



For Immediate Release

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Branstad, Reynolds Announce State Workforce Development Board Subcommittee to Address Minority Unemployment

DES MOINES, IA – Governor Branstad and Lt. Governor Reynolds today announced a subcommittee of the State Workforce Development Board has been established to address disparities in the minority unemployment rate in Iowa. According to the latest Census information, Iowa’s statewide unemployment rate was 3.9 percent, while African Americans had an unemployment rate of 14.2 percent, Native Americans had a rate of 11 percent, Asian Americans had a rate of 5.3 percent (other pacific islanders had a rate of 13.6 percent) and Hispanic Americans had a rate of 8.1 percent for the same time period.

The goal of the subcommittee is clear and measurable: to reduce unemployment in minority communities by five percent (or to the state average) in five years. Lt. Governor Reynolds, co-chair of the [Future Ready Iowa Alliance](#), said Iowa has a tremendous opportunity to close the skills gap, while helping Iowa families find stable, good paying jobs. “Iowa offers programs that are working. We need to do a better job of matching those programs and job opportunities to Iowans who are eligible to take advantage of them.”

Gov. Branstad said the time has come to address this long-standing issue. “It is unacceptable that we have such a huge disparity between our average unemployment rate and the rates in our minority communities. We must be focused in our efforts to address this issue, and the minority outreach subcommittee is the first step. The subcommittee’s work will align with and support the goals of the Future Ready Iowa Alliance to help these Iowans find meaningful employment and meet the needs of Iowa employers.”

Former State Representative Wayne Ford is credited with bringing this issue to the State Workforce Development Board and helping in the development of the group’s goals and agenda.

Four counties have been identified as pilot communities: Polk, Dubuque, Black Hawk and Pottawattamie.



These counties were selected based on having high concentrations of minority residents and unemployment rates. Listening tours will be held in the spring, which will provide opportunities for members and leaders of the communities to gather a broad perspective and identify connections and influences within communities. A strategic plan will then be developed that aligns with the Future Ready Iowa Alliance’s recommendations to the Governor.

IWD Director Beth Townsend said “Reducing the unemployment rate in minority communities five percent in five years is an ambitious goal. However, this is an issue that we must be committed to addressing in order to make real progress. To meet the goal of the Future Ready Iowa initiative, we need to ensure all Iowans are obtaining the education and soft skills necessary to take advantage of the employment opportunities available in Iowa.”

The subcommittee includes Wayne Ford, Joshua Barr, Director, Des Moines Civil Rights Commission, Mayor Quentin Hart, Waterloo; Marvin DeJear Executive Director, Evelyn K Davis Center; Alex Piedras, Multicultural Director, Grand View University; Azadeh Tavakoli, Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in IA; Karl Cassell, Horizon Family Service Alliance; Steve Dust, Greater Cedar Valley Alliance & Chamber; Mike Ralston and Jessica Harder, Association of Business and Industry; Director Beth Townsend, Courtney Maxwell Greene, Cory Kelly and Ben Humphrey of Iowa Workforce Development; San Wong, Director, Department of Human Rights; Marcela Hermosillo, Iowa Dept. of Education; and Tim Perkins, Iowa Commission on Native American Affairs. The subcommittee will be chaired by State Workforce Board member, Andy Roberts, Business Manager, Local 33, Plumbers and Steamfitters. State Workforce Board member Carrie Duncan will also serve on the subcommittee.

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