

STATEHOUSE NEWS

February 5, 2009

Recovery Assistance Programs Now Underway

Governor Chet Culver has signed into law two key pieces of legislation aimed at spurring disaster relief throughout Iowa. In a signing ceremony on Monday, the Governor signed House File 64, the \$56 million disaster recovery bill. This legislation received unanimous support in the Iowa House and Senate.

The funding will come from the Economic Emergency Fund, which was created for just such purpose. The Jumpstart Housing program will receive \$24 million. This funding will be handled through the Councils of Government and certain entitlement cities.

Information can be found at <http://www.iowalifechanging.com/jumpstart/downloads/cogs-hsg.pdf>. This program will begin almost immediately.

Another \$10 million will go toward a new Un-

met Disaster Assistance Grant program through the Department of Human Services. Individuals who already have paid for items, but have not been reimbursed, should gather their receipts to seek reimbursement. A voucher system is also being developed to help those who do not have the funds to make purchases before being reimbursed.

Finally, \$22 million will be used for assistance to cities and counties affected by the floods and storms of 2008. The Department of Homeland Security will be contacting local communities within the next week on how to apply. The applications will be due by April 1.

Local Option Sales Tax

In order to get revenue faster to disaster-

affected communities, the Governor also signed legislation (Senate File 44)



to speed up the process of getting a local option sales tax proposal to the voters.

A majority of the voters must still approve the measure to add a one-cent local option sales tax. If approved, the new penny can be implemented by July 1. This expedited process will only be in place through May 5. After that, cities and counties must go back to the slower process in current law.

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Educational Compact for Military Children

The Iowa House is set to debate legislation designed to remove educational barriers imposed on children of military families because of frequent moves and deployment of their par-

ents. House File 29, which passed the House Veterans Affairs Committee unanimously, allows Iowa to join the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children.

The average military student faces transition challenges more than twice during high school, and most military children will have six to nine different school systems in their

lives from kindergarten to 12th grade. With more than half of all military personnel supporting families, the impacts of reassignment and long deployments are key considerations when making long-term life choices.

Specific impacts on military children include:

- Transfer of Records
- Course Sequencing

- Graduation Requirements
- Exclusion from Extra-Curricular Activities
- Redundant or Missed Entrance/Exit Testing
- Kindergarten and First Grade Entrance Age Variations
- Power of Custodial Parents While Parents are Deployed

The Council of State Governments estimates that the cost for

Iowa to join the compact would be \$180 this year. If adopted by the Legislature, Iowa would be the 12th state to join the compact.

Representative Ray Zirkelbach (D-Monticello) and Representative McKinley Bailey (D-Webster City), both Iraq war veterans, introduced House File 29 to add Iowa to this compact.

New Website Launched for Public Input on Budget

The Legislature launched a new website this week to bring more transparency to the budget process and give the people of Iowa a direct voice in crafting a balanced state budget. The website address is www.iowahouse.org/openbudget.

These are demanding times as the national recession and severe flooding from last summer are impacting the state. The economic downturn has created a revenue shortfall, which will require significant cutbacks and difficult choices.

The Legislature is committed to a fiscally responsible, balanced state budget that doesn't forget the needs of hard working, middle class families. The new website has detailed information about the state budget for Iowans to learn more, and an opportunity to leave ideas or suggestions to help legislators find cost savings and make budget priorities this year.

The Open Budget website has specific information for the seven appropriations areas that the Legislature uses to craft the state budget. There is also budget analy-

sis from the non-partisan Legislative Service Agency on the Governor's budget recommendations just released last week.

Now that the Governor has made his recommendations, the Legislature becomes the focal point of the appropriations process. The seven budget subcommittees will be sifting through the various budget decisions, setting priorities, and proposing budget bills that create a balanced budget.

Tax Credit Available for Middle Class Families

Working families who do not earn a lot of money may be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), as well as free help preparing their tax return. The EITC is the federal government's largest program benefiting lower earning workers.

The Internal Revenue Service estimates that 20-25% of eligible taxpayers fail to claim the credit. This could put as much as \$4,824 into the pockets of a family with two children, or send as much as \$2,917 to a family with one child, or up to \$438 for a worker with no children.

"The extra dollars eligible taxpayers can get through EITC can make their lives a little easier," said Elisabeth Buck, director of Iowa Workforce Development. Buck said some individuals and



families may qualify for the credit for the first time because of unemployment or other changes in their financial, marital or parental status during the past year.

Taxpayers with the earnings of or below the following should check to see if they qualify:

- \$38,646 (\$41,646 if married filing jointly) for families with two or more children.
- \$33,995 (\$36,995 married filing jointly) for families with one child.
- \$12,880 (\$15,880 married filing jointly) if there are no children.

Iowa offers its own EITC, which is equal to 7% of the federal tax credit. Both federal and state credits are refundable so if the credit is larger than your tax liability, you get a refund for the difference.

The EITC is a valuable but complex tax break. Free help is available to determine eligibility and file a claim through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites or at a local IRS Taxpayer Assistance Center. To locate a VITA site near you, call 1-800-829-8482.

For more information on where to locate your local IRS Taxpayer Assistance Center, please call the toll free number 1-800-829-1040 or visit www.IRS.gov.

Two Bills Proposed to Strengthen Mortgage Protections

Last summer, Congress passed the Secure and Fair Enforcement (SAFE) Mortgage Licensing Act, which requires every state to license mortgage loan originators, by August 1, 2009. It also created a Nationwide Mortgage Licensing Registry (NMLR) that states must use to license mortgage originators.

Iowa is ahead of the game, having passed legislation to license mortgage bankers and brokers in 2006, and having participated in the NMLR since its started on January 1, 2008.

The Superintendent of Banking is proposing a bill to strengthen Iowa's Mortgage Bankers and Brokers law and to conform with Federal SAFE Act requirements.

Among other things, the bill prohibits:

1. Employing any scheme to mislead borrowers.
2. Making, in any manner, a false or deceptive statement or representation.
3. Failing to make any disclosure required by any state or federal law.
4. Knowing omitting any material fact in connection with an investigation.
5. Charging a fee to get a loan for the borrower, even if no loan is actually obtained.
6. Making any threat, promise, or payment to anyone to influence their judgment regarding a loan.

The Attorney General is proposing a bill to establish a "duty of

agency" between mortgage bankers or brokers and their customers, which would require that they:

1. Place the borrower's interest ahead of any other party, including their own.
2. Not accept any undisclosed compensation in connection with their services.
3. Carry out all lawful instructions of the borrower.
4. Disclose all material facts of which they have knowledge that might reasonably affect the borrower's rights or interests regarding the mortgage loan.
5. Account for all the borrower's money and property received as agent.

Superintendent Says State Chartered Banks in Good Shape

Iowa Superintendent of Banking Tom Gronstal told the House Commerce Committee that Iowa's 319 state chartered banks are generally still in good shape. The condition of a bank is measured by Capital adequacy, Asset risk, Management, Earnings, Liquidity, and Sensitivity to risk, the so-called CAMEL rating.

With one being the best CAMEL rating and five the worst, 123 Iowa banks are rated one, 180 rated two, 15 rated three or four, and none are rated five.

1. Capital: Capital to asset ratios remain strong, averaging 9.6%, with 98% of banks well-capitalized and 2% adequately capitalized.

2. Assets: The 12 month average of classified assets was 27% of capital on December 31, 2008, up from 17% a year earlier. Loans grew 5% in 2008 through Septem-

ber 30th, but loan loss reserves increased a bit to 1.2%, compared to a 1.77% national average.



3. Earnings: Only 16 of 391 banks did not show a profit for 2008, as of September 30th. Asset return was 1.05%, the weakest since 1.07% in 2000, but still pretty good. 1.42% of all loans were 90 days past due or nonperforming, twice the 2006 level and the worst since 1992.

4. Liquidity: There is more reliance on noncore funding – sources sensitive to interest rates (high rate CDS, borrowing, etc.), as opposed to core deposits.

Iowa Mortgage Loans

Data from the Mortgage Bankers Association shows 361,715 Iowa mortgage loans, as of the third quarter of 2008.

- 5.37% were delinquent, compared to 7.29% nationally.
- 3.49% were seriously delinquent (over 90 days or in foreclosure), compared to 5.17% nationally.
- 8.0% (26,000) were subprime loans, compared to 13.5% nationally.
- 17.0% of subprime loans are seriously delinquent, compared to 19.56% nationally.

Public Safety Commissioner Sees Positive Trends

Gene Meyer, Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety (DPS), spoke to the House Public Safety Committee about the positive trends he's seeing with public safety in Iowa, as well as continued concerns and goals for the agency.

Commissioner Meyer reported that in 2008, there were 409 fatalities in Iowa, which represents a decrease of 16 compared to 2007. Seatbelt usage in Iowa continues to be around 93%, which helps with the decrease in fatalities.

However, he also says that Iowans take motor vehicle safety seriously.

Meth labs continue to be at a low number due to the 2005 law which keeps pseudoephedrine products behind the counter. But Commissioner Meyer said the agency continues to watch the importation from other states and countries.

Commissioner Meyer did state that there always seems to be an increasing need for technical equipment requests from local law en-

forcement. Someday, the Commissioner said he would like to ask for \$40 million to update various operability devices for local law enforcement.

One of Commissioner Meyer's goals is to increase specific types of law enforcement officers. He would like to increase the total number of state troopers to above 400 (in 2001 there were 450). He would also like to have 17 more special agents.

Conservation Practices Took \$40 Million Hit From Floods

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey told the House Rebuild Iowa Committee that last summer's flooding produced a "bucket of rain," causing some \$40 million in damages to conservation practices throughout Iowa. He noted that where conservation practices were in place, most worked and prevented or minimized erosion and damage. Without conservation practices, soil erosion made some of the land unusable.

These conservation practice structures will now have to be repaired. Conservation practices include grass waterways, terraces, grade stabilization structures and water control basins. To repair this damage, provide continued maintenance, and prevent future

disasters, Secretary Northey outlined a \$14.2 million program.

The biggest amount, \$11.2 million, would go for maintenance, technical support and restoration efforts including repairing conservation practices that did not qualify for federal assistance. Low interest loans would help landowners in maintaining conservation practices that were not affected by flooding.

Another \$3 million would be used for flood impact prevention, including a study to understand the flow of water using different conservation practices. Northey also recommends \$450,000 to help urban communities and landowners with planning and technical assistance. Northey believes this will help cre-

ate a better picture of Iowa's hydrologic footprint.

Committee members noted that one of the biggest problems will be finding the funding to implement these recommendations, especially with the downturn in the economy and its effect on Iowa's revenues and budget.

Hunting/Fishing License Increase Postponed

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced this week that they are postponing their proposal to increase hunting and fishing licenses to raise an additional \$7 million for the state's fish and wildlife trust fund. The department said this proposal is not withdrawn, but rather delayed. License fees are set by the Legislature.

DNR Director Rich Leopold said in a statement, "We recognize that hunting and fishing license increases are needed, however, with the increasing scale of the economic downturn, we now fear that this may place an undue financial burden on Iowa's hunters and anglers at this time." Director Leopold made this decision after consulting Governor Culver's office.

Share Flood Photos

The Rebuild Iowa Office (RIO) is asking Iowans to share their pictures and videos of the floods and tornadoes of 2008. They have created a "Share Your Experience" section and are encouraging Iowans to submit material.

Photos must be in .jpg format and videos must be sent in .wmv format. To submit, Iowans should go to RIO's website at www.rio.iowa.gov and then click the "Photo Gallery" tab on the left side of the webpage. Include your name, contact information, and a caption or description for each picture and video.

This new feature is in addition to interaction the Rebuild Iowa Office already has using Twitter and Facebook.

The department notes that the fish and wildlife trust fund, which is supported by hunting and fishing licenses, is running at a deficit. The department said the Governor's recommendation to provide an additional \$6 million this year

to the agency, to help them recover from losses that occurred from last year's floods, will allow the fund to remain solvent for another year.

Revenue in the fund is constitutionally protected and can only be

used for fish and wildlife activities. The department plans to pursue the license increase in the future to ensure the opportunities hunters and anglers rely on are preserved.

Honey Creek Resort State Park Update

Members of the joint House and Senate Transportation, Infrastructure, and Capitals Budget Subcommittee were provided information on the status of Iowa's first destination park, Honey Creek Resort State Park on Rathbun Lake. The 850-acre park opened its doors in late September, 2008.

Michelle Wilson, project manager from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), said weddings are booked for nearly every weekend this year between May and October. Every Saturday in February is 100% booked, 19 group events are planned through May, and 56 group events are planned from July through August. At the golf course, eight tournaments are planned for 2009, with

tentative plans for an additional 12 outings.

The 28 cabins are still being built. On average, they are 60% complete; some cabins are further along than others. The cabins will range from one- to four-bedrooms with fireplaces. Reservations are currently being taken for July 1st and later. People who request cabins for the spring, prior to July 1st, are reserved in the lodge with a notation that if the cabins are ready, they will be moved to the cabins.

Ms. Wilson noted that an average occupancy rate at the resort for the first three months (Oct.-Dec. 2008) was 31%, which was lower than projected. However, this is higher than the 25.2% occupancy among peer resorts in the region in

the same time period the previous year. The lodge saw 80% occupancy the last six days of December.

Honey Creek Resort State Park is publicly-owned through DNR, but is managed by a private company, Central Group Companies from St. Cloud, MN. Ms. Wilson noted that prior to opening, \$500,000 was reserved to help meet any operational challenges this first year. In its first four months, Central Group has used \$71,000 from this reserve.

Honey Creek Resort State Park includes a lodge, conference center, restaurant, indoor water park, and 18-hole golf course. For more information: www.honeycreekresort.com

Governor's Award for Quality Care

The Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA) is seeking nominations for the 2009 Governor's Award for Quality Care in Health Care Facilities. The award recognizes facilities that provide the highest quality of care to their residents.

Nominations are open to nursing homes, residential care facilities and intermediate care facilities, including those for persons with mental illness or mental retardation. Nominations may come from residents, family members, or members of a facility's resident advocate committee. They must be in to DIA by March 2, 2009.

Nomination forms can be found at <http://dia.iowa.gov> or by

calling 515-281-4115. Nominations should state the reason a facility should be considered, any unique services provided to residents, and any activities to improve quality of life.



The program began in 2001, and since then 38 facilities have been recognized. In 2008, seven received awards. They were Sunnycrest Manor in Dubuque, Oelwein Health Care Center in Oelwein, Burling House in Charles City, Arbor Springs in West Des Moines, Happy Siesta Health Care Center in Remsen, Community Memorial Health Center in Hartley, and Heritage Nursing Home in Bancroft.

Assisted living programs, elder group homes, and hospital-based nursing facilities are not eligible since they are not licensed under Iowa Code Chapter 135C. The awards are usually announced in the summer.

Mandatory Reporter List Expanded to Include Clergy

The Legislature is considering expanding the mandatory reporter list by including clergy members. House File 179 has passed the House Human Resources Committee and is eligible for debate by the full House.

The bill specifies that clergy members are required to report suspected child abuse. However, penitential communication such as confession is considered confiden-

tial and cannot be used as evidence to file a report.

Current Iowa law requires that teachers, social workers, nurses, physicians and others that interact with children report suspected child abuse.

Child abuse includes:

- Physical abuse
- Mental injury
- Sexual abuse

- Child prostitution
- Presence of illegal drugs
- Denial of critical care
- Manufacturing or possession of a dangerous substance
- Bestiality in the presence of a child

Any person may report suspected child abuse. Call Iowa's Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-362-2178 to report suspected abuse.

Specialist to Study Glenwood Resource Center

The Department of Human Resources has hired a special consultant to sustain and strengthen advances that Glenwood Resource Center has made toward compliance with U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) standards. Judith S. Johnston of Opelika, Alabama is an expert on mental retardation. She will be contracted for an eight month period.

Along with her duties to assist in the DOJ compliance, she will also analyze current services and make recommendations for im-

provement, review and develop recommendations for enhanced leadership training, and review efforts to find community settings for residents who want to move.

After three years of investigation, in late 2004, the Department of Justice gave Glenwood four and a half years to come in compliance with a civil rights settlement that was reached. The DOJ is responsible to enforce the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act. Recently, the DOJ has extended the time frame for compliance for Glen-

wood by one year due to Glenwood's inability to meet the minimum standards set in the settlement.

About 315 people with mental retardation live at the Glenwood Resource Center. Of those, more than half are profoundly retarded, three-fourths have a severe swallowing disorder, half have a seizure disorder, two-thirds have a diagnosed mental illness, a third are completely non-ambulatory, and many cannot speak and thus have difficulty participating in their care.

Tourism Industry Promoted at the Capitol

The Travel Federation and the Iowa Tourism Office presented to the House Economic Growth Committee this week. Tourism is a \$6.3 billion industry in Iowa, employing nearly 65,000 people statewide and

generating nearly \$308 million in state taxes.

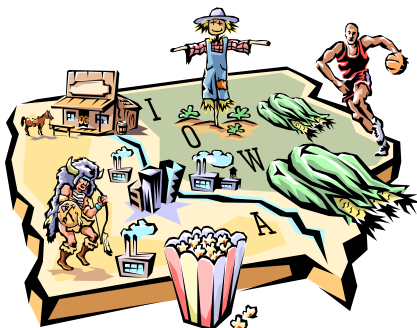
Under the Department of Economic Development, the Iowa Tourism Office works to increase the number of people traveling to, and within, the state to showcase opportunities that will ultimately increase the length and frequency of visits.

A new cooperative advertising option was offered for television in the Chicago market. Six communities invested \$20,000 each to partner with the Iowa Tourism Office in the production of the ads. The partners included Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Dubuque, Okoboji and the Quad Cities. The

30-second ads featured attractions and events from these communities and aired in the Chicago market in Spring 2008.

This current budget year is the first time in six years that the Iowa Tourism Office placed television advertising in an out-of-state market. Out-of-state advertising grants were offered for destinations to place their own advertising in markets targeted by the Iowa Tourism Office. Thirteen grants, totaling \$94,000 were awarded for regional advertising.

The Travel Federation advocated for enforcing Iowa's school start date to be the week of Sep-



tember 1. Over the past decade, Iowa schools have moved the start of school earlier each year.

The Department of Education allows school districts to start earlier. According to the Travel Federation, early school start dates

cut into attendance at the State Fair, and attendance at Iowa tourist attractions.

More than 56% of Iowa tourists are Iowa residents and travel in Iowa. Midwest families typically take their vacations before Labor

Day. The Travel Federation used the Iowa Great Lakes area as an example. For every day that school starts before Labor Day, \$1 million in tourism is lost in just that area alone.

Air & Rail Transportation Play Important Roles

Representatives from the Department of Transportation and the Union Pacific Railroad spoke to the House Transportation Committee about air and rail transportation in Iowa and how these modes of transportation are vital to Iowa's communities and jobs.

Aviation

Over 14,000 jobs in Iowa are related to aviation, which contributes \$1.5 billion to Iowa's economy. These contributions are made through general, commercial and military aviation. Iowa sees 250 million pounds of cargo come in and out of its airports in a year, and annually there are 4,000 helicopter emergency medical service missions.

Every type of aviation relies on programs that are administered by the Department of Transportation (DOT). Some of these programs are wildlife mitigation, windsocks, pavement management, land use near airports and airport inspections. Three of the most talked

about programs are general aviation vertical infrastructure, commercial service vertical infrastructure, and the airport improvement program.

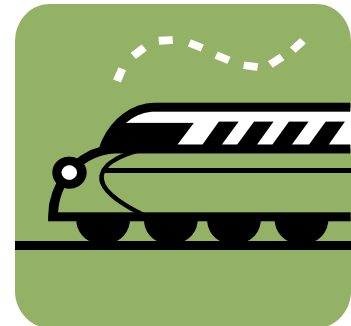
The vertical infrastructure programs assist with costs associated with buildings, hangers and fuel facilities. The airport improvement program assists all types of airports with on-going maintenance such as pilot safety programs, planning studies and Automated Weather Observation Systems (AWOS). Each year, the department continues to see more requests from Iowa's airports through these programs.

Rail

Today, Iowa's rails are used almost exclusively for commercial hauling, even though Amtrak has two routes through the state. Freight employs over 700 Iowans.

Many in the business industry prefer rails over commercial trucks for long distance hauls for cost saving reasons. The Union Pacific reported that one intermodal train takes up to 280 trucks off the high-

way. After the flooding this summer, the rail industry is having to invest in rebuilding and repairing tracks, signals and some bridges.



Currently, Iowa's DOT is exploring the best options for possible passenger rail, both financially and ridership. There is opportunity to participate in a federal program, which would only require Iowa to provide a 20% match. There are many states that are looking to participate in this program, so Iowa needs to make a decision as soon as possible.

Secretary Northey Discusses Ag Department Budget

Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey discussed the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) budget with the Agriculture and Natural Resources budget subcommittee. Secretary Northey said this is "obviously tough budgetary times."

Secretary Northey said the FY 2009 1.5% cut proposed by Governor Culver for IDALS will largely be

handled by leaving open full time employee positions. In total, Secretary Northey said 12 full time positions will not be filled as a cost saving measure.

The governor suggested a 6.5% cut in the budget of all state agencies, including IDALS, for FY 2010. Secretary Northey said a 6.5% cut to the IDALS would equate to approximately \$1.4 million.

The governor proposed an additional \$422,000 in deappropriations from IDALS for FY 2009. Taking all three cuts together, the total cut to the IDALS budget would be approximately 9.7%.

Conservation Districts Fight Erosion

This week, Deb Ryun, executive director of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI), gave a presentation to the House Environmental Protection Committee. CDI is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that educates on soil, water and other natural resource conservation issues.

The CDI was created legislatively in 1939 in response to soil erosion caused by the Dust Bowl. The first conservation district was formed in Marion County in 1940. By 1952, all of the land in Iowa

was covered by a conservation district. Every conservation district in Iowa was locally created.

The CDI was formed to address issues of erosion. Today, sediment in Iowa's waterways is the most important water quality issue in the state. Ms. Ryun indicated that cover crops, grass waterways, buffer zones, and pastureland can help reduce sediment in Iowa's waterways. Ms. Ryun indicated that whole farm conservation practices are necessary to fully address this issue.

Chuck Gipp, director of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship division of soil conservation, said that the state suffered over \$100 million in damage from the 2008 flood. Mr. Gipp indicated that 10% of the farmable land in the state suffered severe erosion in 2008. Mr. Gipp stated that the losses would have been much worse if not for practices that were already done statewide, but flooding showcased the need to do more of what we already do.

Judicial Branch Not Exempt From Tough Budget Times

Chief Justice Marsha Ternus stressed the possible consequences to Iowans if the Legislature does not adequately fund Iowa's courts. She was quick to note that the courts, as with other state agencies, can and should find cost savings measures, but responsibilities of the courts are heavily weighted.

If the courts' operating budgets are reduced, this could very well result in the delay of service and cases, as well as information sharing with other courts and state agencies. Chief Justice Ternus stated that it easy to forget that the

courts manage a heavy load in civil, not just criminal cases. In 2008, Iowa courts saw 10,000 foreclosures, 16,000 landlord/tenant relation cases and 40,000 domestic relations cases.

Identified Savings

On Tuesday, Chief Justice Ternus ordered all court personnel to take one unpaid day, February 16, Presidents' Day. This furlough will not affect judges and magistrates, but is estimated to save the courts more than \$335,000. Since February 16 is a federal holiday, this day

was identified in an effort to ease the effect on the public.

All judicial branch employees and officers have been asked to reduce all travel to a minimum. This is a big request since travel is the largest non-personnel cost to the judicial branch. Chief Justice Ternus stated that if the courts are asked to find further reductions, identified options include more furloughs, layoffs, shifting record keeping to electronic means, and possibly merging court offices.

Iowa Cities Outline Session Priorities

Alan Kemp, Executive Director of the Iowa League of Cities, told the House Local Government Committee that disaster recovery is priority number one for Iowa cities. Kemp says that League priorities are adopted by the entire membership. Not surprising, cities are looking for help to get their communities and their residents back on their feet, as well as help plan for future disasters.

The second priority was to give cities a way to diversify their revenue options to lessen the dependence on property taxes. Right now,

according to the League, property taxes provide over 50% of the funding for cities.

Kemp thanked Legislators for supporting increased revenue for Iowa's roads and bridges. However, he noted that the 2008 legislation did not eliminate the \$200 million shortfall Iowa is facing, which has only grown worse because of flooding and storms. The League would like to see additional sources of revenue found to eliminate the shortfall and meet Iowa's basic infrastructure needs.

Another priority mentioned was maintaining, or preferably increasing, economic development programs to increase growth in Iowa. Finally, the League recognizes the need to improve Iowa's water, but notes that improving our drinking water and wastewater infrastructure will be very expensive. Cities need help facing the challenges of upgrading or replacing aging and outdated systems and meeting state and federal requirements.

Status of Municipal Fire and Police Retirement System

Dennis Jacobs, Executive Director of the Municipal Fire and Police Retirement System, presented the House State Government Committee with the funded status of this retirement system.

The Municipal Fire and Police Retirement System, also known as the 411 system, is a defined benefit retirement plan for police officers and fire fighters in Iowa's larger cities and towns. Members of this retirement system do not receive social security.

The retirement system has, since October 2007, experienced a decline in the value of its overall portfolio due to the effect of the credit crisis. Jacobs' report indicates that this decline in value is consistent with that experienced by other plans and portfolios.

He indicated that the system's portfolio is invested in a very broad diversified manner, which is in accordance with the asset allocation policy annually set by the system's board.

Mr. Jacobs advised the committee of the action being taken by the board, including: regular reviews with each investment firm; a periodic re-examination of the investment policy; participation in information briefings provided by economists and market commentators on the condition of the economy and the markets; ongoing reporting about the plan's financial status via a newsletter; and adjustment of the contribution rates occur with the annual actuarial valuations.

Motorcycle Safety Forum on March 13 in Cedar Rapids

Persons are able to sign up for the Sixth Annual Motorcycle Safety Forum, which is facilitated by the Iowa Traffic Safety Alliance. The event will be held on March 13 at the Cedar Rapids Marriott from 7:30 am to 4 pm. The focus of this year's forum is increasing safety through "conspicuity", and the theme is Gear Up 4 Safety.

Because motorcycle fatalities have increased both nationally and

in Iowa, these events provide an opportunity for all involved parties to collaborate on ideas to make Iowa's roads safer for motorcyclists. Early data shows that 54 people were killed last year while driving or riding on a motorcycle in Iowa. Five of those deaths involved crashes with deer, and 52% of the crashes were single-vehicle crashes.

Registration is free and lunch will be provided. Participants are

asked to be prepared to share ideas and thoughts throughout the day. To register, contact Iowa State University's Conference Services by phone at 515-294-6222, fax 515-294-6223, or e-mail UCS-info@iastate.edu