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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Brent M. Willett, Executive Director, Fairfield Economic Development Association & Fairfield Area Chamber of Commerce

641-472-2111 | bwillett@fairfieldiowa.com

NOTE TO EDITOR: A .DOC VERSION OF THE 2011 AGENDA IS ATTACHED TO THIS MESSAGE.

### **Fairfield Chamber releases expanded 2011 legislative; FEDA-endorsed**

Fairfield (IOWA) – The Fairfield Area Chamber of Commerce on Thursday released its 2011 Legislative Agenda, a document designed to provide direction to the advocacy program division of the organization, Chamber leaders said. The agenda, the product of an extensive membership-wide legislative survey and committee work, comes ahead of the convening of the 84th Iowa General Assembly on January 10<sup>th</sup> and has been endorsed by the Fairfield Economic Development Association.

The 2011 Agenda, drafted by the Chamber’s Government Affairs Committee and ratified by the Chamber Board of Directors on December 23, is slated for distribution to all Fairfield Chamber members; area community groups; targeted statewide advocacy organizations; and local, state and federal lawmakers. Chamber Executive Director Brent Willett lauded the work of the committee which put the agenda together.

“The Chamber Government Affairs Committee and Board of Directors has delivered to our membership a comprehensive agenda rich with information and policy positions on issues critical to Fairfield-area business, but also a comprehensible resource for members to reference when communicating with policymakers or simply forming opinions and positions on prescient business issues before our elected leaders,” he said.

Lori Schaefer-Weaton, Director of Business Development at Chamber member Agri-Industrial Plastics Company, chairs the Government Affairs Committee, which began its labors in the summer by drafting a 13-point Chamber membership-wide legislative survey and concluded its 2010 work with the ratification of the agenda by unanimous vote of the Chamber Board of Directors last week.

“I’m pleased with the work of the committee and its outcomes,” said Schaefer-Weaton, a member of the Fairfield Economic Development Association Board of Directors. “Perhaps never before have so many critical

legislative issues faced business in the Fairfield area and across the country, meaning the advocacy role of chambers of commerce like ours will become increasingly important to the preservation and building of positive climates in which to conduct business and prosper for our local communities,” she added.

The FEDA endorsement of the agenda provides “increased horsepower” to the Chamber’s ability to advocate for the priorities contained in the agenda, Willett said. “With FEDA providing its endorsement to the agenda, we now have the strong support of more than 400 Chamber- and FEDA-member partners, putting us in a position to truly advocate for their interests at each level of government. My staff, board and I look forward to working to put into motion the prerogatives and initiatives that the Agenda summarizes,” he said.

Added Jane Anne Harl, Chamber President, “the agenda the Government Affairs Committee has formed is the result of responsible member polling and debate, and they got it just right.”

“FEDA is proud to stand behind this comprehensive, effectual agenda and provide our support and advocacy to the Chamber to see that it is effectively heard by our elected leaders,” said FEDA President Pat Doyle.

Priority issues identified in the agenda include right-to-work, business climate, property tax reform, economic and workforce development, education and county zoning and comprehensive land use planning topics. A complete listing of the agenda’s priorities follows

### **I. Preserving Iowa’s Right-to-Work Status**

- Iowa’s Right-to-Work status, which precludes employers from depriving any individual the “right to work at his chosen occupation for any employer because of membership in, affiliation with, withdrawal or expulsion from, or refusal to join, any labor union, organization, or association” provides employers in the state and those considering doing business in Iowa a competitive advantage. Any alteration to Iowa’s Right-to-Work status would significantly impair future job retention and creation efforts in the state. It is imperative Iowa preserve its Right-to-Work status without modification. In a survey of the membership, 70% listed this issue as “Critical/Important”.

### **II. Business Climate**

- In order to grow our local and state economy, we must create an environment conducive to business investment, optimism and job creation. To that end,
  - Iowa’s unemployment tax structure, which compels the Iowa Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund to remain solvent despite record economic turmoil and permits Iowa Workforce Development to independently adjust company rates up during times of significant statewide unemployment, should be reformed to include a third-party indexing system to determine rate increases.
  - Iowa’s current system providing for employer direction of medical card for work-related injuries- Iowa law since 1913- should not be altered in any way.
  - Efforts to impose “prevailing wage” decrees by statute on public or private construction projects should be opposed.
  - Efforts to provide for “open-scope bargaining” for public employee labor contract negotiations by statute should be opposed.

### **III. Comprehensive Property Tax Reform**

- Iowa’s legislature and Governor should follow up on gubernatorial and other campaign pledges to reform Iowa’s property tax system. The current system, which allows for no limitations on valuation increases for industrial and commercial properties and provides substantial rollbacks on residential and agricultural valuations, has allowed for the shifting of the property tax burden to commercial and industrial property owners, placing Iowa at a significant competitive disadvantage. Iowa consistently ranks in the bottom third nationally for commercial property tax burden, hindering business attraction and retention efforts. In a survey of the membership, 68% listed this issue as “Critical/Important”.

#### **IV. Economic Development**

- The Fairfield Chamber strongly supports economic growth efforts to improve local, state and federal business and community development programs that foster an environment for new and existing businesses to succeed and invest in our community. Areas of opportunity include:
  - Fully funding the Iowa Values Fund at its historic \$50 million level in 2011. The Grow Iowa Values Fund supports essential programs with proven track records of success and return on investment, including the regional marketing program that has helped communities come together to plan for growth collaboratively.
  - Supporting local efforts to assist and enable entrepreneurial development, including business incubator support and development and collaboration with the Fairfield Economic Development Association’s entrepreneurial development programs as well as those of the City of Fairfield, the Fairfield Entrepreneurs Association and other groups.
  - Strengthening local economic development incentives for new and expanding existing companies alike. The City of Fairfield’s commercial property tax abatement program should be lengthened to five years and a local fund supported by the City of Fairfield and Jefferson County to provide support for downtown building façade and sign improvements should be established.
  - Strengthening successful worker training and retraining programs like 260E and 260F Industrial New Jobs Training Program as part of an effort to address Iowa’s widening workforce availability and skills gap with long-term, multi-faceted policies which include education, training, retention and recruitment. These programs are critical to economic development efforts to retain, expand and recruit businesses to the Fairfield area.
  - Supporting efforts to develop the next generation of Iowa’s Enterprise Zone program into an expanded and less administratively burdensome one which provides access to Enterprise Zone benefits to more counties and more projects by eliminating the 1% per county land designation, reforming local oversight procedures and other measures recommended for adoption by a special committee of the Iowa Department of Economic Development. The Enterprise Zone program, in place for close to two decades in Iowa, provides investment and other incentives to qualifying projects in approximately one-quarter of Iowa counties those which have been identified by Census data review to be among Iowa’s most economically distressed. Jefferson County is currently an Enterprise Zone-qualifying county.
  - Amending Values Fund regulations to enable wage threshold requirements to better reflect project and community dynamics, including the segmentation of wage thresholds by industry and the lowering of wage thresholds for start-up companies in disadvantaged counties like those in Southeast Iowa.

#### **V. Education**

- The Fairfield Community School District should lead a contingent of partners including Cardinal Community School District, Harmony Community School District, Van Buren Community School

District and Indian Hills Community College to see to the development in 2011 of a Fairfield-based regional Career Academy to provide skills and education relevant to job opportunities in the area to area high school students. The Academy would bear a series of curriculum streams designed to deliver training and education to area students which corresponds with existing job opportunities in the area, providing incentive to remain in the area post-secondary or collegial graduation.

- State-level education policy reforms should include increased emphasis on math and science skills development, early childhood education expansion, performance-based assessment programs for educators and students, and statewide accountability standards.

## **VI. Other local priorities**

- Zoning regulations should be established in Jefferson County, one of only a handful of Iowa counties without a formal development policy. In order to motivate orderly, efficient and comprehensive land use policies and practices, Jefferson County should produce and maintain straightforward zoning regulations which demonstrate to existing and future property owners an investment in orderly and lawful land governance.
- The City of Fairfield should bring fully up to date its Comprehensive Land Use Plan to better inform planning and development decision-making throughout the community, including housing, agricultural, government and commercial development.

In an effort to directly advocate for the agenda, the Chamber will again partner with the Washington, Iowa Chamber of Commerce to bring members of both organizations to the Iowa State Capitol on Tuesday, February 8. A bus will take Fairfield and Washington Chamber members to Des Moines for visits with local legislators as well as legislative and department leaders and return in late afternoon. The trip is open to all Fairfield Area and Washington Chamber of Commerce members. Details on the trip will be announced soon.

To download a copy of the agenda, visit [FairfieldIowa.com/blog](http://FairfieldIowa.com/blog). To request a mailed copy, contact the Chamber at 641-472-2111 or [chamber@fairfieldiowa.com](mailto:chamber@fairfieldiowa.com).

For more information on the 2011 Agenda or the Chamber Government Affairs Committee, contact Willett at 641-472-2111 or [bwillett@fairfieldiowa.com](mailto:bwillett@fairfieldiowa.com).

The Fairfield Area Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advocacy of its more than 375 member partners. The Chamber produces dozens of community events year-round and works with local, state, regional and national partners to improve the Fairfield's business environment and quality of life. The Chamber's 204 West Broadway offices also house the offices of the Fairfield Economic Development Association.

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