



# MINUTES

## International Relations Committee

Thursday, January 14, 2016

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### MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Rita Hart, Chairperson  
Senator William A. Dotzler Jr.  
Senator Tim L. Kapucian  
Senator Charles Schneider  
Senator Steven J. Sodders

Representative Jake Highfill, Vice Chairperson  
Representative Ako Abdul-Samad  
Representative Deborah L. Berry  
Representative Peter Cownie  
Representative Stan Gustafson  
Representative Daniel Kelley

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### CONTENTS

- I. Procedural Business
- II. Presentation by Iowa Sister States Regarding the Opening of the Kosovo Consulate in Des Moines and Other Activities
- III. Review of Committee Finances
- IV. Committee Discussion
- V. Materials Filed With the Legislative Services Agency



### I. Procedural Business

**Background and Charge.** The International Relations Committee was created by the Legislative Council in 1992. The committee's charge is as follows: develop goals and procedures that will facilitate international communication between the Iowa General Assembly and foreign governments on several different levels, including but not limited to interpersonal interaction between state legislators and legislative staff and foreign visitors, instruction about state and local democratic institutions, and the development of trade in foreign markets.

**Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Hart at 8:02 a.m., Thursday, January 14, 2016, in Room 22 of the State Capitol Building in Des Moines.

**Adoption of Rules.** The proposed rules were approved by voice vote of the members.

**Opening Remarks.** Chairperson Hart welcomed those in attendance and thanked members for attending the early morning meeting. She expressed her intent, with this and future meetings, to create a forum for conversation regarding the committee's activities and for determining the protocol for actions by the committee and its members. Vice Chairperson Highfill also welcomed those in attendance and said he is excited to learn more from the presentations made during the committee's meetings.

**Adjournment.** The meeting adjourned at 8:47 a.m.

### II. Presentation by Iowa Sister States Regarding the Opening of the Kosovo Consulate in Des Moines and Other Activities

Ms. Kim Heidemann, Executive Director, Iowa Sister States; Lieutenant Colonel Michael Wunn, Director of the Iowa National Guard's State Partnership Program (with Kosovo); Mr. Dennis Dietz, Chair of the Iowa Sister States' Kosovo Committee; and Ms. Kassi Wheeler, International Program Manager, Iowa Sister States, presented information regarding the activities of Iowa Sister States and provided background on Iowa's relationship with Kosovo. Lieutenant Colonel Wunn said that the Iowa National Guard has been involved in Kosovo since guard units were sent to Kosovo as part of a peacekeeping mission in 2003-2004. In 2013, Governor Terry Branstad traveled to Kosovo and signed a sister state agreement with the Republic of Kosovo, which has led to numerous military and educational exchanges between Iowa and Kosovo. The Iowa National Guard has established a partnership with Kosovo to assist the newly independent country with its nation-building activities.

**Consulate.** Ms. Heidemann invited committee members to meet with Kosovar dignitaries who will be in Des Moines for the official January 29 opening of the Kosovo Consulate, which will be located on the second floor of the Saddlery Building on Court Avenue. A number of committee members responded positively and Chairperson Hart said she would work with Ms. Heidemann to schedule a date for the meeting.

**Young Population.** Mr. Dietz noted that the majority of Kosovars are young, with the average age being less than 30 years of age. He described the country as a high plateau surrounded by mountains. With a population of nearly 2 million, the country's land could fit into seven or eight of Iowa's counties. The culture is a mix of Asian and European influences. The majority of the population is Albanian and Serbs make up the largest ethnic minority. The country is secular, though most of the population is Muslim. The country faces ethnic tensions and high unemployment issues, but due to the support of the United States over the years, Americans are very welcome in the country.

**Committee Discussion.** Senator Dotzler noted the importance of learning about the cultures of countries around the world in order to treat guests here and hosts in other countries with the proper



respect. Ms. Heidemann asked members to utilize Iowa Sister States as a resource. She said they often work with the U.S. Embassy. Senator Dotzler said he is working with the Senate President's Office and with the Iowa Economic Development Authority (EDA) on a request from China officials to visit Iowa. Ms. Heidemann observed that though the Iowa Sister States office is located in the same building as the EDA, the two offices are not always aware of each other's activities. Representative Gustafson suggested that committee members should communicate through the chairperson to avoid a duplication of effort and Vice Chairperson Highfill welcomed members to speak with him as well, noting that Chairperson Hart and he have developed a good working relationship.

### **III. Review of Committee Finances**

Mr. Bob Lamberti, Legislative Information Officer, Legislative Services Agency, provided members with a document detailing the International Fund purchases and balances for the 2015-2016 fiscal year. Chairperson Hart suggested that the committee purchase gifts to have readily available for presentation to official visitors to the General Assembly and for use by representatives of the General Assembly on official visits to other countries. Senator Sodders suggested that the committee chairperson and vice chairperson make the gift selections. Committee members approved these suggestions by unanimous consent.

Chairperson Hart expressed her intent to find a way to tastefully display gifts from international visitors in public viewing areas in the State Capitol Building. Representative Gustafson agreed that the gifts should be considered the property of the state and the displays should be periodically rotated. Senator Kapucian suggested reaching out to the Department of Cultural Affairs for assistance in displaying gifts from international visitors.

### **IV. Committee Discussion**

Representative Gustafson suggested that the committee hold an introductory meeting each year, with other meetings called at the discretion of the chairperson. Committee members approved his suggestion by unanimous consent. Senator Sodders noted that at a future meeting he could update members on his recent trip to Cuba. Representative Berry expressed her hope that communications could be improved and increased between the committee and the Governor's Office and between the committee and Iowa Sister States. Chairperson Hart agreed that communication should be improved, and observed that the committee receives little advance notice of the arrival of foreign visitors to the Capitol.

Vice Chairperson Highfill advised committee members that Chairperson Hart and he are working together to set a date for the committee members to meet with Ms. Mary Kathryn Lawyer, Honorary Consul for the Canadian Embassy in Iowa.

Representative Berry noted that she is a member of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee of the Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC), a regional association of legislators representing 11 Midwestern states and four Canadian provinces, part of the Council of State Governments.

Representative Abdul-Samad asked the committee to consider meeting with immigrant populations living in Iowa, such as Bosnians and Somalis, to help those populations feel more connected. Chairperson Hart said she would be happy to work with Representative Abdul-Samad to create such opportunities.



**V. Materials Filed With the Legislative Services Agency**

The following materials listed were distributed at or in connection with the meeting and are filed with the Legislative Services Agency. The materials may be accessed from the “Committee Documents” link on the committee’s Internet site: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/meetings/documents?committee=661&ga=ALL>

1. Materials distributed by Iowa Sister States.
2. International Fund — Fiscal Year 2016, submitted by Mr. Bob Lamberti.

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