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## Good Luck Cardinals!



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# Governor discusses I-JOBS initiative during Maquoketa visit

By KELLY GERLACH

New jobs and infrastructure improvements topped Iowa Gov. Chet Culver's agenda Tuesday as he tried to raise spirits beaten low by the national recession.

Culver spoke to a crowd of about 60 concerned citizens and local government officials gathered at Maquoketa City Hall Tuesday, March 24. The governor was initially slated to speak in front of the downtown fire debris but intermittent rain showers forced a change in location.

The focus of the governor's eastern Iowa Shovel Ready Tour – which included stops in Davenport, Clinton and Anamosa – was to promote the I-JOBS initiative he and Lt. Gov. Patty Judge proposed in January.

I-JOBS, Iowa's Infrastructure Investment Initiative, is the governor's attempt to create and retain new jobs by investing up to \$750 million in updating, improving and replacing Iowa's infrastructure.

Culver said federal stimulus dollars will pump \$160 million into infrastructure, "but our needs are in the billions. Our state highway system has a bunch of problems...compounded by recent natural disasters. Did you know that floods of 2008 were the fifth major natural disaster in U.S. history?"

"We haven't really invested in modern infrastructure for 40 to 50 years," since Dwight Eisenhower was president, Culver said.

Gaming revenue from Iowa's 17 casinos and the Iowa Lottery would fund the I-JOBS initiative.

The obvious benefit of the governor's proposition? The state roads and bridges would be repaired and upgrades made throughout Iowa.

"We would not just rebuild to where we were the day before the flooding but build more sustainable, more efficient, utilize geothermal power. We're rebuilding a more modern state, rebuilding so much safer...flood mitigation," the governor said.



MSP photos by Kelly Gerlach

**Charlotte Mayor Marty Jahn**, right, urges Iowa Gov. Chet Culver to make provisions in the I-JOBS initiative to benefit small towns such as his. Jahn said his town of 421 residents doesn't "have money just waiting on the back burner" to begin preliminary work on projects it may not be able to complete.

He said his office has already received 3,800 shovel-ready project proposals statewide from counties and cities ready and eager to act.

Jackson County is not included in that number. The county has shovel-ready projects but applied for federal stimulus funds to help fund the projects, Supervisor Jack Willey explained to the governor and assembled crowd.

"Our county engineer said it takes 1 to 1 1/2 years to get bridge and street repair projects ready," added Supervisor Steve Flynn. "We need time to get our projects shovel-ready."

Flynn offered the example that guardrails have been removed from some Jackson County bridges to allow larger and larger farm equipment to travel over the outdated structures.

Culver explained that the shovel-ready funds would be disbursed in phases over about

36 months so that others have access to the I-JOBS initiative.

Marty Jahn, mayor of the 421-resident town of Charlotte, voiced concerns that the I-JOBS initiative has no provisions for small town such as his.

"We don't have money just waiting on the back burner for these projects," and some of the preliminary survey work often needed to start the projects, Jahn said.

He urged Culver to set aside I-JOBS funding for the state's smallest towns.

The governor responded that he "thinks we can find a way" to do that and remove small towns' "competitive disadvantage."

Maquoketa Mayor Tom Messerli added that Maquoketa has a few potential shovel-ready projects in the works regarding sewers and street repairs. Culver said his initiative's decision-making committee would have to determine exactly how such projects could fit into the overall scope of I-JOBS.

The second major component to the governor's proposal is the creation of new jobs to jumpstart Iowa's economy and dwindling job supply.

"Iowa lost 17,000 jobs in the last few months. (Some) 70,000 families are on unemployment – that was 35,000 last year. (Some) 82 of our 99 counties saw an increase in their unemployment rate the past 12 months," Culver explained.

The governor expects I-JOBS projects to create and sustain thousands of new jobs across the state, although exactly how many jobs has yet to be determined.

Culver explained how the \$750 million would be disbursed among what he considers five key areas of unmet infrastructure needs across the state:

- \$250 million for transportation projects, especially road and bridge safety. This includes \$200 million for roads and bridges and \$50 million for other modes of transportation;

- \$175 million to complete already scheduled projects such as improvements to the Iowa Veterans Home and community colleges;

■ **CULVER,**  
Please turn to page 2



**Gov. Chet Culver** shakes hands with Robert Osterhaus after about a 45-minute public gathering in Maquoketa City Hall Tuesday, March 24. The governor was promoting his proposed I-JOBS initiative that he says would create new jobs and improve infrastructure throughout the state. Also shown is Dan Dague and Ann Osterhaus.