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The Gazette

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AGRIPROCESSORS RAID

Judge gets an earful

Postville residents welcome visit, wish it had come sooner

By **Orlan Love**
The Gazette

POSTVILLE — Nearly seven months after a federal immigration raid plunged this town into a humanitarian and economic disaster, a top state official arrived Thursday to hear firsthand the displaced workers' plight.

"I don't know that we should have been here any sooner. We have been very much engaged" behind the scenes, Lt. Gov. Patty Judge said during a visit to Turner Hall, a temporary relief center for workers displaced by the May 12 raid and the subsequent slowdown and recent three-week shutdown of the kosher meatpacking plant.

Community leaders said they were glad Judge came but wished she'd done so sooner. "If they can say they should



Iowa Lt. Gov. **Patty Judge** Meets residents

leader in the effort to provide food, shelter and legal aid to displaced workers and their

families. "Her visit is most welcome, but it would have helped us draw attention to the community's plight if she'd come sooner," said the Rev. Steve Brackett, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church and another leader of the ongoing community relief effort.

Government leaders "did not want to touch Postville before the election" because

► **POSTVILLE, PAGE 10A**



Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette

Luisa Hernandez holds her sleeping 2-year-old son, Diego, as she waits to fill out housing assistance forms through the Postville Response Coalition at Turner Hall on Thursday in Postville. Hernandez worked at Agriprocessors Inc. for eight years. Seated at right is Tal Ginter, who also was affected by the issues surrounding the troubled kosher meatpacking plant.

GIRLS' SPORTS

Lily Moloney (from left), 15, of Solon, Madeline Rainey, 13, of Cedar Rapids, and Jordan Fencl, 16, of Solon, take the puck down the ice during a practice Wednesday for the Lady RoughRiders at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena. The team says it's the first organized all-girl youth hockey team in the state.



Ice breakers

Lady RoughRiders first all-female youth hockey league in Iowa

By **Jeff Johnson**
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — There's no wasted time allowed. "One lap around. Let's go, let's go! Move your feet!" Kevin Brooks barks to his hockey team as it begins practice by sprinting around the Olympic-sized rink at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena.

The coach gets fed up with what he sees during a drill a short time later. His players aren't showing nearly enough energy or execution.

"Everybody, 10 push-ups, 10 push-ups!" he shouts. "You're throwing away the puck too many times!"

Without hesitation, the players hit the ice and give Brooks his push-ups. There's nary a com-

plaint. These girls always listen to their coach.

Girls? Yes, and the Cedar Rapids Lady RoughRiders are billing themselves as the first organized all-female youth hockey team in Iowa. There are 13 players on this historic roster, ranging in age from 13 to 16. They had been forced to play on boys' teams until now.

It's a local team, with the exception of two girls from Solon and two from the Waterloo area, and it's won its first five games.

"It's exciting to see it take off," said Jordan Fencl, 16, of Solon. "It's like you're on a road trip,

► **LADY ROUGHRIDERS, PAGE 10A**



Stephen Mally photos/freelance

Haley Schmelzer (left), 15, talks with Madeline Rainey, 13, both of Cedar Rapids, during a Lady RoughRiders practice Wednesday in Cedar Rapids.

THE FLOODS OF 2008

Councilman ups ante for sales tax plan

By **Rick Smith**
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — Ten years, not two years.

For anyone who didn't hear him clearly at Wednesday evening's council meeting, City Council member Justin Shields said Thursday he wants to see the city enact a 2 percent local-option sales tax for flood recovery for 10 years, not two.

After the Wednesday night council meeting, during which Shields himself said the city needed to fix its microphones, The Gazette reported two years.

Also Thursday, Shields said he understood that state law does not allow a city to enact more than a 1 percent local-option sales tax, a fact the Iowa Department of Revenue confirmed.

Shields said he wants the city to ask the Iowa Legislature to change the law to allow cities to enact 2 percent taxes.

State law also requires voters to approve any local-option sales tax. In recent months, the City Council has asked state lawmakers to allow cities to enact such taxes without voters' OK. Shields said he favored that change, too.

Officials estimate the city would bring in \$23 million a year for each 1 percent of tax if no other jurisdiction in Linn County passed it. It would bring in \$18 million a year for each 1 percent of tax if all other jurisdictions in the county passed the tax.

Across Iowa the state sales tax is 6 percent, with 1 percent of that for school districts.

In a Thursday noon meeting between council members and representatives from the city's Washington, D.C., lobbying firm, Shields again lamented the insufficient help coming from the federal government to help with flood

► **SALES TAX, PAGE 10A**

HIGHER EDUCATION

More state aid, loan forgiveness advised to cut student debt

By **Diane Heldt**
The Gazette

Iowa could stem its rapid growth in average student debt with more state-funded student aid and rewards for companies offering loan forgiveness benefits, officials said Thursday.

Changes already made to how private loans are handled, officials said, also should help control increases in Iowa's average student debt, ranked first in the country.

Those are among about 15 recommendations to the state Board of Regents from financial aid officials

at the University of Iowa, Iowa State University and the University of Northern Iowa. The regents will discuss the Access and Affordability report, released Thursday, next week when they vote on 2009-10 tuition. That proposal, unchanged from October, would increase base

tuition by 4.2 percent for resident undergraduates.

Escalating student debt and college affordability are top regents concerns.

► **DEBT, PAGE 10A**



Mark Warner
UI financial aid director

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TODAY'S WEATHER



Chilly start, mostly sunny
TODAY 23 20
SATURDAY 29 2 8E

Lady RoughRiders/Big February trip planned

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knowing it's not going to stop for a while."
 "It's just been really fun. I've enjoyed playing with the girls," said Sarah Thompson, 16, the goaltender from Cedar Rapids Kennedy. "We all wanted it to happen, and we basically talked to as many people as we could to get it going."

That includes Jess Carlson of Cedar Rapids Prairie, who gets a lot of credit for creating the team. Carlson and her mother, Natalie Simon, took the all-girls team idea to Brooks in early fall after he took the job as hockey director at the Ice Arena. The former RoughRiders player had experience coaching girls' teams.

"I got the girls together, sent out some e-mails, kind of got some games set up," said Carlson, 15. "Then Brooks came along and kind of ran with it."

The team has to go out of state to find competition, including tournaments in Wis-

Lady RoughRiders

Members of the Cedar Rapids Lady RoughRiders, the first organized all-girl youth hockey team in Iowa:

- **Cedar Rapids** — Lauren Manninen, Haley Schmelzer, Madeline Rainey, Madeline Flesner, Jessica Carlson, Lauren Netz, Clara Gilbert, Katelyn Larson, Sarah Thompson
- **Solon** — Jordan Fencil, Lily Moloney
- **Waterloo** — Alex Spitzner
- **Hudson** — Stephanie Newhouse

consin, Minnesota and Illinois. Then there's a really big February trip to Boston planned.

A native New Englander, Brooks has set up practices and scrimmages with Boston-area teams. The Lady RoughRiders will enjoy two Boston Bruins NHL games and a meeting with USA Olympic team goalie Chandra Gunn.

"I've been lucky enough to be around a lot of these (girls)



Stephen Mally/freelance

Cedar Rapids Lady RoughRiders Jessica Carlson (left) and Haley Schmelzer, both 15 and of Cedar Rapids, practice a passing drill Wednesday at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena.

programs," Brooks said. "They all started small ... My big thing is to educate people about hockey. I wanted these girls to be able to realize 'Hey,

we don't have to play with boys. We can have our own team.'"

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Sales tax/Some worry recovery priority falls

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recovery.
 "What has come just hasn't scratched the surface," Shields told Mary Langowski and Mary Pat Lawrence of Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal. "... We can't rebuild without help. There is just way, way too much damage."

Langowski and Lawrence said they had heard a similar message in the last two days as they have met with an assortment of local groups to talk about flood recovery. It is because of what Shields called the lack of federal and state assistance that he is proposing a local-option tax. Five of the other eight council members on Wednesday said they also wanted to discuss such a tax at next week's meeting.

Members worried that the Cedar Rapids flood has fallen off the national radar screen. Shields suggested a city vid-

eo about the flood be sent to all members of Congress. He also wondered if Cedar Rapids should invite each senator and representative to the city, though Langowski wasn't sure many would come.

"Is there going to be dollars available?" council member Chuck Wieneke asked.

Langowski said obtaining federal dollars for flood recovery is "not a sprint but a marathon." Funding is apt to come from a variety of federal pots over several years, she said.

City Manager Jim Prosser said in a Wednesday interview that local-option sales taxes can be a tough sell. Typically, he said, voters like to know that such a tax is going for a specific project — like the one-year tax in 2002 that paid to update the city's swimming pools — rather than for general operating expenses.

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Debt/Marketing practices of private loans changing

► FROM PAGE 1A

The recommendations are a good start, but Iowa's No. 1 national ranking for average indebtedness likely won't change quickly, UI Financial Aid Director Mark Warner said.

"I would envision debt will not grow at the rate that it has grown, and that is extremely important," he said. "What people have to understand is it's not going to turn around in a year or two."

Iowa's ranking includes debt incurred by students at public universities and private colleges. Among 2007 graduates with debt, the average was \$31,501 at ISU, \$22,541 at UNI and \$22,181 at the UI. The national average at public universities was \$18,482.

Several factors contributed to the marked increase in student debt levels, Thursday's report said. They include: intense marketing of private loans by the Iowa Student Loan Liquidity Corporation, which frequently were marketed as the lowest-cost loans even when they weren't; lower median household incomes compared with peer states and the country; smaller amounts of state grant aid to public university students compared with peer states; and state funding drops for the public universities earlier this decade that led to significant tuition increases.

The attorney general recently scrutinized Iowa Student Loan for its marketing practices of private loans, and changes are under way. ISU several years ago stopped promoting private loans to its students, which officials be-

Among 2007 graduates with debt, the average was \$31,501 at ISU, \$22,541 at UNI and \$22,181 at the UI. The national average at public universities was \$18,482.

lieve will help stem escalating debt levels there. Nationally, the volume of private loans awarded increased by 1,100 percent from 1995-96 to 2005-06. In Iowa, it increased 5,000 percent, which includes increases of 171,000 percent at ISU, nearly 16,000 percent at UNI and 1,470 percent at the UI.

Other recommendations: making sure university aid programs keep pace with tuition increases; notifying all parents of their maximum eligibility for federal PLUS loans; encouraging all students to complete financial literacy programs; and awarding federal, state, university and private scholarships and grants to students before awarding loans.

"We want to make sure they're not borrowing more than they necessarily have to," Tim Bakula, UNI associate director of aid, said.

State legislators are concerned about rising debt, but it will be tough this year for the state to make greater financial contributions toward solutions, Sen. Bob Dvorsky, D-Coralville, said.

"But we ought to at least look into trying to figure out ways to deal with it," he said.

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Postville/Residents lament medical bills

► FROM PAGE 1A

immigration has been such a divisive issue, said local veterinarian Larry Moore. "But the election is over and it's time to address the crisis."

Judge answered questions and heard comments from dozens of the more than 200 people gathered in the hall. Acknowledging that she could not immediately solve their problems, she advised them to apply for assistance from a \$698,000 Community Development Block Grant earmarked for people financially injured by Agriprocessors' meltdown.

David Boss of the Northeast Iowa Community Action Corp., which will administer the imminent threat grant, said it can be used primarily for rent, utilities and mortgage payments, with a \$3,000 cap per household.

Judge said three AmeriCorps-VISTA workers will be dispatched to Postville next week to help former Agripro-

cessors workers find solutions to their problems.

Those problems range from repeated eviction notices from landlords and livestock producers who have not been paid for shipments to Agriprocessors to former workers who lack health insurance even though premiums had been deducted from their paychecks.

Melody Brink said her family has unpaid bills of more than \$40,000 for surgery that should have been covered by insurance but was not. Truck driver Chuck Larson said he owes \$20,000 for medical bills and that the company "deducted premiums right up to the end." Ginger Warthen, who was diagnosed with leukemia a year ago, said she can't get needed treatments because her family has no health insurance, even though premium payments had been deducted from her husband's checks.

Rep. Roger Thomas, D-Elkader, said the state is not doing enough to help victims

Man invites disadvantaged to inauguration

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the JW Marriott Hotel, \$1 million will buy you 300 hotel rooms, \$200,000 worth of food and private access to a tented, heated balcony overlooking the parade route of President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration.

Earl W. Stafford is buying it all — and giving it away to strangers.

Stafford, a Virginia businessman, plans to invite disadvantaged people, wounded

soldiers and others to the prime location on Pennsylvania Avenue. He's calling it the "People's Inaugural Project," inviting those who would never otherwise have a chance to wear tuxedos or satin dresses to the president's swearing in.

of the Agriprocessors meltdown. "We have to figure out what we can do about child support and health insurance payments that have been misdirected or misappropriated," he said. "We need legislation to ensure that employers put deductions where they belong."

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Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette

Rhonda Lechuga (right) of Postville asks Lt. Gov. Patty Judge a question during a meeting with residents about problems associated with Agriprocessors Inc. on Thursday in Postville. Lechuga has worked at Agriprocessors for 2 1/2 years. Luisa Hernandez is at left.



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