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Governor Chet Culver used an appearance at the Iowa State Fair to say mistakes have been made under his watch, and to tell the approximately 100 fairgoers that he takes full responsibility for those mistakes.

"There's been a lot of criticism, there's been a lot of questions about things we've done or we've not done ... and I want to say that some of that criticism is justified and that we have made our fair share of mistakes," Culver said. "And I take full responsibility for those things that have happened in various state agencies, that happened on my watch, and I take responsibility for those mistakes that have been made."

Culver later elaborated, saying scandals in the Iowa Film Office and the Alcoholic Beverages Division are his responsibility, and that he must do all he can to effectively manage government and limit those mistakes. "The thing I feel good about is that we've replaced those individuals that were responsible and as quickly as I learned about those things, I acted, but I still take responsibility," Culver said.

Part of preventing future mistakes will be spending more time "shoulder-to-shoulder" with department directors and their senior staff, Culver said, and changing the communication structure from those agencies into the governor's office. He also said he wants to make sure employees feel comfortable blowing the whistle on mismanagement in state government.

House Minority Leader Kraig Paulsen (R-Hiawatha) said he appreciates Culver's acknowledgment that mistakes had been made under his watch, "but he's yet to acknowledge one of his biggest mistakes -- increasing Iowans property taxes."

Paulsen said Culver knowingly spent too much money in Fiscal Year 2010, which led to a 10-percent across-the-board budget cut. He said property taxpayers were forced to pick up the tab to the tune of a $526.9-million increase. He also said state spending has increased by $1 billion since Culver took office.

"I look forward to Governor Culver acknowledging his fiscal mistakes and joining with House Republicans on our plan to put the taxpayer first, rein in government spending, and cut out waste in government," Paulsen said.

Republican Party of Iowa Chair Matt Strawn said Culver has waited too long to acknowledge his mistakes and that he has had plenty of times to correct them. He also said Culver should take responsibility for "wasting" $1.7 billion on the I-JOBS program and causing property taxes to increase.

Branstad Proposes Eliminating Economic-Development Department

Republican gubernatorial nominee and former Governor Terry Branstad is pushing to replace the Iowa Department of Economic Development with a public/private partnership called the "Iowa Partnership for Economic Progress" that would promote and market Iowa to attract new investment and jobs.

Branstad said the current Iowa Department of Economic Development is dysfunctional and scandal-ridden, and the public/private partnership would focus more on customer service for the

state to keep or create jobs.

The partnership would have a chief executive officer and a board of directors with the lieutenant governor as its chairperson.

"Only by reworking the bureaucratic structure of state government will we be able to eliminate redundancies and roadblocks in our regulatory and economic-development efforts," Branstad said. "To attract and retain business, we must change the mindset of those charged with economic development and job creation."

Branstad also called for a cost/benefit analysis of the programs and incentives that cities, counties and the state use to attract and retain businesses. He said the current system is too complex, slow, and archaic. Branstad has said he wants to create 200,000 new jobs in the state, cut the corporate-income tax in half, and reduce commercial property taxes.

Culver criticized Branstad's proposals for economic development, education, and the state budget, saying the plans are short on details. "He put out a very light plan today on economic development -- a one-page plan that was actually proposed by Doug Gross, who unsuccessfully ran for governor in 2002," Culver said.

The governor defended Iowa's record on economic development, saying that in the past three years, Iowa has worked successfully with 251 businesses to bring 20,000 jobs to the state.

National Dems Settle on February for 2012 Caucuses

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) confirmed Friday that the Iowa caucuses will remain first in the nation in 2012.

The DNC is meeting in St. Louis. Under the plan, Democrats would hold the Iowa caucuses on February 6, 2012, and the New Hampshire primary eight days later. Nevada caucuses would be

February 18, and the South Carolina primary would be February 28.

All other states would hold their primaries and caucuses March 6 or later. The plan essentially mirrors the schedule approved earlier this month by the Republican National Committee (RNC).

DNC Chair Tim Kaine had reassured Iowans earlier in the week that the state would retain its position. "Yeah, because if I want to get out of here alive, I've got to say 'yes,' and the answer is 'yes,'" Kaine said when asked during a visit to the Iowa State Fair if the Iowa caucuses would remain first.

"I have also worked with the RNC Chair Michael Steele so when they met, they agreed to do the same thing," Kaine said. "So we've lined up our calendar, which really not only keeps Iowa first, but it keeps Iowa-style politics first, which is the person-to-person, grassroots style which is such an important part of our country's tradition, and Iowa really leads the way in that."

Iowa Democratic Party Communications Director Sam Roecker said there has been great support for Iowa to remain first in the nation. "That doesn't mean Iowa is guaranteed beyond 2012. There is still work to be done, and we will continue to work to keep Iowa as first in the nation," he said. "The first-in-the-nation status keeps Iowa as a national political voice and gives Iowans the opportunity to change the course of the nation, just as they did with President [Barack] Obama. It will be a strong start to President Obama's reelection."

Santorum Open About 2012 Consideration

Former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum (R-Pennsylvania) says he is pondering a run for president in 2012, but he's spending most of his time in the state supporting Iowa politicians.

"That's really what I'm doing most of the time when I'm here, but through that process I'm getting a chance to get out a message and let people sort of kick the tires a little bit and let them know what I think and see what kind of feedback I'm getting," he said.

Santorum spoke at the Iowa State Fair, appearing on WHO radio and then serving as guest chef at the Iowa Pork Producers Tent. He later spent some time at the Republican Party of Iowa's fair booth and later joined U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) for an event in Des Moines on behalf of state Representative Pat Grassley (R-New Hartford).

Running for president is a decision that will involve many factors, Santorum said, including the level of grassroots and financial support he can muster as well as the impact it would have on his family, which includes seven children.

"I'm in the process of sort of assessing this right now to see whether this is a possibility," Santorum said. "I think at least early on I get the impression that what I'm saying and what I've stood for and the record I have is something that would be an important contribution to the debate in 2012 in the presidential elections."

Whether he runs or not, Santorum said he wants to stay involved in the process and make sure a strong conservative candidate is chosen to take on President Obama. Santorum said his primary goal as president would be to repeal "Obamacare."

Santorum said he expects to be back in the state a couple more times before November.

"The caucus is a nice way to start, because it's much more personal, and New Hampshire is less personal in the sense that it's a primary and you've got a lot more people voting," Santorum said. "But I think it's a nice little way of sort of having folks that really pay attention to this, really take this responsibility seriously, be in a position to really recommend folks to the country."

Santorum said Iowa's smaller population is also an asset for the state as the nation's first contest for presidential candidates. "The cool thing about Iowa is it gives everybody a chance," he said. "Just because you have $50 million doesn't mean you're going to win Iowa, because the relatively small number of people that vote in these caucuses gives you an opportunity to meet maybe not all of them but a good chunk of them in the time that you're here."

Gingrich Gets Mixed Reviews During Fair Visit

Former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich got mixed reviews during what he said was his fifth lifetime visit to the Iowa State Fair, with some people praising him as the "best hope for America" who has a good chance of becoming America's next president, and at least one vocal Republican shouting insults at Gingrich.

"We're all supportive of the things you're talking about, and I feel you're the best hope for America right now," Gary Cunningham, a native of Van Meter who now lives near Kirksville, Missouri, told Gingrich. He said Gingrich has insight into what's happening around the world and has "a real good chance" at becoming president.

"I admired him when he was speaker of the House," Cunningham said. "I thought he was one of the best speakers then. His sincerity and his dedication and his compassion come across. But I also like his direct approach to things. He'll call a spade a spade. If he feels there's something that should be said, something he firmly believes, he does not hide behind politics to say it. I think he truly believes in America, not just in the Republican Party. That's what I like about him."

Others who waited to see Gingrich, who showed up an hour late at the Republican Party of Iowa's fair booth because of a delayed flight, echoed those comments. "You're the most knowledgeable possible presidential candidate we have," said one woman. "I hope to address you as Mr. President," said another.

Gingrich, 67, spent the majority of his time at the fair signing copies of his book *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular Socialist Machine*
. He appeared to be encouraged by the comments. "I'll tell you, Iowa will play a big role in that," Gingrich said about whether he'll be president.

Amid the praise, recent University of Iowa graduate Jeff Sherman, 22, of Ankeny started shouting at Gingrich at the Republican fair booth in the crowded Varied Industries building, accusing Gingrich of doing nothing while he was U.S. House speaker in 1994 and saying that if Gingrich is going to be in Iowa, he'd better abide by Iowa values.

"I think we have a lot of problems in this country with the Democrats spending, the Democrats taking us to war, and Newt Gingrich represents more of the same," Sherman later said in an interview. "He had his chance in power and for him to come to Iowa and pretend like he's going to run for president -- his only experience is in going with the status quo."

Sherman, who identified himself as a Republican who leans toward supporting Ron Paul for president, made it clear that he is not impressed with Gingrich's record.

"We had every opportunity to shrink government in 1994, and he did nothing," Sherman said. "His leadership has failed; he's going to try to run for president, and I just want to stop him ... because the man has no integrity; he only lusts for power just like he lusts over women. ... He's the exact opposite of what I want in a politician."

Huckabee Leads in Early 2012 Poll

A 2012 presidential poll released by *The Iowa Republican* shows 2008 Iowa-caucus winner Mike Huckabee leading among likely Republican voters in the state.

Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor, grabbed 22 percent of support, with former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney in second place with 18 percent and Gingrich coming in third with 14 percent. Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin received 11 percent of support, and U.S. Representative Ron Paul of Texas received 5 percent.

Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, South Dakota Senator John Thune, and Santorum all received about 1 percent. Twenty-three percent of those polled were undecided.

The Iowa Republican commissioned the poll with Concordia Group LLC, and the poll was conducted by Voter Consumer Research of Washington, D.C. The poll surveyed 399 likely Republican voters in the state, and the margin of error is 4.9 percent. All interviews were conducted by telephone between July 25 and 28.

This weekly summary comes from IowaPolitics.com , an online government and politics news service. Reporter Andrew Duffelmeyer and other correspondents contributed to this report.