments focused

on two areas. Her first priority was Iowa's children. Her second was

general support for the court system as a whole.

Children's Justice Initiative

Chief Justice Ternus requested \$467,000 to make court oversight of child welfare cases a permanent ongoing priority. The initiative seeks to increase collaboration between the courts, child welfare agencies, and other interested parties.

Funds will be used to hire two district judges, two associate judges, and seven support staff who

will be specially trained in children and family cases issues.

"One Judge/One Child"

Chief Justice Ternus requested \$737,000 to help implement the "One Judge/One Child Model", which provides each child will have the same judge presiding over all their juvenile court proceedings. This allows the judge to become familiar with the details of the unique circumstances of the prob-

lems of each child and the child's family.

Funds will be used to hire four juvenile court officers and two juvenile court technicians.

General Court Support

Chief Justice Ternus also requested \$1.8 million to hire more judicial clerks, court reporters, and other support staff to keep up with the growing workload of the entire court system.

Report Approved on Office Building Projects

The Legislative Fiscal Committee met on January 8th to approve a report submitted by the Department of Administrative Services on the two state office building projects. During the 2006 legislative session, funding was approved to construct a new 350,000 square foot state office building and a new building for the Iowa Utilities Board and the Office of Consumer Advocate.

State law requires the Department of Administrative Services to conduct a return on investment study on new construction projects, before they are authorized to expend more than \$1 million on the

construction project. Both projects exceeded the 5% return on investment threshold required by law for the Fiscal Committee to approve construction expenditures to exceed \$1 million.

The construction of the new state office building will save taxpayers \$136 million in lease expenses over the next 50 years and the state will own a building that will continue to be an asset for government operations.

The building being constructed for the Utilities Board and the Offi-



cer of the Consumer Advocate will also save taxpayers \$13 million in lease expenses. This building will incorporate a number of energy efficiency designs that will serve as a model for other smaller government constructed buildings.

The Department of Administrative Services will move into the next phase of construction process, the architectural design and planning. The Legislative Fiscal Committee is expected to receive periodic updates on the construction projects.

Hearings on Affordable Health Care

The joint House and Senate Health and Human Services Budget Subcommittee will begin to hold hearings next week on expanding access to affordable health care for Iowans. The hearings are just the first step in the legislative process.

The hearings will examine plans other states have proposed and implemented to help fill the

gap of uninsured citizens. The hearings will also focus on a proposal to develop a bipartisan legislative commission to review insurance reforms that could expand health coverage to reach more working families and help small businesses that are having a difficult time providing affordable private coverage.

The committee will also hear testimony about proposals to help close gaps in the public health programs for low income, disabled and senior Iowa families.

These hearings are a beginning step of many to move the State of Iowa forward in providing expanded access to affordable health care coverage.

National Report on Fight Against Meth

The Office of National Drug Control Policy has issued a report that shows a nationwide drop in

methamphetamine laboratory seizures. The primary reason for this decline was because of enactment

of state laws, like Iowa's, that put restrictions on products containing

pseudoephedrine, which is found in over-the-counter cold medications.

The report noted that Iowa's law is one of the strictest in the nation, and stricter than the federal law. In Iowa, meth lab seizures declined by 70% after the law went into effect on May 21, 2005. Workplace drug testing results also showed a 31% decrease in positive tests for amphetamine, measuring the first five months in 2006, compared to the same period in 2005.

The report noted that by early 2006, more than 40 States had implemented some type of new restriction on pseudoephedrine and ephedrine retail transactions. On September 30, 2006, the federal Combat Meth Act of 2005 went fully into effect. This law sets a nationwide baseline standard for how to legally sell these products.

This report from the Office of National Drug Control Policy highlights the progress made across all

50 states through the passage and implementation of laws, laboratory incident seizures, and positive workplace tests for amphetamines in reducing methamphetamine production in 2005.

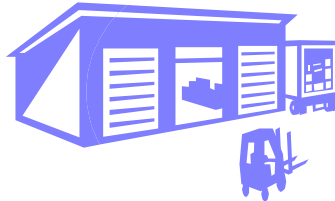
To download a copy of the report, go to:

www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/pdf/pushingback_against_meth.pdf

DOT Commission Approves RISE Grants

At their January meeting, the commissioners for the Department of Transportation approved three RISE grants (Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy). Funding for RISE grants comes from the road use tax fund, which collects money from gasoline tax, motor vehicle registration fees, and other such items. The grants were approved for Huxley, Waterloo, and Shelby.

Huxley and Shelby applied for Immediate Opportunity grants, which mean that they had to show that the project is related to the permanent creation or retention of jobs, and that other non roadway factors have been addressed. The Waterloo project is awarded from the category of Local Development, which considers issues such as development potential and local commitment and initiative.



Huxley – the commission approved a grant totaling \$285,000 for the grading and paving of 1,300 feet of new roadway. This new roadway will begin 950 feet east of 560th Street. This roadway will provide access for the proposed Technochem facilities at the Technochem Development Park, as well as to the Van Wall Development. The result of this project will allow for the creation of 51 new jobs at Technochem and 6 new jobs at the Van Wall Development.

Waterloo – the commissioners approved a grant totaling \$270,000

for the grading and paving of approximately 400 feet of Cyclone Drive, 850 feet of Titan Trail, and a left turn storage lane on U.S. 63. All of these projects will provide access to the three new lots in the Greenbelt Centre business park.

Shelby – the commissioners approved a grant totaling \$43,000 to assist in the construction of a 250-foot right-turn lane on East Street (County Road M-16). This turn lane will be at the entrance for a new facility for Con-Way Freight, Inc. The company is relocating and expanding in the city of Shelby, which is the reason for the improved access. This roadway project will assist in the creation of nine new jobs at Con-Way Freight, Inc.

Board Approves Newton Redevelopment Project

In a special meeting before the end of 2006, the Department of Economic Development Board acted in support of a brownfield project in Newton that will assist the community in redeveloping and improving the former downtown campus for Maytag.

A \$1.25 million award from the Brownfield Redevelopment Program was awarded in conjunction with Physical Infrastructure Assistance Program (PIAP) funding of \$690,000 to assist in renovation.

Iowa currently funds the Brownfield Redevelopment Program with \$500,000 of state funds per year, which has already been allocated for the current fiscal year. The money used in this Newton project was federal funds and will be used for asbestos abatement.