Governor Terry Branstad laid out his budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2015 during his Condition of the State address on Tuesday. The proposal implements the major policy initiatives passed by the Legislature during the 2013 session and introduces some new ideas as well.

On the revenue side, Governor Branstad proposed that the state eliminate the income tax collected on military pensions. The projected result of this is a $10 million reduction in revenue. Currently, there is no federal tax coupling bill since Congress has not enacted any changes to the federal tax code yet. That may change if the omnibus appropriations bill being considered this week in Washington actually passes.

As for expenditures, the Governor’s budget proposes spending $7,000.9 billion from the General Fund in FY 2015. This is slightly above the Revenue Estimating Conference’s December ongoing revenue estimate of $6,983.2 billion. The proposal represents an increase of $505 million over the FY 2014 budget; however, $330 million of that goes to implement last year’s Commercial Property Tax Relief bill and the Education Reform package. Another $86 million is designated for paying the state’s share of Medicaid costs. Unfortunately, the state’s share of Medicaid is at an all-time high due to Iowa’s strong economy and federal changes to the financing formula.

A few highlights of the Governor’s budget proposals are:

**Home Base Iowa** – Governor Branstad has requested two separate $1 million appropriations for implementation of the Home Base Iowa Initiative, which will work to attract veterans to move and live in Iowa. The first request will fund an Iowa Workforce Development study researching the compatibility of military occupational training and service with state licensing requirements. The second request would fund a grant to a non-profit veteran service organization to use to market Iowa as a place for veterans to locate after completing their military service.

**Apprenticeships** – In order to help Iowans acquire the necessary work skills to succeed in their career path, the Governor funded two different apprenticeship programs. He is also expected to introduce legislation revising the 260F program to change the focus to apprenticeship training. This would include increasing the funding available for this program by $1 million. The Governor is also proposing to expand the existing Innovative Business Internship Program, by providing apprenticeship opportunities to Iowa students studying in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and providing $2 million as incentives for employers to participate.

**Regents Institutions** – Governor Branstad increased the general aid funding for the three Regents universities by 4%. 2.3% is for maintaining the tuition freeze, while the remaining 1.7% is for on-time graduation initiatives. The Governor provided initial funding in the RIIF budget for the next series of infrastructure projects at each of the universities.

**Community Colleges** – the Governor maintained community college general aid funding at the FY 14 level.
On Wednesday, Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court, Mark S. Cady, delivered the State of the Judiciary to a joint session of the Iowa House and Senate. In previous speeches, Justice Cady reported on the large problems facing Iowa Courts. This year the Chief Justice was able to highlight the wonderful changes being made in the Court System, thanks to responsible budgeting that has allowed more individuals to be hired and various specialty courts to be opened.

Last year, the Chief Justice laid out six priorities for the Judicial Branch. Those priorities are the same today:

- Protecting Iowa’s Children;
- Providing full-time access to justice;
- Operating an efficient, full-service court system
- Providing faster and less costly resolution of legal disputes;
- Being open and transparent and
- Providing fair and impartial justice for all.

With the additional funding provided by the Iowa legislature, the Judicial Branch was able to meet all six of these goals last year.

Thirteen juvenile court officers were added throughout the state to help at risk juveniles. The goal of these court officers is to intervene and guide these children towards productive adult lives. Additionally, the Court has strived to help families in difficult situations. Family Treatment Courts work with families facing the overwhelming issues of physical abuse, substance abuse, mental health issues and other problems. Through the Family Treatment Courts, 463 families in Iowa have been helped. These families include 549 parents and almost 900 children.

The Judicial Branch has worked to make justice more readily available to everyone the past year. Beginning in September, every Clerk of Court office, in every county, was reopened on a full time basis for the first time in four years. Along with additional hours, the Judicial Branch has been implementing the Electronic Data Management System (EDMS) throughout the state in an effort to make Iowa’s courts more efficient and paperless. The EDMS is available in 43 counties, and within the next two years, it will be available for the entire state.

In an effort to provide faster access to justice for everyone, specialty courts and new litigation tracks have been created. The Business Court is a pilot project being led by three judges. Business with a legal dispute can now take advantage of this specialty court. The goal of the Business Court is to make the process more efficient, quicker and consistent. A new litigation track was also added for civil cases with claims less than $75,000. This track will allow for trials to be scheduled within one year. Discovery and trial processes will be streamlined to reduce costs and create greater court effectiveness.

Finally, the Judicial Branch is reaching out to the community in new and different ways. The Justices on the Iowa Supreme Court have been traveling around the state, hearing cases and taking time to connect with Iowans. This spring, the Court will visit Clarinda and Toledo. When the Court is not traveling, there will be new ways for media to cover the hearings. Proposed rules will allow for new forms of communication, social media and media forums, including twitter.

Justice Cady’s State of the Judiciary Address indicates that the Iowa Judicial Branch is thriving due to new courts, specialty courts and the better use of technology. He commented that Iowa’s Courts continue to be some of the best in the nation. As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I appreciate knowing that Iowans have more access to justice than ever before.
Monday marked the first day of the 2014 Session of the 85th General Assembly. In the weeks previous, we had been hearing that this Session was going to be a short, no-nonsense one. It was abundantly clear to those in the House Chamber that this rumor was true, as my fellow legislators and I began filing bills and attending committee meetings on the very first days back in the Chamber. During the interim, I had been working on several bills that attempt to locate and correct inefficiencies in state government, ensure that transparency is not in name only, and discourage petty political practices that keep government from its number one priority of protecting the interests of Iowans. I was pleased this week to put the finishing touches on several of those bills and garner bi-partisan support. Hot button issues this session will be Eminent Domain, the Gas Tax, the Governor’s Budget Proposal, and Raising the Minimum Wage.

“A wise and frugal government, which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned, this is the sum of good government.”

- Thomas Jefferson -

Getting Around the District...

Like last year, I will hold regular forums in all three counties of House District 28 (Jasper, Marion, and Lucas). The first town hall meeting is in Knoxville on Friday, February 7 at 4 pm at Tasos’. As the legislative session gets started, I would like to encourage folks to attend one of the scheduled forums to share concerns with me. If you would like to get in contact with me at other times, I can be reached on my cell phone at 641-218-0185 or by email at greg.heartsill@legis.iowa.gov.

If you have a group that is coming to the Capitol, please let me know so that I am able to arrange some time to visit with you and arrange a tour. If you would like to watch us online in the House Chamber, please go to: http://coolice.legis.state.ia.us/Cool-ICE/default.asp?category=billinfo&Service=livevideo

Please share this newsletter with those that might be interested and/or send me email addresses of those that wish to be added to my newsletter list.

I consider it a great honor to represent you in Iowa House District 28. God Bless!