President Kramer presented Governor Thomas J. Vilsack, who delivered the following inaugural address:

My fellow Iowans:

I came to Iowa in August 1970.

It was because of a girl.

I was 19, in college, and in love.

This girl invited me to come here and meet her family.

I got in my car and drove for 13 hours. I crossed the Mississippi at Burlington—it was the first time I had ever been that far west—and before I left, I had fallen in love for the second time.

The first time, of course, was with the girl.

The second time was with the state.

Your state. My state. Our state.

I was, naturally, predisposed to have nice thoughts about Iowa. After all, a state that produced as smart, as pretty, as wonderful a girl as Christie Bell had to be a pretty special place.

But I was instantly taken by Iowa’s beauty, by her people, and by her land. I started noticing the rivers, the trees, the fields, the prairie flowers. I noticed the colors. I thought to myself, the state is as pretty as the girl.

On my first evening in Iowa those 33 years ago, Christie and her family took me to a potluck supper in a cabin on the banks of the Skunk River in Henry County. I saw there two things—really my first two impressions of Iowans. I saw a sense of pride—pride in the quality of the pies and the stews and the dishes that folks brought to the potluck. And I saw a sense of community—a joy of being together, a wisdom shared between old and young, a caring about those things we should care about, a concern about those things we should be concerned about, and most of all, a simple gratitude of being able to be among friends and one 19-year-old stranger.

But that’s the wrong word. I never felt like a stranger from the moment I crossed that bridge at Burlington. For me, that bridge spanned more than Mississippi. It brought me to a new life as well as a new land—one where small towns are more than a place to live. I’ve learned that they represent a lifestyle and values worth preserving—Iowa values—hard work, self-reliance, family, community.

It’s a life, I’ve come to realize, that is bound tightly to the rich land that God handed to us and to the strong values our ancestors bred in us. From the beginning, Iowa’s success has been rooted in its rich soil and natural bounty. That is still true today, and it will be tomorrow if we have the vision to seize the opportunities of the future. A parent can give a child only a few things of real worth—love, values, knowledge, and an education. And those are the things our ancestors have passed onto us. A great capacity to love this land and the people on it, the strong values of hard work and honesty and sharing, a knowledge of our land and ourselves, and one of the best educational systems in the world.

A sense of pride, and a sense of community.

All of that, we have in abundance. Those are the strengths we must build on.

Our values, our land, our schools, and, most of all, our people. Those are the resources we must marshal to build the New Iowa. For, ladies and gentlemen, we must build a new Iowa. We must build a New Iowa that encourages entrepreneurship from within and attracts development from afar. We must build a New Iowa that guarantees the best education for all, from preschool through college and beyond. We must build a New Iowa that has the resources, and the will, to take care of the needy and the ill—the physically ill and the mentally ill—as well as our natural resources the land, air, and water. We must build a New Iowa so rich in opportunities to succeed and so varied in resources to enjoy that our sons and daughters will want to settle here and sons and daughters from elsewhere will want to move here—even if they aren’t pursuing a pretty girl from Mount Pleasant.

But wishing won’t make it true.

We must act.

We must change.

Whether or not we act, we will, of course, change. But without bold actions, the change that comes will be change for the worse. For if we do not manage change, change will manage us. We have already begun to act. Through the partnerships forged by Vision Iowa—partnerships involving cities and counties and schools and private interests—through those partnerships, we are committing upwards of $2 billion to make Iowa a better place for those of us lucky enough to live here and a more attractive place for those seeking to move here. From the spectacular new waterfront in Dubuque to Music Man Square in Mason City to the canals and windmills of Pella, we are putting Iowa on the tourism map, the economic development map, and the let’s-just-have-some-fun map. We are building trails and libraries and skate parks and community centers—as well as the wondrous new downtown in Des Moines and riverfronts in Davenport, Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Waterloo, and Clinton, along with Dubuque.

This is part of the New Iowa.

And it is just a start.

It shows, though, what we can do in this great state. It shows how we can build spectacularly on our values and our resources to provide good jobs and clean fun. It shows we can work together—city with county, school with town, state with everyone—to leverage our dollars and our ideas and our energies. And it shows, most of all, that good ideas are abundant in this wonderful state, and that there are legions of good people ready to bring those ideas to life. It shows that dreams can come true.

But only if we accept change. No, we must do more than accept it. We must embrace it.

Embracing change means a new, focused economic development effort. Changing our economy from one of low-priced agricultural commodities and lower paying jobs to one of high-priced agricultural ingredients that feed, fuel, and heal; that create wealth through high-paying jobs held by highly educated workers. The state must act as a catalyst for change building on the lessons of Vision Iowa and creating a resource to transform our economy. The state must remove barriers by simplifying our income tax system and reforming our property tax system.

We must embrace the new technologies while reaffirming the old values. We must find ways to identify and encourage the Henry Wallaces and John Vincent Atanasoffs of this generation. It is not accident that the greatest agriculture scientist in American history—Henry Wallace—was an Iowan. It is no accident that the genius behind the most important technological advancement in American history—John Vincent Atanasoff—did his work in Iowa. The environment for them was there. But now we must redouble our efforts to encourage the entrepreneur, the genius, the innovator, by providing the resources and the atmosphere for innovation and invention.

Embracing change means continuously improving education. Our values require that we remain a leader in education. We must commit to better preparing our children for school by supporting early childhood education. We must encourage more of our children to attend college. If they are to earn more, they must learn more.

We cannot just tinker—we must reinvent. For example, expanding educational opportunity by giving students access to online courses, enabling schools to combine courses to widen course selections, and encouraging consolidation where it improves educational opportunity becomes important in a regional system.

By doing so, we can tell those looking to invest in Iowa: “Put your business here—it’s best for your needs.”

We’re making progress as class sizes are falling; test scores are rising. But we need to do better.

There will be risk. Some ideas may be difficult to accept or implement. It will not be easy. However, I sense an already great amount of cooperation between this legislature and our administration. We are dedicated to getting the job done.

To get the job done, we must manage the power of partnerships between governments at all levels and between the public and private sectors. We can do little alone. We can do anything together.

We must take risks—as individuals and as a state. We must not be afraid to lead, not be afraid to fail.

We must be dogged in our pursuits, as dogged as Arabella Mansfield, as dogged as Alexander Clark.

Arabella Mansfield was born in Burlington, was educated at Iowa Wesleyan in Mount Pleasant, and taught at Simpson and then at Iowa Wesleyan. Even though there were no women lawyers in America, she studied law in a law office in Mount Pleasant and then applied for admission to the bar in 1869. After reading her paper, the examiners said that her performance gave “the very best rebuke possible to the imputation that ladies cannot qualify for the practice of law.” They then certified her as the first woman to be admitted to the bar of any state in the union.

She took risks. She wrought change.

Alexander Clark Jr. was a loving father who thought his twelve-year-old daughter should attend the neighborhood school in Muscatine. The school board didn’t think so. It said it had a special school for children like her—a separate school for “colored” children. This was in 1868, and Mr. Clark sued on behalf of his daughter. The Supreme Court said of course Susan Clark could go to the neighborhood school. Whether we are African, German, Irish, French, or English, it said we are “one harmonious people” and we all should be treated alike.

He took risks. He wrought change.

We were then, and we are today, “one harmonious people.” Irish escaping famines of the 1840’s were among the first people to settle in Iowa, and they were quickly followed by Norwegians, French, Swedes, and Germans. A look at the names of our counties tells the story. Lajos Kossuth was a Hungarian patriot. Will Smith O’Brien was a leader for Irish independence. Marquis de Ia Fayette—for whom Fayette County was named—was a French statesman. Frederick Bremer was a Swedish author. Baron Friedrich von Humboldt was a German scientist. We must continue to be one harmonious people. We must continue to welcome anyone and everyone to this state so they enjoy the blessings of the liberties we prize, and we can gain from the skills and productivity they bring.

“The liberties we prize.” That’s one half of the Iowa motto. “Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain.” We must never forget that motto, for those liberties and rights define our state every bit as much as our fields and factories do. We have fought dear to preserve those freedoms. When Abraham Lincoln asked for troops in 1861, Iowa Governor Samuel Kirkwood said we would send one regiment. But we had tenfold that number of volunteers, and ultimately provided 48 regiments of infantry, nine regiments of cavalry, and four batteries of artillery—more than 75,000 men, about a tenth of the population of the entire state. Thirteen thousand of those men died—a higher percentage of loss than any other Union state sustained—and another 8800 were wounded.

But our liberties were saved, our rights were maintained.

The world had changed markedly since I stood before you four years ago. The national economy is weaker. Let us never forget the budget problems we have in state government reflect the day-to-day struggles of people from our state. We lost revenue. They’ve lost jobs and incomes. We struggle with rising health care costs. They can’t find a doctor. We cut and scrimp to pay our bills, and so do they.

We face new battles—a war on terrorism at home, and, soon perhaps, a war on terrorists abroad. Already, Iowans have lost their lives to terrorists. Already, our National Guard has been called up—we are bracing for the worst, hoping for the best. In difficult times our values get tested. We must be ever vigilant in protecting our liberties as well as our rights. We should not allow the terrorists to destroy our rights any more than our liberties. Our Iowa constitution is as precious as our Iowa soil. Both must be tended with care.

In the past four years, Christie and I have traveled this state from corner to corner, border to border, river to river. We will continue to do so in the years to come. We never cease to be impressed by the landscape and awed by the people, the young and the old. We have talked with farmers and teachers and doctors and truck drivers, and as often as not, they ask us: “What can we do for you? What can we do for Iowa?”

I’ve thought about that, and there is an answer.

You can dream of a better Iowa.

You can act by embracing change for a better Iowa.

Dream your dreams. Plan on how to turn them into reality. Then work to do it.

The next 12 months for this state are the most critical 12 months the state has faced for as long as I’ve lived here. Reforming the tax system. Redesigning the education system. Re-examining the issues involving health care. Reworking the whole theory of economic development. These all must be explored. These things are all huge undertakings.

But if all of us—farmer and factory worker, teacher and student, firefighter and chief executive, governor and legislator—if all of us dream and plan and work, if all of us are willing to take bold steps, to risk failure, to build on our strengths, to love our past and embrace our future—if we’re all willing to do that, we’ll have a New Iowa where all of us thrive and prosper, where we can have jobs and have fun, where we can learn and lead, where we can live and love.

By seizing the opportunities of a new transformed economy and by embracing change, we can preserve and maintain the values we cherish for generations to come. This is our challenge. This shall be our legacy.

You don’t always have to cross a bridge at Burlington to get to a new land.

Sometimes, you can make a new land right where you are.

God bless you, our great state, and our nation.