



Capitol Comment

The Other Flood Coming

By State Rep. Mike May

Those of us who live in House District 6 (Dickinson and parts of Clay Counties) are fortunate to have avoided most of the vile weather that ravaged much of central and eastern Iowa.

The historic floods were particularly destructive in southeast Iowa, and the city of Cedar Rapids was especially hit hard by a so-called "500 year flood."

The vast majority of Iowa counties were affected and eventually declared disaster areas by the federal and state government. Those declarations are important because they allow residents of "disaster counties" to receive special help from federal and state agencies.

Of course our northwest Iowa weather was not "perfect." Later than normal planting may have adverse affects on agricultural yields. Additionally, those who depend on tourism dollars were negatively impacted by the unusually cool and wet early June.

Having said that, most of our losses do not rise to the huge price paid by cities like Parkersburg, Cedar Rapids, and Iowa City -- to mention only three. To further state the obvious, it is difficult if not impossible to understand the suffering and pain endured by many of our fellow citizens these past few months.

Many of us have responded in a variety of ways, sending donations, traveling to hard-hit locations to assist in the cleanup and rebuilding efforts, and providing moral support to friends and families who were affected.

While we did not experience devastating tornados or flood waters, the dramatic impact on southeast Iowa in particular will continue to affect us.

Limited state dollars for programs that are important to all counties and citizens in Iowa are likely to be less available, having been redirected to more "needy" parts of the state. The economy of Iowa has and will be effected by the significant losses to business and home owners in these important areas of our state.

Tax revenue increases are not likely to keep up the torrid pace we have seen these past two years. That too will have significant consequences for our state and its ability to pay its long-term commitments.

On the positive side we should see the influx of millions of federal dollars to our state that will allow home and business owners to rebuild their properties. I expect there will be a large growth in the construction business in the impacted areas . That help will be instrumental in restoring Iowa and moving toward an even brighter future.

Additionally, we do have some extra funds available to us do to those booming 2005-2007 tax revenues (Economic Emergency Fund). There will be a consensus that this emergency justifies spending a good bit of the extra money on flood relief.

To that end, the governor established the Rebuild Iowa Advisory Commission several weeks ago. Their first meeting was held on July 17. I think it is important that you are aware of the activities of this group and how it might impact our state.

The RIAC established two goals at its first gathering:

1. Meet within the next 45 days and provide a complete assessment of damage and unmet needs to the Governor and the Legislature. I have told many of you that before a special session is held (if there is to be one) we need accurate information before we meet. It now appears that information will be available sometime after Labor Day and we will hold a special session.

2. By Nov.1 develop a long-term vision and plan for redevelopment. We will be dealing with this phase during the next session of the Iowa Legislature which convenes in January.

The governor also established the Rebuild Iowa Office which is a centralized department to handle flood recovery. Personnel from 16 different state agencies are currently working at RIO. The lieutenant governor has been assigned as the director.

The estimates now are that agricultural losses in Iowa will exceed \$3 billion. This part will not be covered by FEMA but under other agricultural programs.

We still do not have final numbers on the cost to business, home owners and state/local public properties but it could rival the \$3 billion in ag losses.

The federal government has been asked to pick up the costs of emergencies services and to use a 90/10 cost share ratio in much of the rebuilding.

I will be reporting more on this important issue as accurate information comes in. It is important that politics not become the driving or motivating force in decisions that will be made. I wish I could promise you that will happen.

Iowa is a remarkable state with a strong and resilient citizens. We will face this challenge successfully and be stronger for it.

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