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Vilsack, Pederson Choose Model Communities for New Iowans Pilot Project

DES MOINES – Governor Tom Vilsack and Lt. Governor Sally Pederson announced today the communities of Mason City, Marshalltown, and Fort Dodge have agreed to participate in a pilot program designed to help grow Iowa's population and help to reduce the state's workforce shortage. These cities will act as models for successfully welcoming skilled workers and their families from other countries into Iowa. Community leaders, including elected officials, labor leaders, business leaders, those from faith-based organizations, volunteer organizations, schools, health, and law enforcement will work with Governor's staff and various state agency directors to assess community strengths and needs and to develop a strategic plan for creating a successful model community project.

"Mason City, Marshalltown, and Fort Dodge were chosen as pilot communities because of their strong city leadership and their workforce needs. Each has the strong support of businesses, schools and community colleges, faith-based organizations, and community volunteers," Vilsack said. "We're eager to begin working with them to develop a comprehensive plan to welcome people who want to make their home in Iowa."

"By working with the communities to develop models, we can ensure that citizens, businesses, schools, law enforcement agencies, and medical facilities are ready to welcome new residents," Pederson said.

The selected communities and state department directors and Governor's staff will work to collectively create a positive model for welcoming New Iowans. The model will be documented, then used by other communities across Iowa. Each community will work in partnership with representatives from state agencies to identify the populations to live and work in the communities. The immigrant populations will be recruited domestically, through family-based and/or employment-based immigration opportunities, or other means in accordance with federal immigration laws. The U.S. Department of State recommends first reaching out to communities of immigrants already legally residing in the United States.

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The leadership of each community, in cooperation with State representatives, is responsible for setting goals and developing a strategic community plan to encourage a smooth transition for being skilled New Iowans and their families to Iowa. This plan will begin with an assessment of community strengths and community needs, including workforce, housing, healthcare, and education needs.

Vilsack and Pederson are encouraging the model communities to host public hearings to allow citizen input, and to generate ideas to be incorporated into the plan.

“Iowa has a long history—and a global reputation—for being a welcoming state to those who want to make a new life for themselves. All of us have come from immigrant families who came here for new opportunities,” Vilsack said. “We’re very excited about creating a plan to ensure success both for those new families and for the communities. We look forward to working with all the citizens of Mason City, Marshalltown, and Ft. Dodge.”

It is estimated that the planning phase of this project will take several months. Vilsack and Pederson expect recruiting and reception of New Iowans will begin in the spring of 2001.

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Recruiting New Iowans into Model Communities

Governor Vilsack and Lt. Governor are encouraging the development of a strategic community plan to encourage a smooth transition for bringing skilled workers and their families to Iowa from other countries. Skilled workers from other countries can provide a valuable resource to Iowa employers and can add cultural richness and diversity to Iowa's communities. New Iowans can help Iowa's communities, businesses, and economy grow.

In addition, Iowa can be a safe haven for those who need it; we can provide opportunities for people across the world who are suffering the effects of war, famine, and illness. We can offer them work, and help them provide their children a brighter future. In return, we expect them to take the responsibility to learn English and become contributing members to our communities.

The key to creating a foundation for successful immigration in Iowa is to start with a few model communities, where new Iowans are assimilated into companies, schools and neighborhoods. By following a step-by-step plan, the newcomers and their community will have the smoothest transition possible.

Project Mission: To create a positive model for immigration for a segment of immigrants within a few communities that will be modeled by other communities across the state.

Model communities were chosen for the pilot project based on the following criteria:

- Willingness of community and labor leaders to participate in and support the pilot project.
- Adequate economic opportunity for skilled workers
- Local businesses willingness to promote good, quality jobs
- Sufficient housing stock
- School system that can absorb new students
- Proximity to community college, for adult education or training
- Community's ability to provide education of labor and employment laws
- Presence of a strong faith-based community (whether a single or various, compatible faith-based organizations)
- Informed law enforcement officers
- Accurate current crime statistics, so that impact of immigration on crime rates can be accurately tracked
- Presence of some minority populations
- Existence of a strong volunteer ethic, as identified by volunteer organizations and individual volunteers.
- Cultural activity based on the community's geography
- Sophisticated media
- Combination of urban and rural opportunities

The immigrant population will be targeted based on these criteria:

- Willingness to integrate and participate fully in the community
- The population's reasons for wanting to immigrate to Iowa

The Governor asked certain department directors and members of his staff to evaluate and recommend communities for the first pilot projects. The selected communities are Mason City, Marshalltown, and Ft. Dodge.

This group also has developed a plan for implementation and a system of working with the communities and monitoring and evaluating the project once it's in place. They also are making recommendations to make licensing easier in Iowa for skilled workers and for professionals.

THE NEW IOWANS PILOT PROJECT

Governor Vilsack and the Mayor of each of the selected communities will sign a letter of agreement regarding the responsibilities of the communities and the role of the State of Iowa in the model Communities project.

The Vilsack/Pederson model to recruit new Iowans includes community plans designed to bring skilled immigrant workers to communities in Iowa, and to help them acculturate into the communities, workplaces, and schools.

The mission of this project is to create positive models for immigration within a few communities. The selected communities and the State of Iowa will work to collectively create a positive model for immigration. This model will be documented and used by other communities across the state.

Each community will work in partnership with the State of Iowa to identify immigrant populations to live and work in the community. The immigrant populations will be recruited on a domestic basis, through family based and/or employment based immigration opportunities or other means in accordance with federal immigration laws.

Technical support to each community will be provided by the following agencies: Iowa Department of Economic Development, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department of Human Services, Iowa Department of Human Rights, Iowa Department of Human Services, Iowa Finance Authority, Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa Department of Public Safety. The State of Iowa, through the Iowa Department of Economic Development, will provide up to \$50,000 in financial support to assist each community to reach its New Iowans Pilot Project goals.

The leadership of each community, in cooperation with the State of Iowa, is responsible for setting goals and developing a strategic community plan to encourage a smooth transition for bringing skilled immigrant workers and their families to Iowa from domestic locations or outside the United States. The plan will begin with a thorough assessment of community needs, including workforce needs, housing needs, healthcare, education etc. The plan for each community will determine strengths of community contribution vs. needs that can be provided by the state.

This plan will be developed by a steering committee of community leaders with representation from each of the following groups:

- Business and Industry
- Community Civic Groups
- Education
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Health
- Labor
- Law Enforcement
- Local Government
- Volunteer Groups

The strategic community plan will address the availability and maturity of each of the following community support systems in regard to project goals.

- Cultural and Recreational Opportunities
- Health Care
- Employment Opportunities
- Housing
- Law Enforcement
- Media
- Schools, including colleges and community colleges
- Transportation

The plan will determine the number of new Iowans the community will host. State of Iowa representatives will assist in determining the methodology for recruiting new Iowans.

Suggested activities for communities to reach project goals could include obtaining consultative services to provide direct assistance to new Iowans, such as translation, immigration information, necessary curriculum development related to direct services, such as teaching English, introduction to the community or local government, etc.

Additional activities could include scholarships to new Iowans for technical/skill development related to local job advancement, housing assistance (such as payment of deposits for utility hook-up, security, etc.), transportation assistance, or other necessary financial assistance to new Iowans. Other creative or innovative activities that the community deems necessary to reach project goals could also be developed.

The communities will document steps taken that created the community system of services offered to new immigrant populations for use in developing a community immigration model. This model will be showcased to other communities in the state.

The letter of agreement will be in effect for one year after the date of signature. Project evaluations at six-month and 12-month intervals, by community representatives and the State, will determine if an additional time extension will be needed.

The State will facilitate meetings with local businesses to determine, as precisely as possible their workforce needs. Businesses should be prepared to identify the skill level, the education level, the licensure or certification requirements and the number of employees they seek. Business will be an integral part of the entire planning process.

Communities will be encouraged to host a series of public hearings or town meetings. Hearings will not only provide an outlet for citizen input and dialog, but can generate ideas to be incorporated into the strategic plan. Representatives of the State of Iowa will be represented at these hearings.

One of the more immediate needs of a newcomer to Iowa is that of housing. New Iowan families will need assistance and guidance for long-range plans of buying a home. New Iowans may need training regarding filing a loan application, building a credit-rating, saving for a down-payment and shopping for a house. Bankers, local educational institutions and Realtors are encouraged to establish networks or partnerships that can communicate these basics to the new population.

Home ownership usually follows the more immediate need of finding an apartment or rental property. Communities are encouraged to establish a housing referral center that can compile and list information that is easily retrievable on available housing units.

Schools will be instrumental in welcoming new Iowans. They are well positioned to handle the potentially diverse languages spoken by new students. Where English as a Second Language (ESL) is an issue, the State's Department of Education can be a resource. The Department's funding for Iowa students takes into account the needs of those students with limited English proficiency. ESL school programs allow students to learn English while they receive classroom

training in both their native language and in English, until they are transitioned into a full English curriculum. Community colleges and state universities can assist in locating teachers and aides who speak the native languages of new Iowans. Other community school districts, which have experienced similar assimilation challenges, are also a potential resource for teachers and aides.

English limited proficiency will not necessarily be limited to students. Adults may also need accommodation in learning a new language. Communities will be encouraged to create partnerships among employers and local educational institutions to devise classes that are flexible in scheduling and accessible to the new population. Location of the classes, scheduling of the classes and the availability of transportation are all factors that should be considered in creating a successful transition to English.

Informed law enforcement officials are an important piece of the model community plan. New Iowans will come with varying levels of understanding of our cultural, political and social norms. Lack of some basic understanding of what is and is not acceptable behavior among cultures can lead to unnecessary clashes within the community. Law enforcement may be seen as the final arbiter in these instances, and it is essential that law enforcement officials be educated and prepared. Law enforcement officials who have dealt with new immigrant populations in their communities offer the following guidelines: 1) be prepared to deal with a population that is limited in English proficiency; 2) be ready to communicate to the new population any local expectations of conduct; 3) be willing to understand the cultural heritage and customs of the new population; 4) be aggressive in establishing a solid level of trust with the new population.

Communities will be encouraged to devise a mechanism for new Iowans to become acquainted with local religious groups, social service organizations, and any other existing immigrant population. Ecumenical ministries of Iowa are poised to assist communities in devising this mechanism.

Together, local health departments, hospitals, and the state Public Health Department will assess any special health care needs of the new population. They will promote health fairs or clinics to help familiarize the new population with available health care provider institutions and facilities. Health care providers may face the challenge of establishing a level of trust with the new population. Where language is a barrier, it will be necessary for health care providers to expand their services to include translation or interpretation assistance.

The model communities selected to host new Iowans will benefit from the experience of communities that have already done so. A network will be established that allows individuals who were key in addressing issues such as housing, ESL, education, health care and law enforcement in their respective communities, to share their stories of success and failure with key individuals in the new host communities. Likewise, new host communities will be expected to

perpetuate the model community initiative by visiting with prospective communities and offering them the benefits of their experience.

Diversity committees will need to be established or reinforced. Communication between newcomers and established residents is key to success, and a local diversity committee can be instrumental in facilitating communication. Diversity committees should include representatives from various aspects of the community, including, but not limited to: faith-based organizations, health care providers, business and/or chamber of commerce, labor organizations, school system(s), law enforcement, social service providers, and local media. The new Iowan population needs to be represented on these committees as well.

TENTATIVE TIME LINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

December 4, 2000: Governor Vilsack announces model communities; representatives of all three communities are present.

December, 2000:

1. Representatives from all three selected communities meet in Des Moines with the appropriate Governor's staff and Directors of pertinent state departments (or their representatives) to formally share the vision of each of the communities for the project and to hear the governor's vision for the project.
2. Discussions and suggestions for assignments for organization and preparation of communities.
 - a. Identify key participants in committee work/process (churches, schools, media, medical providers, law enforcement, high school students, city/county officials, civic/fraternal groups etc.)
 - b. Discuss possible community organization consisting of overall coordinator and various committees, each with chair reporting to coordinator
 - c. Discuss organizing committees around tasks (housing, jobs, volunteers, transportation, medical, schools etc. to determine:
 - employment possibilities with health coverage
 - available housing units incl. costs, leases etc.
 - Site(s) for medical care
 - Opportunities to practice religious faith
 - Orientation for newcomers to community
 - Orientation for the community
 - ESL for adults/children
 - Preparation of schools K-12
 - d. Discuss expected work product for each committee including timelines and outcomes

e. Provide resource lists to communities detailing sources of assistance (expertise and financial) and contacts in state government or other entities such as:

- Governor's office
- Iowa Diversity Task Force
- Department of Human Rights
- Department of Education
- Department of Health
- Department of Economic Development
- Iowa Workforce Development
- Department of Human Services
- Iowa Civil Rights Commission

f. Discussion of possible target populations upon which to focus recruiting efforts, methods of recruitment.

January 2001:

1. Core state level group staff (Governor's staff, DED, IWD, DHR, ICRC etc.) and other resources meet individually with each community to review, and assist as necessary, their preparatory work.

- Meet committee heads and hear their reports
- Discuss how to recruit/screen target populations
- Discuss reconciling job possibilities with possible recruits
- Discuss how community work group can elicit preliminary community input/feedback to be incorporated into planning

January-March 2001

1. State level core group begins to locate possible recruiting pools/locations and make contacts with possible partners (ethnic fraternal groups/clubs, ethnic media outlets, etc.) in those locations.

February 2001

1. Core state level group staff and other resource staff meet individually with each community work group in public setting with all interested members of the community to share vision, organization and work done to date.

2. Elicit community input and incorporate into or modify work plan and preparatory work as appropriate.

3. Revise work plan as necessary

March 2001

1. Core state level group and representatives from each community meet with the Governor. Each community will share their work plan/organization, thoughts on target populations and timetable to start recruiting.
2. Immediately after meeting with Governor community representatives and state level core group will meet to share more details on their respective plans.

April 2001

1. Core state level group meets with communities as needed to review modifications to work plan or to hold additional community wide meetings to hear additional community input.
2. Selected state level staff/departments begin community orientations by meeting with churches, fraternal groups and other interested organizations.

May 2001

1. Upon appropriation of funds, staff and office program; introduce staff to key target community contacts.
2. Meet with communities to develop action plan to initiate recruiting and reception of target population.