President Kramer presented Governor Vilsack, who delivered the following Condition of the State and Budget Address:

Thank you, Madam President, Mr. Speaker, thank you members of the General Assembly, thank you distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen.

After a welcome like that from both sides of the aisle, I am tempted to sit down right now and keep my bipartisan support intact. But I will take a chance and speak about the state of our great state and its future, taking the risk that you will be as supportive, generous, and enthusiastic with your applause when I finish.

During the last year, the Lt. Governor, the First Lady, and I experienced the heart and soul of this state. We looked at the faces of Iowans struck by devastating tornadoes, floods, and droughts—and we saw determination. We looked into the faces of Iowans who farm the land, concerned about whether their way of life would continue—and we saw character. We looked into the faces of Iowans who are coping with the unexplainable tragedy of children and firefighters who died recently in Keokuk—and we saw strength. In all those experiences, and many others, we felt the strong bonds of community. Even in our most challenging times, Iowans’ determination, character, strength, and dedication to community triumph.

In our travels across our great state, we have been struck by the renewed sense of purpose in the air. It is our collective desire to move ahead. It is a longing for greatness, so real you can reach out and touch it. All over the state we see a new era unfolding. As it unfolds, people here, across our nation and around the world, recognize that Iowa is a great place to live, to work, and most importantly, to raise a family. Iowa’s promise is its quality of life.

After meeting remarkable Iowans everywhere, the Lt. Governor, First Lady, and I are convinced that Iowa’s moment to lead is now.

The building we gather in today is an emblem of Iowa’s long-standing belief in greatness. Those that came before us made a conscious choice not to construct a pedestrian, ordinary capitol. They built a shining edifice on a hill, solid and timeless. A special building for a special people; a special place to write special laws. In the past decades, this building fell victim to complacency. The plaster cracked, the ornament crumbled. But our generation of Iowans rejected complacency and erected scaffolding to repair and replace. Building on a solid foundation, we restore this building to greatness.

For our state to reach its fullest potential, we too must build on our strengths with clear goals in mind. Establishing clear goals begins by an honest assessment of where we are.

In the past year, the Iowa 2010 Strategic Planning Group has done an admirable job of outlining where this state is and where it is headed. The group’s work indicates that without bold action, Iowa risks limited, not limitless, opportunities.

Our challenge is demographic. We know the statistics all too well. More than half of our counties had their population peak in the year 1900—one hundred years ago. Our present population grows at a rate one-fourth that of the nation’s. At current growth rates, we will not return to our 1980 population until the year 2010—thirty years to get back to where we were. Skilled worker shortages reflect the impact of this stagnant growth.

To make the situation more daunting, our growth sectors involve Iowans no longer in the work force. The fastest growing segment of our population today, is people over the age of 100. For the first time in our state’s history, since we began keeping track, we have more people over the age of 74, than we have five or under.

As we have struggled with these demographic trends, we also have struggled to increase per capita and family incomes. Iowa ranks at the bottom third of states in per capita income—a ranking that consistently corresponds with the percentage of our work force that holds a college degree. Simply put, these statistics and others point to three key goals that must be reached to realize Iowa’s promise.

We need more Iowans. We need younger Iowans. We need better-paid Iowans.

For the past six months, the Lt. Governor and I have challenged our staff and the departments of state government to focus on these goals and to develop programs and budget priorities aimed at achieving these goals. We’ve also encouraged the participation of all Iowans, through the 2010 Strategic Planning Council efforts and two weeks of public hearings on the budget, held at locations around the state. Through this inclusive process, we developed the agenda we outline for you today—an agenda that seizes our moment to lead—an Iowa quality of life agenda that builds and improves upon our already good quality of life. We will be better educated and healthier. We will enjoy cleaner air and water and the benefits of richer soil. We will experience value-added economic opportunity and feel more secure in our homes, schools and communities, and we will be served by a responsible, accountable government.

The budget presented to the general assembly funds these priorities while recognizing the need to limit general fund spending this year. We take seriously our collective duty to be fiscally responsible. When revenues in the current year didn’t increase as expected, we called for budget cuts and spending reductions. As part of our budget, we have already presented to you a deappropriations bill. We ask you for quick and speedy action on the bill. I have appreciated the cooperation exhibited by leaders of both chambers and both parties as cuts and reductions were identified for consideration. Let us continue that work together. Working together, I know of no reason why, that bill could not be signed one week from today.

Ordinarily, a budget-cutting year would be a very bad time to present an aggressive list of new ideas. I can already hear the objections. But our administration has a different approach. This year, we are going back to the basics—the three Rs.

The three Rs I am talking about are not reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Our three Rs are reduce, reallocate, and redouble. State agencies have identified $30 million in reductions they are ready to make. They also will reallocate current dollars to fund priorities by undertaking hard-nosed evaluations of how funds can be better spent. As for redoubling, state agencies are working smarter than ever to find other sources of money for our priorities—from federal funds, to private foundation funds.

The budget we are presenting assumes a general fund revenue growth rate of 4.2% and a general fund expenditure rate of 2.8%. Our budget is balanced, is fiscally responsible, and calls for no new taxes.

Last year, working together, we made a down payment on better educational opportunities for Iowa’s students with the class size reduction, reading initiative, by increasing allowable growth, and by fully funding the community college formula for the first time in recent memory. We must continue investing in our children and their future. We fund an additional $10 million this year for the class size reduction and reading initiative. We propose fixing the allowable growth rate at 4% for fiscal year 2002 and fund an additional $8.9 million in new resources for the community colleges. But, that is just a beginning—we pledge to do more.

We pledge to do more because Iowa prides itself on quality schools—from kindergarten to graduate school. The challenge of a global economy will only be met by well-educated people. Past success does not justify a lack of action. Declining test scores warn us of the price of complacency.

To reverse that decline, emphasis must be placed on early childhood education. Iowa must be the leader, a nationally recognized leader in early childhood education. Brain research now proves the importance of the first years of life in the learning process. In Iowa, parents will be their child’s first and best teacher. In Iowa, childcare providers will recognize their important role in the learning process.

Our children are entitled to a great start. We propose increased funding of $5.2 million—throughout empowerment communities—to improve early childhood education, and additional resources to provide greater access to quality childcare. Let us pledge together to rewrite the nation’s number one educational goal. Today it reads that every child should be ready to learn by the time he or she reaches kindergarten. Tomorrow, let it read that in Iowa, as a result of our efforts, every child shall begin learning at birth and be ready to learn more by the time he or she reaches kindergarten.

As children enter Iowa schools, they will experience smaller class sizes and well-wired schools. But, a great education requires more. Poorly paid teachers and crumbling school buildings undermine our past efforts to improve educational opportunity. Today, I announce an acceleration and expansion of our efforts to recruit, educate and retain quality teachers. In the real world, we continue to lose many of our brightest and our best teachers to other states, who offer incentives or higher pay or to other professions that do likewise. We can no longer afford to ignore the competition. Officials at the University of Northern Iowa and many of the private colleges know all too well how many potentially good teachers we lose each year.

First, I am asking the Council on Continuous Improvement in Education to make recommendations for revising the manner in which we compensate teachers to enable Iowa to be competitive for quality and to report to me by the end of this year. Second, I’m asking you to establish a fund to create an incentive for one or more school districts to develop and implement a model teacher compensation system. Third, I’m asking you to approve a tax credit program for three years that will help school districts now, particularly in rural areas, that are having a difficult time recruiting quality teachers to their districts to do so. Finally, I am asking you to adopt changes in IPERS, including the Rule of 85, that will enable teachers interested in retiring to do so. These retirements will free up resources that must be used to increase teacher compensation. It is time to get serious about teacher pay.

Our children cannot afford to wait any longer for us to act. These steps will enable us to better compete for talent, but we must not stop there. We must increase funding for the teacher induction program that will ensure statewide application of a mentoring program for first-year teachers. Extensive mentoring results in higher teacher satisfaction, which in turn means better retention of quality teachers. After investing so much in quality teachers, we cannot afford to lose them after only a few years of teaching.

Quality teachers with smaller classes and up-to-date technology mean little if school buildings are unsafe or are in poor condition. Iowa remains one of only ten states that fails to provide any direct assistance to districts for building maintenance, repair or construction. Our state ought to provide resources to school districts faced with serious safety issues and significant building needs. We must recognize that some districts simply cannot do it alone.

Today, we propose using $100,000,000 of our $300,000,000 major attractions millennium fund to begin addressing safety issues and other building needs. I support the need to help our urban communities with major attractions to finance them, but the major attraction of most communities is and should be a safe, well-maintained school.

We must also recognize that education in the 21st century will not be confined to a single geographic location. Learning in this century should take place anytime, anywhere, for anybody. Children learning at an accelerated rate ought to have the chance to do so at virtual schools or regional academies created through technology. We fund the beginning of this accelerated learning initiative. Access to well-organized educational materials should be only a click away. Iowa should lead in the development of the technology that delivers such information. We propose a $2 million appropriation to begin the building the technological infrastructure of this 21st century learning community. Leadership in education requires nothing less.

Along with safer, better schools, Iowans seeking knowledge will experience an enriched Iowa through better libraries and literate communities. The First Lady has been a strong advocate for libraries this past year, visiting libraries large and small. She intends to visit every library in the state, and is well on her way. We need to continue funding for the Enrich Iowa program and to increase it. Her Stories 2000 Initiative will expand on the theme of literate communities. This initiative underscores the importance of reading and storytelling early in life and throughout life. It strengthens family and community identity and helps prepare young people to read.

Would an improved quality of life, centering on providing the best education in the country make a difference, leading to more Iowans, younger Iowans and better-paid Iowans? Consider the story of Brian and Diane Bergstrom and their family, who moved to Cedar Rapids from Chicago four years ago.

Brian and Diane grew up in the Swedesburg-Olds area. They both have advanced degrees. Diane received her master’s degree from UNI, and Brian graduated from Harvard Law School, after a fellowship at Cambridge University in England. They were living and working in downtown Chicago, and started thinking about where their first son, Austin, now five years old, would go to school. They moved back for a better education for Austin and his new younger brother, Augie, who was born in Iowa. They wanted to be closer to their families, including Brian’s parents, Melvin and Vicky, who also are here today. Education was a key reason this couple moved back. Quality educational opportunities were Iowa’s promise to the Bergstroms. Welcome back to Iowa, Brian, Diane, and Austin. Please join me in welcoming back home to Iowa the Bergstroms.

Iowa can seize this moment and become a national leader in education. But we also have an unparalleled opportunity to be a national leader in health care, specifically, preventative health care. Our tobacco settlement presents us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do something meaningful and long-lasting. We could, given the tight general fund, use all of these funds to cave in to the immediate financial pressures and avoid having tomake tough choices, or we could dribble it out in a broad array of tax cuts, losing forever the opportunity to save health care dollars in the future and make Iowa a healthier state. How we decide to invest these settlement funds will say much about our collective desire to improve the health and welfare of Iowans. Let us join together for a healthier Iowa today, where disease, illness and the after-effects are properly treated or prevented.

Where the stress and burden of illness and disease experienced by many Iowa families is relieved. If we invest $55 million of tobacco settlement funds, we receive an immediate return of $100 million of federal resources. Our investment will also pay for itself in general funds of health care savings, as we realize millions in savings over time. More important than dollars and cents are the lives that will be saved. Here is what we must do:

1. Educate young people not to smoke or convince them tostop smoking through an aggressive anti-tobacco and enforcement program as proposed by Attorney General Tom Miller; this will save over a thousand young lives a year;
2. Help Iowa’s working families provide health insurance for their children through HAWK-I insurance and expanded Medicaid eligibility; this will impact tens of thousands of our children;
3. Extend the time of residential substance abuse and mental health treatments and give those in need of help a real shot at recovery;
4. Expand respite care for over one thousand families coping with the difficult task of caring for a loved one who is physically or mentally challenged, including brain injured loved ones;
5. Create better access to primary care through stronger public health initiatives and from a variety of health care professionals who will be better compensated for their efforts; and,
6. Respond to the Older Iowa Legislature’s number one legislative goal by using federal funds in setting a national standard with a high quality, comprehensive care system for older Iowans needing home health care, assisted living, or nursing home care—a system that leads the nation in ensuring the maximum level of independence and quality of life for this most important group of Iowans.

Finally, if we are to lead in health care, we must erase the stigma of mental illness. Mental illness affects one out of every four Iowa families. A better public/private partnership must be developed if we are to properly and promptly treat mental illness. Iowa is the nation’s insurance capital. In that capacity, our state has the unique responsibility and opportunity to lead—and lead we will, when we establish full parity for mental illness coverages in insurance policies. Parity’s time in Iowa has come.

Will an improved quality of life and Iowa being a national leader in preventative health care make a difference and lead to more Iowans, younger Iowans and better-paid Iowans? Let me tell you the story of Yukio Strachan from Des Moines. Yukio came to Drake University’s School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences from Chicago. After receiving her Doctor of Pharmacy degree in 1998, she decided to stay. Why? She says a big draw was a good job with Hy-Vee, and the family atmosphere of the company. Also, she believes she has more opportunities in pharmacy here, such as conducting regular teaching seminars at a residence for senior citizens. She expected Iowa to be slower-paced than Chicago, but has found herself busier than before with activities that range from being a fitness instructor, to her sorority, to her church. Quality of health care opportunities was Iowa’s promise to Yukio.

Welcome home to Iowa, Yukio.

However, being a national leader in education or preventative health care will mean little if we can not drink the water or breathe the air. Aldo Leopold once said: “We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” We face a severe threat to water quality from the 159 polluted waterways that crisscross our state. We clean up these waterways by recognizing what the land and water are to all of us—the essential building blocks of our future, the essential infrastructure of our state. We must invest in our working land and water. Our clean water initiative proposes to do just that. For a small investment of state dollars, we generate over $50 million from the federal government to put in the pockets of our farm families in the form of incentives for farmer participation in private land conservation programs. These programs support the establishment of vegetative buffers, field borders and wetlands, as well as encourage soil conservation practices.

The clean water initiative we propose is a catalyst for positive change and builds on what we know works. Fully fund the clean water initiative and watch the native prairie grasses grow and become home to natural habitat that will draw people from all over the country. Fully fund the clean water initiative and measure the improvement of our water. Fully fund the clean water initiative and welcome more prosperity back to rural Iowa. This clean water initiative will establish Iowa as a national leader in private land conservation.

One other program also must be fully funded to improve Iowa’s environment. Isn’t it about time to fulfill the promise made to the people of Iowa in the last century, in the last millennium? Shouldn’t we finally fund REAP at $20 million?

Leadership involves accepting the challenge of finding solutions to what appears to be unsolvable problems. Leadership in land stewardship and the environment mandates that we resolve the hog lot issue in our state. We propose a reasonable solution, shared responsibility with integrators and statewide standards based on sound science with modifications allowed based on a county’s land use plans. We pride ourselves on our local control of schools and the empowerment of local officials to make decisions about a broad array of human services. Aren’t local officials as qualified to help make decisions about their environment? Let’s find a way to give local control to the siting and location of large livestock facilities.

Will investing in our natural resources by being a national leader in private land conservation, our parks, our roadsides, and our trails lead to more Iowans, younger Iowans, and better-paid Iowans? Let me tell you the story of Dave Carr and Mark Chelgren, co-founders of Frog Legs in Vinton.

Dave grew up in Charles City, graduated in aerospace engineering from Iowa State, and did his graduate work in California. He is a cyclist who has ridden 13 RAGBRAIs, and RAGBRAI lured him and native Californian Mark Chelgren back in 1995. A RAGBRAI connection took them to watch a wheelchair rugby match in Colorado. Why, they wondered, couldn’t wheelchairs have the high-performance features of the high-tech mountain bikes they rode? An idea was born. By this time, Mark had followed his heart back to Iowa to marry Janet Comer that he met on RAGBRAI. The business was begun in their living room. He and Dave created a high-tech shock absorber for wheelchairs, shaped like a frog’s leg, hence the company name. Dave Kaufman, a native Iowan living in Las Vegas, moved back to become the director of marketing.

Now in their third year of business in Vinton, Iowa, Frog Legs sells worldwide and has ten employees.

Quality air, water, and open spaces were Iowa’s promise to Dave, Mark, and Dave. Welcome home to Iowa.

It can be difficult to know when you are standing at the beginning of a scientific revolution. When John Atanasoff and Clifford Berry put together the world’s first digital computer in Ames in 1939, it was doubtful that they knew. Likewise, the scientists and businesspeople around this state who are entering a golden age of discovery in agricultural research, probably can’t realize the future ramifications of their work. But as I travel to the biocatasis laboratory in Iowa City, and hear the plans for the new plant sciences center at Iowa State University, and see the new, leading-edge companies that use plants and animals for products ranging from fuels and fibers to pharmacy products, I can sense that Iowa is uniquely poised to become the epicenter of a new world food economy.

Are we as a state going to rise to the challenge and become the food capital of the world? It makes sense for us to do so. We have the infrastructure, the knowledge and the history of agricultural innovation.

Let us continue our quest to be the world’s food capital for leadership and greatness in this scientific revolution by increasing funding for the plant science center at Iowa State University, and by improving the biology program at the University of Iowa and the biology instruction program at the University of Northern Iowa.

Working with John Pappajohn and our Department of Economic Development, we have identified the nation’s best practices for venture capital. We present that to you as well. Let us, working together, create a climate where entrepreneurs can grow their dreams as easily as we grow our corn and beans.

In doing so, let us create the opportunity to convert the 60% of the raw commodities grown in our state to value-added products, such as ethanol. Let us, working together, figure a way to become the nation’s leader in ethanol.

Value-added agriculture, changing commodities to ingredients, is the key to keeping profits and people in Iowa.

For Iowa to become a national leader in the new economy, rural Iowa must grow; and for rural Iowa to grow, it needs high-speed Internet access. Today, I call upon all of Iowa’s private telecommunications companies to meet with me, the Lt. Governor, and the state’s technology and communications officials to develop a strategic plan to make that happen as quickly as possible.

Last year, the Lt. Governor convened a group of talented Iowans and challenged them to provide solutions to skilled work force shortages. I appreciate her efforts and the efforts of the 21st Century Workforce Council. Our budget reflects their work. The council confirmed that Iowa’s skilled work force shortages derive from our stagnant population, but pointed out that our full employment statistics are deceiving. Even with record low unemployment levels across the state, there are Iowa populations experiencing high rates of unemployment. African-Americans are unemployed at double-digit rates. People with disabilities are unemployed at double-digit rates.

We propose the creation of an opportunity fund that would provide resources to remove the barriers existing to full employment for those Iowans.

At the start of the new millennium, let us bring Iowa’s promise to all of its people.

But, there is another group of Iowans that we should pay attention to in our quest for skilled workers—Iowa’s at-risk students. No child should be allowed to fall through the cracks by becoming a high school dropout or failing to develop needed job skills. Our budget provides $9.8 million for alternative schools funding for at-risk students. We also propose the expansion of a public-private partnership started last year called Jobs for America’s Graduates. This program, currently thriving in 22 other states, focuses attention and resources on young people who are in the bottom 20 percent of their class. It has been successful in keeping teenagers in school to graduate, and then following through for a year after graduation to ensure their continued success at work or at the next level of education.

There is more to do. We have to complete the good work you did last year in creating opportunities for enhanced skills for Iowa’s workers at our community colleges. There needs to be greater flexibility given to the community colleges in spending the resources provided for infrastructure on equipment. Financial assistance must be extended to those interested in upgrading their skills. Any individual willing to work hard enough to obtain new skills and to stay in Iowa and use those skills should not be shut out by the cost of tuition. The core program, which stands for career opportunities and resources for education, proposed in this budget will add the flexibility and financial assistance needed to make a good program even better.

Our skilled worker shortage also can be eased by making Iowa an inviting place for those coming to America, drawn by its hopes and dreams. Had it not been for newcomers from other countries, Iowa would have experienced an out-migration of citizens in the last decade. We must make sure that Iowa lives up to its history of a welcoming state. Too often, difficulties exist for immigrants coming to our state and for the communities in which they settle. Many Iowa communities, such as Storm Lake and West Liberty, are working hard on these challenges. All of Iowa should learn from their experiences. We propose developing a number of centers for new Iowans, run by Iowa Workforce Development, to help families and communities seize the opportunity of diversity. Let freedom’s beacon of inclusion shine brightest here in the heartland. At the start of the new millennium, let us bring Iowa’s promise to all of its people.

Can improving the quality of life for new immigrants and being a leader in the new economy lead to more Iowans, younger Iowans, and better-paid Iowans? Let me tell you the story of the West Liberty Elementary School, where half of the students come from Spanish-speaking homes. Many of these children’s parents work at West Liberty Foods turkey processing plant.

Two years ago, the elementary school began an innovative program, aimed at producing bright, bilingual students. Starting in preschool, students who volunteered for the project were taught in English for half of the school day and in Spanish for the other half.

We have with us today 37 first-grade students who are in this dual-language program. Their principal, Nancy Gardner, also is with them, as well as several teachers.

Now, these students may be in first grade, but they already know more than I do regarding languages. Think of what they’ll be able to do in the world economy when they graduate!

Students, I’ve been practicing and I have a question to ask you. I’ll ask it in Spanish, and you can answer in English.

My question is: En cual estado es mejor vivir y estudiar?

(In what state is it best to live and study?)

Students answer: The state of Iowa!

Muy bien. Muchas gracias!

(Very good students. Thank you!)

Quality of value-added economic opportuity is our promise to these students.

State government needs to be more accountable and be operated like a business. We’ve started by initiating a massive and comprehensive effort at regulatory reform. This is just a beginning.

An accountable government means a government who knows who the boss really is. It is not the immediate supervisor, or the department head, the Governor, or legislative leader. It’s the people. Government is of, for, and by the people. To reach that goal, we must reconnect Iowans to their government by making it available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Currently, our state’s information technology systems are a patchwork of computer systems that often are incompatible with each other and not capable of 24/7 service. We need an IT department with a dedicated, uninterrupted, and reliable funding stream for information technology. Delivering 24/7 service.

For years, we have talked about how uncompetitive our tax system is—how high our highest tax rate appears to be—how it discourages growth and expansion—how difficult it makes recruiting top talent from outside the state. Here again, we have a choice. To play politics as usual and fail to take action, or solve this problem once and for all. An accountable government does what is right for the people, not what is politically expedient for special interests. Let’s eliminate our high tax rates. Let’s simplify our tax system. Let’s reduce the number of tax brackets. Let’s eliminate federal deductibility. For those who are skeptical that tax rates will creep right back up, let’s recognize who the boss really is in our systems—let’s give the people the power to vote on future tax rate increases.

An accountable government is also built on trust. We establish trust by guaranteeing that our service is what the customer expects—that is why we propose a series of money-back guarantees for certain state services such as licenses and permits to ensure quality and satisfaction.

We also build trust by the process we use to elect public officials. Iowa needs more campaign disclosure and campaign finance reform.

Voters need fuller disclosure. They ought to be able to find out who is financing any candidate. We should require full disclosure up to Election Day of contributions and expenditures. Iowans ought to be able to find out who is paying for the telephone calls used in a campaign—especially those annoying push poll calls. We should require a disclaimer at the end of each call, identifying who is paying for the call.

At some point, the money madness in politics must stop. Campaigns for governor should not be about money raised, but issues answered. There is a better way. Iowa should make available public funds, not from tax revenues, but from earned interest, to candidates for governor who voluntarily agree to limit their spending and who have broad-based support. Our agenda is about government of, by, and for the people—not government of, by, and for thousands, tens of thousands or millions of dollars in contributions. Better disclosure, public financing, limited spending for governor’s races, and term limits for governors put the people back in charge.

Will quality of life delivered through a more accountable government lead to more Iowans, younger Iowans and better-paid Iowans? Let me tell you the story of Bruce Banister of Jefferson, who sells classical guitars through the Internet. He’s open 24 hours a day and epitomizes the new way to be responsive to customers.

Bruce grew up in Jefferson, and spent years in Spain studying classical guitar. He later went to Germany, where he taught and performed. He began buying and selling finely made classical guitars to an esoteric group of buyers worldwide. He met and married photographer Carola Wicenti there, and she agreed to move back to Iowa in the summer of 1998. Bruce realized that his website-based business could be headquartered anywhere. If you want to find him, just type in classicalguitarnet.com. He says he moved back for Iowa’s open spaces, slower-paced life, and to be close to family.

Quality government is Iowa’s promise to Bruce and Carola. Welcome back to Iowa.

The last part of the quality of life agenda I’ll mention today is perhaps the most basic. It doesn’t do any good to improve education, clean up the environment, prevent disease, and create a larger and smarter work force if our communities aren’t safe. Safe communities are one of Iowa’s basic strengths. To ensure our safe communities, we must reduce the supply and demand for illegal drugs. I remain committed to a plan we worked on last year to fight the methamphetamine epidemic by adding six new narcotics agents to the Department of Public Safety this year. These agents will make inroads in our war against methamphetamine and other drugs.

We also propose increasing the staff for our state criminal laboratory to aid our prosecutors in investigations leading to convictions. Another tool in our effort should be the expansion of drug courts. Drug courts aimed at lower-risk substance abusers have shown to be successful in lowering the rate of recidivism among its graduates. We must increase our commitment to community-based corrections as an alternative to prison for low-risk drug addicts, holding them accountable for their offense and providing necessary treatment. We need to keep prison beds for more dangerous criminals.

We need to avoid losing Iowans, particularly young Iowans, to untimely deaths. It is tragic that children are being killed in firearm accidents. New educational programs for gun owners will prevent children’s access to firearms. Our sheriffs and the Department of Public Safety will be working together on this effort. We also need to ensure that if handguns do get into the hands of children they not lead to accidental deaths. Handguns sold by dealers in Iowa, in the future, should be required to have safety locks. We have no hesitation requiring safety caps on aspirin bottles—why not safety locks on handguns?

Will safe communities and a focus on worthwhile programs for children lead to more Iowans, younger Iowans, and better-paid Iowans? Let me tell you the story of Deirdre Cleary and her husband Marcos, who moved to Des Moines six months ago from New York City.

Deirdre’s Iowa connection was from middle school. She attended middle school in Nevada, and then moved to California. She’s lived in New York City the past 13 years, although her grandparents still live near Iowa Falls.

Last summer, she came to the reception for former Iowans which the Human Resource Consortium, the Department of Economic Development, and our office held in New York City. This was the event that we thought would draw perhaps 200 former Iowans. More than 800 showed up. When Dierdre attended the reception and talked with state officials, she decided to come home. She and her husband Marcos had been wanting to own a house in a good neighborhood where they could have one thing: a safe backyard. They wanted that backyard for their two sons, Kristofer, age seven, and Jacob, age 15 months.

They moved in August. Dierdre found a job in her field, social work, at Mainstream Living, as a supported living coordinator for persons with mental disabilities. Marcos, who was born and raised in Brooklyn, also found a job quickly. They are renting a home and hope to purchase their own home—with a backyard—soon.

Quality of safe homes, schools, and communities is Iowa’s promise to Deirdre and her family. Welcome back to Iowa, Deirdre. And welcome home to Iowa, Kristofer.

During this past year, I have been energized by meeting with young Iowans and seeing their hope and enthusiasm for the future. More than we realize, they do listen to us and watch what we do. As I visited schools across our state, I said the Pledge of Allegiance more than once.

Now you know that when you say the pledge, you do a few things. You stand a little straighter and a little taller. You place your hand over your heart—a symbol that you are repeating those words in all honesty. And you look at the American flag.

The words of the pledge stay with you a lifetime, particularly the last phrase, which is perhaps its most powerful and visionary. When our forefathers wrote “... with liberty and justice for all,” it was our collective guarantee of safety.

They did not write: “... with liberty and justice for all those who share my religious beliefs.”

They did not write: “... with liberty and justice for all those who share my skin color.”

They did not write: “... with liberty and justice for all those who speak the same language I do.”

They did not write: “... with liberty and justice for all those who live as I do.”

They wrote: “... with liberty and justice for all.”

We teach the Pledge of Allegiance to all our children. They are justified in asking us if we believe, if we truly believe and live the words we have them memorize.

Do we really believe in liberty and justice for all? I believe in our heart of hearts we do. I believe Iowa can lead the nation in delivering on this guarantee.

I’d like to invite you here this morning to stand with me, placing our hands over our hearts, and repeating the words that our country was founded on. Let us stand a little taller and a little straighter and think about these simple words that should guide our lives—particularly that last phrase.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. And to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Over the last two hundred plus years, Americans have fought and died to uphold that vision of liberty and justice for all. We owe a debt of gratitude to those veterans, which is why we propose fully funding Iowa’s share of the World War II memorial.

Please remain standing as I close. We have now said the Pledge of Allegiance. It will be a sign of our individual and our collective integrity, whether we live by those words and act by them when we take action in this Chamber, in the Senate Chamber and in the Governor’s office. It will be a sign of our collective leadership that we improve our quality of life and realize Iowa’s promise.

As we make our communities safer, our schools better, our health care more accessible, our environment cleaner, our crops and workers more valuable, and our government more accountable, people will come. As we build on our strengths of fertile soil and fertile minds, people will come. As Ray Kinsella was told in the movie *Field of Dreams* about our fields of opportunities: “People will come. They will come to Iowa for reasons they can’t even fathom. Oh, people will come, Ray. People will most definitely come.”

May your God, my God, and our God bless this great state and its people.

Thank you.