

## 2011 Legislative Agenda of Priorities Southwest Iowa Coalition

**Changes to Tax Increment Financing (TIF):** TIF is still considered the single most important tool available for economic development in rural Iowa. It adds millions of dollars to the future tax base each year, and we would oppose efforts to limit its use. We do however recognize that some counties and municipalities may not understand or abuse the use of urban renewal areas and TIF. It is our belief that independent third party technical assistance programs run by ISAC, the League of Cities or public policy departments of our regent universities could/should provide the necessary education to make TIF a useful tool. We also believe that local control needs to be maintained, but that some regulatory oversight may be necessary to prevent abuse.

**Enterprise Zones (EZ):** As some of you may recall, the Southwest Iowa Coalition, was in the forefront in the development and passage of the Enterprise Zone legislation. Over two years went into the research and drafting of this legislation which pulled in examples from around the country to create a substantial economic development tool that would help incent manufacturing and research growth in urban areas experiencing extreme blight and in bringing new opportunities to underserved rural areas. Distress criteria to determine inclusion in this program was originally done in such a manner that only the most deserving areas of the state would qualify. We adamantly oppose any attempt to remove these zones, water down any of the incentives, or otherwise change this legislation to dilute it from its original intent.

**Closing or Downsizing Mental Health Facilities in Southwest Iowa:** The mental health facilities in Southwest Iowa (Clarinda and Glenwood) have been very successful at creating an integrated system approach that allows both public and private entities to coexist on the same campus. This has allowed the campus to evolve into a system where economies of scale have kept costs down. These examples are some of the most cost efficient treatment campuses in the State system. We would oppose any further efforts to close or downsize these facilities.

**TIME-21:** The Southwest Iowa Coalition strongly supports investments in infrastructure that contribute to sustaining and enhancing opportunities for economic development within the State of Iowa. Members recognize that Iowa must address long-term funding that will be dedicated to maintaining its entire road system. SWICO recognizes that our rural areas are struggling to maintain county and rural roads vital to our rural economies. TIME 21 funding is essential to economic recovery and development as well as providing jobs to not only

the highway industry but also the many businesses that support it.

**Local Food Systems:** We specifically ask that legislators consider the recommendations of the comprehensive task force on local foods (SF 404). The authors of the bill created a task force similar to what was created in Illinois to explore the possibilities of expanding local foods into institutional, commercial and individual consumer markets. With the assistance of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and it's Regional Food Service Working Groups (RFSWG), a series of recommendations were made for both policy and funding that we would encourage the legislature to consider. We would encourage the legislature to move the recommendations of these groups forward and to encourage local foods system initiatives' across the state of Iowa.

**Bottle Bill:** We believe that it is well passed the time to include plastic water bottles as part of the bottle bill refund program. Not only are we continuing to clog our landfills with these PET bottles, the high rate of disposal onto our roadways and ditches is causing safety and maintenance concerns. Water bottles of all types, as well as cans, are fouling the efforts of roadside mower and maintenance crews to adequately do their jobs while costing city and counties time and money to repair costly machinery. We propose that the bottle deposit be taken to 7 cents with an additional penny being sent

back to the recycler, as it has been far too long since these businesses have seen any kind of increase to offset their operating costs. Iowa has always been national leaders in their efforts to keep the state's natural heritage intact—let's continue that trend by making all drink containers part of the bottle refund program.

**Rural Broadband :** While this is a Federal issue, we feel strongly that Iowa can exert some influence over fiber utility grid access and fees. Education and outreach explaining the broadband initiative also needs to be implemented so local officials really understand the implications of this infrastructure.

Many of our municipal and independent utility companies have invested heavily in the fiber network that now allows wireless broadband interconnectivity to rural residents throughout Iowa. The rural broadband issue concerns SWICO when we hear elected officials calling Cedar Rapids "rural" – we all deserve equal communication platform opportunity. Where does this discussion leave rural communities which provide a quality of life sought after by prospective new Iowans if the ability for employment via the Internet or by developing a web-based business is not readily available? The National Broadband plan would also give larger phone and cable companies an access to these fiber networks without having to pay a user fee to the grid itself or provide the compensation necessary to offset the investment made by the local utilities.

