



Representative Andrew Wenthe Statehouse News

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Inside this Issue

- 1** Headline
- 1** Wenthe Website 2.0
- 2** Faces From Home
- 2** Governor Culver Releases Budget Recommendations
- 3** Governor's Education Recommendations
- 4** Governor's Health Care Initiatives
- 4** Governor's Iowa Power Fund Recommendation
- 5** Governor's Public Safety Recommendations
- 5** Governor's Environment Recommendations
- 6** Public Hearing Held on Affordable Healthcare
- 6** New Secretary of Agriculture Reviews Priorities
- 6** Unpaid Fines and Fees Result in Unlicensed Drivers
- 7** Free Shuttle for Visitors to the Capitol

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

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Moving the Budget Ball Forward

The big news in the legislature this week was Governor Chet Culver's address to a Joint Session of the General Assembly unveiling his budget for Fiscal Year 2008. Typically, the Governor releases his budget request in the first two weeks of the legislative session, but a newly elected Governor has until February 1 to present a budget. Now that we have Governor Culver's request, the budget process can truly begin in the legislature.

I am happy to report that Governor Culver's budget places great importance on a balanced budget and fiscal responsibility. Governor Culver's budget maintains the 10% balance in the state reserve funds required by law with \$577 million, which is the most the state has ever had in our savings account. His budget also aims to repay the \$98.4 million to the Senior Living Trust Fund, which helps keep seniors in their homes while enjoying a higher quality of life.

The budget process requires many tough decisions be made by the

legislature. For instance, during testimony before my Education Budget Subcommittee the Department of Education (DE) requested funding for a program to be implemented in Iowa's high school and middle schools. The "21st Century International Competitiveness Skills" program would appropriate \$350,000 to develop curriculum in the areas of financial literacy, civil literacy, health and wellness awareness, problem solving, creativity and use of technology to better equip Iowa's students with the skills necessary to succeed in today's global economy. This program did not make it into the Governor's budget, and it is now up to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to decide whether or not we move forward with the program. This is just one example of the many budget related decisions we have before us in the General Assembly. Please read the following articles that more thoroughly address the Governor's budget request.

Wenthe Website 2.0

I am very excited to inform you about my new and improved website, www.andrewwenthe.org. One of the many new features of my website is a poll that can be found on the lower left side of the main page. You will be asked to

answer a question relating to an issue currently being discussed in the legislature. This week's question has to do with Governor Culver's budget request for a one dollar increase in the cigarette tax –

go to www.andrewwenthe.org to have your opinion heard!

My website is designed to be a tool to keep you informed about what I am working on as your legislator. You can access important information about bills I am

Faces from Home

I had many more visitors to the Capitol this week, including Robin Bostrom and Troy Johansen representing West Union's "Main



State Representative Roger Thomas and Andrew met with students from Northeast Iowa Community College when Community college students from across the state visited the Capitol on Jan. 25. From left to right, Burt Hurst, April Souhrada, Thomas, Jennifer Bruening, Robert Bennett, Kayla Kramer, Elea Uhl, and Wenthe.

working on by clicking on the "Legislative Information" page, catch up on the latest news in "The Wenthe Wire" and see pictures taken at the Capitol.

I also need your help in keeping me informed about activities

Street Iowa" board, advocates for Iowa's Public Transit Association, and Fern Rissman with the Association of Iowa's Workforce



Andrew and Sen. Danielson met with volunteers from Together for Youth when the organization visited the Capitol to discuss the issue of teen pregnancy

happening in District 18. I want you to contact me if your community has a soup supper, festival, or any other activity people should know about. Thanks for your help!

Partners. Check out the pictures below to see who else visited me at the Capitol this week, and enjoy the rest of my newsletter.



Andrew with Jennifer Leistikow, a member of Readlyn's Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter. Members of FFA chapters from across the state visited the Iowa State Capitol on Jan. 25.

Governor Culver Releases Budget Recommendations



Governor Chet Culver presented a budget address to a joint session of the Legislature on Tuesday.

The Governor proposed a \$5.7 billion budget for fiscal year 2008, which has a \$188 million ending balance.

The Governor's budget recommendations parallel many of the same priorities Democrats proposed last year in our Plan for Prosperity. The budget takes steps to improve education by attracting

and retaining quality teachers, increasing access to health care to children, and positioning the state as a leader in research, development and use of renewable energy.

Highlights of the Governor's budget priorities are as follows:

Renewable Energy Leader

The Governor proposes a \$100 million Iowa Power Fund, with a down payment of \$25 million this year, to keep Iowa on the leading edge of research, technology and production of renewable fuels. The investment will help grow Iowa-based businesses and attract millions of private investment to our economy. The Governor noted that, "we can lead the way in wind,

solar, cellulosic ethanol, and biodiesel using public/ private partnerships to help develop and commercialize these new opportunities." The Governor's ultimate goal is to make Iowa the energy capital of the world.

Excellence in Education

The Governor commits more than half of the new spending in his budget on education. He is recommending \$165 million new dollars in our K-12 schools with \$70 million dedicated solely to raising teacher pay to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers for our kids.

The Governor recommends \$20 million next year to increase access to pre-school. The

Governor plans to provide an annual increase in funding for early childhood education, until every four-year old has access to pre-school. The Governor's plan will help every Iowa child arrive at kindergarten prepared, and ready to learn.

The Governor recommends an additional \$25 million for the State universities and \$12.5 million for community colleges. This funding, coupled with other allocations, will help limit the annual tuition increases at out colleges.

The Governor is also proposing \$5 million to establish an All-Iowa Opportunity Scholarship, which will provide greater access to higher education for high school students in financial need. Eligible students can get up to \$2,500 for

community college tuition or up to \$5,000 for tuition at a regent institution. The Governor's budget also increases Iowa Tuition Grants for private colleges.

The Governor proposes creating a Senior Year Plus program to give every Iowa high school student the opportunity to earn up to a year of college credit before they graduate.

Access to Healthcare

The Governor proposes a \$1 per pack cigarette tax increase to stop kids from smoking. It will save more than 17,000 lives and improve the quality of life for thousands through improved health.

There are 250,000 Iowans, 50,000 of which are kids, with no health insurance. The Governor's

plan includes \$10 million to expand coverage to uninsured kids and cover 6,400 parents living in poverty.

The Governor recommends continuing long-term care options for seniors and maintaining our commitment to the Senior Living Trust Fund.

Another part of the Governor's health care initiative is lifting Iowa's ban on stem cell research. He proposes a \$12.5 million "Center for Regenerative Medicine" at the University of Iowa to search for lifesaving cures for diseases like cardiovascular, diabetes, cancer, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

Governor Recommends Increases for Education

Governor Culver released his budget recommendations this week. In his budget were several increases for education that directly impact early childhood, K-12 and higher education.

Student Achievement and Teacher Quality

The most significant increase was to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers for our kids. Governor Culver recommended \$70 million to go to teacher salaries with the goal that Iowa reach the national average within four years.

Allowable Growth

Allowable growth is recommended to be 4% again for the 2008-2009 school year. This would make per pupil funding \$5,546, an increase of \$213 over the 2007-2008 school year.

Early Childhood

The recommendation for pre-school education is \$20 million.

The proposal includes an increase in funding over four years until all four year olds have access to quality pre-school.



Senior Year Plus Program

There is a push to develop a program for high school seniors to have access to freshman level college courses with an initial appropriation of \$300,000 and \$3 million the following year for implementation. The program is designed after the Virginia Senior Year Plus Program already in place.

New Scholarship Program

Governor Culver has recommended a new appropriation for an All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship in the amount of \$5 million. This would be 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 \$12.4 million, which would restore prior funding levels. The Regents universities recommendation was for \$25.5 million with the Governor also recommending full funding for the salary bill. That would give money for teacher salaries at the Regent universities.

In his recommendations, there is also an increase for the Tuition Grant Program. The goal is to be able to grant money to more Iowa students attending post-secondary, private institutions.

Governor Proposes Health Care Initiatives

This week, Governor Chet Culver proposed several health care items for the Fiscal Year 2008 budget. He challenged legislators to keep their health care promise by helping the 250,000 Iowans without any health insurance.

\$1.00 Cigarette Tax

Governor Culver insists that the cigarette tax be increased by \$1 dollar. As a result, an expected 38,600 youths will not start smoking or use tobacco products, the number of adult smokers will decrease by 20,200, and more than 17,000 Iowans' lives will be saved yearly. The increased revenue from the tax will be used to expand the health care program, fully fund Medicaid, improve child welfare, provide programs for our seniors, and increase smoking prevention programs by \$3 million.

Medicaid and hawk-i Coverage

For FY 2008, Governor Culver has proposed fully funding Medicaid for the first time in some years. He has asked for appropriating an additional \$713.1 million from the general fund to cover the costs of Medicaid. As a result of his request, a supplemental funding request, which has been used in the past years, would not be needed.

As part of fully funding Medicaid, Governor Culver has asked for an increase appropriation of \$745,000 of state dollars to expand outreach and enroll 25%, or 10,750, of eligible children in Medicaid or *hawk-i*. The total cost is \$8.3 million. This is the first step to enroll all eligible children over the next four years.

Furthermore, Governor Culver recommends expanding Medicaid coverage for 6,400 additional parents of children on Medicaid. This would require appropriating an additional \$9.3 million to increase the deduction for earned income when determining eligibility. Currently, over 24,000 parents of children on Medicaid are not eligible for Medicaid coverage.

Iowa Center for Regenerative Medicine

Lastly, as part of Governor Culver's health initiatives, he has proposed establishing an Iowa Center for Regenerative Medicine at the University of Iowa to conduct stem cell research. For the Center, Governor Culver requested a \$2.5 million supplemental appropriation this year, and for FY 08, \$10 million next year.

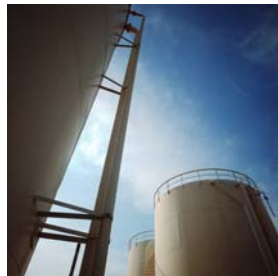
Governor Proposes the Iowa Power Fund

The Governor's budget includes \$25 million this year to jump start the Iowa Power Fund, to help keep Iowa on the cutting edge of renewable energy technology.

Governor Culver said Iowa has an opportunity to be very competitive in this area based on the fact that we have institutions that lead the country in crop research, and we already lead the nation in ethanol and biodiesel production. He proposed \$100 million over four years for the Iowa Power Fund.

The Iowa Power Fund would expand businesses in renewable energy, alternative fuels and clean technologies. A public/private partnership would be formed to help guide the process and carry out key projects financed by the fund. A Renewable Energy Director will assist in removing

obstacles to expanding renewable



energy without lowering standards for protecting Iowa's health and environment.

According to Governor Culver, Iowa has already proven that it can feed the world. The Iowa Power Fund will make Iowa a renewable energy leader whose farmers can fuel the world. The investment will help grow Iowa-based businesses and attract private investment.

In his budget address to the Legislature, Culver said we can lead the way in wind, solar,

cellulosic ethanol and biodiesel using public/private partnerships to help development and commercialize these new opportunities. His goal is to make Iowa the energy capital of the world.

Green State

Culver's renewable energy vision for Iowa matches the House Democrats plan to make Iowa the "Green State." Our "Plan for Prosperity" calls to increase the amount of electricity generated from renewable energy; develop the nation's first bio-refinery; make Iowa a leading manufacturer and producer of alternative energy; and, develop public/private partnerships to commercialize alternative fuels research and technology.

Governor's Public Safety Budget Highlights

Governor Culver's public safety budget includes additional funding to make Iowa safer. It includes the following recommendations:

Public Defense Department & Homeland Security: \$8.7 million is recommended, which is a \$750,000 increase. This includes \$100,000 to continue the Civil Air Patrol and \$1.5 million for our armories – \$400,000 for a new Eagle Grove Readiness Center, \$1.2 million for the new Iowa City Readiness Center, \$400,000 for the new Newton Readiness Center, \$1 million for the Ottumwa Armory, and \$1.5 million for the Waterloo Aviation Armory.

Governor Culver is also recommending \$2 million to develop STARCOMM, the new Siouxland Tri-State Area Radio Public Safety Communications System.

Public Safety Department: \$83.8 million is recommended, which is a \$3.9 million increase. Part of the increase is for the Iowa State Patrol operations – 387 of 413 authorized trooper positions are now filled and a training academy for new hires will likely be held later this year. An additional \$2.4 million is recommended for a new patrol post in Mason City.

Governor Culver is also recommending a \$2 million increase to the Division of Criminal Investigation, which includes \$400,000 for more narcotics enforcement and \$390,000 to expand the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force by hiring three new agents.

Corrections Department: \$255 million is recommended for our prison systems, which is a \$27.5 million increase. \$17 million of this is for the new 178 bed Special Needs Unit at Oakdale. A \$300,000 increase will also allow

substance abuse assessments of all new offenders entering the prison.

The Governor is recommending a \$2 million increase for hiring 16 new community supervision employees to increase monitoring of convicted sex offenders.

Governor Culver is also recommending \$2 million for security audits at all penal institutions to evaluate security protocol and recommend improvements.

Attorney General: \$12.6 million is recommended, which includes \$50,000 for a Charities Unit to enforce regulations of charities and \$100,000 to continue Farm Mediation Services.

Civil Rights Commission: \$1.3 million is recommended, which includes \$97,000 to replace lost federal funding and maintain services.

Governor Maintains Funding for Environment

This week, Governor Culver unveiled his budget recommendations on enhancing and preserving our natural resources and the environment. His recommendations continued many of the initiatives that we started last year.

Governor Culver is recommending that we continue to provide \$18 million to improve our water quality. This maintains funding for lakes restoration, watershed improvement, and wastewater treatment assistance.

Governor Culver continues to provide \$35 million to the



Environment First Fund. This money funds the state programs on soil conservation, watershed protection, ag drainage well closures, farm demonstration projects that protect water resources, brownfields redevelopment, water and air quality monitoring, and lake dredging.

The Environment First Fund also provides money for Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection Program. Governor Culver maintains the current level of funding for REAP at \$11 million. The program provides money for state and local projects that preserve and enhance our natural, cultural, and recreational resources. He is also recommending \$1 million for state park infrastructure renovations.

The Governor's budget recommends a \$2.35 million increase to the state's soil conservation cost-share program, which helps landowners install

measures to control soil erosion. The Governor maintains funding to assist farmers in enrolling in the

continuous sign-up federal conservation reserve program and the conservation reserve

enhancement program, to improve water quality.

Public Hearing Held on Affordable Healthcare

The Health and Human Services Joint Appropriations Subcommittee held a public hearing on January 29th at the State Capitol to hear from Iowans about a proposed bill on affordable, comprehensive healthcare. The public hearing was in addition to the hearings that have been taking place in the subcommittee.

During the hearing, over 30 people presented their thoughts on the proposed bill on affordable healthcare. Some thought that the Iowa Legislature should look instead at what is causing all the health problems and what steps can be taken to prevent them.

In addition to this public hearing on healthcare, the

subcommittee has heard testimony over the past two weeks from agencies and groups that have interest in affordable, comprehensive healthcare. The subcommittee will continue to review plans and ideas over the next few weeks as they work to build consensus on a bill.

New Secretary of Agriculture Reviews Priorities

Iowa's newly elected Secretary of Agriculture, Bill Northey, addressed the House Agriculture Committee about his views on a few topics such as young farmers in Iowa and the attitude toward the future of agriculture.

On Secretary Northey's list of things to do to improve and promote Iowa Agriculture:

- Meet with legislative committees to discuss his vision for agriculture as well as the budget requests.
- Meet with division directors and bureau heads within the department to determine their functions and how they can improve.

- Meet with federal entities to discuss the Federal Farm Bill and what Iowan's would like to see in it.

- Meet with various groups around the state such as Future Farmers of America (FFA) and at the Iowa Power Farm Show.

- Hold regular meetings with Director Rich Leopold of the Department of Natural Resources to discuss overlapping issues and common goals.

The Secretary plans on making his way around the state to discuss agricultural related priorities in individual communities. His staff is setting up meetings through individual legislators. Constituents are encouraged to call their



legislator to discuss having a meeting in their area.

For more information on the secretary of agriculture's office, call 515-281-5332 or visit the website at www.agriculture.state.ia.us.

Unpaid Fines and Fees Result in Unlicensed Drivers

A series of articles in *The Des Moines Register* brought to the growing number of persons who have lost their driver's license, but are still driving. Some believe that the problem began with law changes that were not in the best interest of the driver. Whatever the case, unlicensed drivers is not just

happening in Iowa, it's happening across the nation, and the records show that there's a large amount of money that hasn't been collected.

It was reported that there are currently over 300,000 licenses have been taken away, and a majority of those are because the driver failed to pay the required

court fees and fines in relation to their original offense. That original offense may not have been driving related. If a person is driving while their license has been suspended, revoked or barred, they should expect a longer suspension and more fines.

New Laws

In 1999, there were just under 60,000 licenses suspended, in 2005, just over 100,000 licenses were suspended. Some associate a large portion of this increase to specific laws passed in 1998 and 2001.

In 1998, legislation was passed which puts a driver who has regained their license after a suspension, on a 12- month probationary period. The driver's license can be suspended for a second time if the driver commits any moving violation while on probation.

In 2001, legislation was passed that allowed the Department of Transportation to send notice to persons who will lose their license by first class mail rather than certified mail. The department

argued that some people were refusing to sign for the letter, which then resulted in DOT not being able to suspend their license. Today, it is common to hear a person say, I didn't know that my license was suspended because I didn't get the letter.

Unpaid Fines & Fees

In this report, the *Register* stated that there are "about 78,000 drivers that have failed to pay traffic fines and fees of \$500 or more." Laws allow for a person's license to be suspended due to violations that may not be related to driving, such as not paying child support or drug related charges.

What some experience as the most frustrating part is the inflexibility that a person encounters when trying to make

payments in order to get their license back. The DOT requires all of their charges to be paid in full before it decides whether a person can drive.

The courts do have flexibility in deciding how they will collect the money owed from fines and fees issued by the court. Some courts are exercising some of that flexibility, or exercising the ability to garnish wages. One problem for courts is that they are overworked and simply don't have the required time and personal. The Department of Revenue works with a private company to collect overdue debt forwarded to them by the courts. While this has annually collected almost \$16 million for all counties, the company does charge a fee.

Free Shuttle for Visitors to the Capitol

If you come to visit the State Capitol Building between now and March 9, you may use the free shuttle service from the parking garage located at the corner of Penn and Grand Avenues. The parking in the ramp is free, also.

Visitors can board the shuttle at either the northwest corner of East Grand and Penn, or at the southwest corner of East Locust and East 7th/Penn. The second location is at the State Historical Building. The shuttle runs continuously from 7am to 6pm,

Monday through Friday, and it takes approximately 10 minutes for the shuttle to make the loop.

The bus will drop you off at the west entrance of the Capitol, which is the location where you

catch the bus to go back to either the parking ramp or the Historical Building. This service is being provided by the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART).

