

Governor Chet Culver Inaugural Address

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Iowa State Capitol
Des Moines, IA
As delivered

I love Iowa.

This "land between two rivers" is blessed with people of strong character; a history that is rich; and as the Native Americans who came before us said, "A Beautiful Land."

My fondest childhood memories are docked along the banks of the Mississippi River near McGregor. As a kid, I remember going out in my fishing boat, "Chet's Charter," and enjoying the magnificent surroundings.

Some of my ancestors settled north of there in 1863 and our family lived there for many years. We had a house on the bluff overlooking the river. When you look down the valley of the mighty Mississippi you get a real sense of the awesome landscape and vast history of our state.

The constant movement of the river also reminds us that things are changing all the time. It rises and falls, freezes and thaws, yet emerges strong and powerful, generation after generation!

Right now, Iowa is experiencing much the same change and with it comes the opportunity for a new era of greatness.

As some of you may have heard, once or twice, I was once a high school government and history teacher!

But I am also a student of history. In my classroom, I would remind my students of the ebbs and flows in our history.

As Iowans, I think we could do much worse than to learn from the lessons provided by those who have come before us.

Our state has always been a state of explorers and pioneers. Chief Black Hawk and the Native Americans taught us how to live off the land. Marquette and Jolliet were the first Europeans to navigate the Mississippi River in 1673.

Following the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark made their famous expedition up the Missouri River along our state's western border.

These explorers were fearless! They faced many obstacles, but showed great courage in their pursuit.

Today, we should challenge ourselves to emulate their commitment to pushing the limits of discovery.

These visionaries were undaunted by the practical challenges of the day.

They were guided by: Their faith. Their hopes. And their dreams. Even when no one gave them a map!

One of my heroes, President John F. Kennedy, also believed in the importance of exploration and in the relentless pursuit of a new frontier.

He challenged us to win the race to space, saying, "We choose to go to the moon and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills; because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win."

Well, my fellow Iowans, this is our time!

It's our time to accept the challenge, to explore and discover Iowa's unlimited potential.

It's our time to win the race to become the energy capital of the world.

Let us invoke the lessons previous generations of explorers and leaders have taught us.

Let us all come together as one and lead our own "21st Century Iowa Expedition."

There is an energy frontier open before us, and we must explore it immediately! America and the world are counting on us.

Simply put, we can't afford to duck this responsibility!

It's time for Iowa to become the Silicon Valley of the Midwest.

It's time to create the jobs of the future that will keep your children and my children here at home, where they belong.

It's time to make the entire state of Iowa a laboratory so we remain on the cutting edge of all forms of renewable energy.

We will protect our precious environment: the land, lakes, rivers and streams we all love. However, with the right balance, we can harvest rewards beyond even our wildest imagination.

Our value-added opportunities allow us to take from the earth more than once because we are blessed with the best soil and the most productive farmers in the world.

In addition, we have a tradition of great scientists like Henry Wallace and Norman Borlaug, and a world-class education system that nurtures our homegrown talent.

We have already led the nation with ethanol and biodiesel. Now we must maintain that leadership. With the eyes of the world upon us, we must prepare for the next generation energy economy.

We will create an Iowa Power Fund to invest in and attract cutting edge research and development. This will ensure we can lead the way not only in alternative fuels but also in biomass, geothermal, wind and solar energy.

It's time for Iowa to become the first state in the nation to declare energy independence!

We are already on our way!

Whether it's the production of soy lubricant in Waverly, the development of a biorefinery in Emmetsburg, the manufacturing of corn-based plastics in Clinton, the wind storage project in Dallas County or the new biomass option of burning oat hulls in place of coal in Cedar Falls -- Iowa is on the frontier!

Our dreams of an amazing future, one of energy independence, prosperity and a quality of life second to none, are within our reach. I know we can turn our dreams into reality!

There is another important lesson we must take from those daring souls who have come before us. They understood the importance of working together to get the job done!

So, to the 150 dedicated Iowans who will serve in the 82nd General Assembly, I say this: may our inevitable disagreements reflect deep conviction but not contempt, honest difference but not divisiveness.

Let us work together in a sincere and inclusive way, to create One Iowa. After all, we serve the same Iowans, they are counting on us, and this state's future belongs to all of us.

And, I want every Iowan to know, we need you!

It doesn't matter whether you are a Republican, Democrat or Independent. Whether you live in rural Iowa or urban Iowa. Whether you are a native Iowan or a new arrival. Young or old. What does matter is that we lock arms for the common good and tap our gold mine of potential.

Together, we will continue to move this great state forward! However, to achieve this, we who serve must remember to respect the will of Iowans. They have spoken, and they expect results.

Iowans expect us to achieve our amazing potential in renewable energy.

They expect us to renew our commitment to educational excellence by expanding early childhood education; getting teacher pay to the national average; and making college more affordable.

They expect us to find a way to insure that every child has health care; to save lives by increasing the tobacco tax; and to give hope to the sick by lifting the ban on stem cell research.

They expect us to pay tribute to our seniors and veterans by showing them the dignity and respect they have earned.

Iowans expect us to find a way to honor and reward hard work by raising the minimum wage.

They expect us to find ways to support and encourage entrepreneurs and small business owners, the dreamers who create jobs across our state.

Iowans also deserve a government that reflects their values! They are right to expect us to be smart with a buck, and to balance our checkbook the same way they do.

And they are right to demand ethical, accountable and open government.

Iowans expect us to encourage, not shy away from, the diversity that has made us a better state. Governor Ray taught us that.

We should never tolerate hate, especially in the form of bullying and threats in the workplace or in our schools.

We have an obligation to make the most of this important moment in Iowa history to explore and harness every bit of potential we have.

But a Governor can't do it alone. That's why today, I am asking for your help. Especially, the next generation of Iowans. Everyone has a role to play in our "21st Century Expedition."

On Monday, we will honor a great American, Dr. Martin Luther King, who led Americans into action when he said, "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love."

Well, Dr. King was right! Every single one of us can play an important role in this new expedition.

I care deeply about the challenges we face, but I have an even greater faith in Iowa's promise.

So, as we go from here, let us always remember:

This is our time!

Much is expected of us,

And, our future is unlimited.

Let us work together to build One Iowa and in doing so, we will achieve the greatness we all know is possible.