Four years after Iowans received their first report from the Iowa Policy Project, our organization’s staff and board members re-evaluated our mission in 2005. We wanted a short description yet one that represents the range of work we do – a more difficult task than we initially imagined, because words in the policy arena take on added meaning in the age of political spin machines. In this atmosphere, columnist Paul Krugman has written, “there is no longer such a thing as nonpolitical truth.” This presents our challenge. As we are most effective when we can cut through the spin and offer meaningful information to the public and policy makers, we realized that our mission must be especially meaningful as well. The result:

The mission of the Iowa Policy Project is to promote public policy that fosters economic opportunity while safeguarding the health and well-being of Iowa’s people and the environment. By providing a foundation of fact-based, objective research and engaging the public in an informed discussion of policy alternatives, IPP advances accountable, effective and fair government.

This represents not a change of course – but a fresh, clear definition of where this young organization had been and where it is heading.

Focus of Activity

Iowa Policy Project research reached a national stage in 2005, most notably with the release of Nonstandard Jobs, Substandard Benefits, a report that examined changes in the workforce and the implications for fringe benefits, in particular health insurance. This report received attention in national media circles – one of several IPP reports in 2005 that drew attention from beyond the state’s borders.

The year was perhaps IPP’s most productive yet. Besides publishing or contributing to 13 reports in the first 11 months, IPP staff produced dozens of press releases, monthly job reports, fact sheets and newspaper columns.

Tax and Budget Work

Tax policy analysis led by our Research Director, Peter Fisher, is recognized as the hallmark of the Iowa Policy Project. IPP’s cooperation with the Child & Family Policy Center in Des Moines led to the formation in 2004 of the Iowa Fiscal Partnership (IFP) as a member of the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative (SFAI). This designation comes with funding from the Stoneman Family
Foundation and technical assistance on fiscal issues from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. In the last half of 2004 and 2005, the Iowa partners focused on the state’s budgeting practices and its resulting structural deficit, or “chronic crisis.” A leadership deadlock at the State Capitol, primarily through a 25-25 partisan split in the Senate, blocked the movement of controversial tax policy and offered a window for legislators and the public to take a long-term look at the connection between budget decisions and cuts in public services.

Fortunately, the Iowa Fiscal Partnership was well-positioned to provide that perspective. A series of reports released from September 2004 to January 2005 examined how Iowa arrived at a situation of chronic deficits by reducing revenues deliberately over several years, putting Iowa “out of step” in comparison with other states’ handling of fiscal troubles. The reports illustrated the resulting effect on local government, education and human services, and concluded with recommendations to modernize Iowa’s tax system to prevent future crises. In February, the IFP compiled these reports in a book titled, *Our Vanishing Budgets: Iowa’s Response to the Fiscal Crisis in the States*. In addition to the usual press outreach, the reports were offered on our websites, <http://www.iowapolicyproject.org> and <http://www.iowafiscal.org>, and IFP staffers made over 20 presentations to groups around the state. Fisher and CFPC’s Charles Bruner presented an overview of *Our Vanishing Budgets* to the Iowa Senate Ways and Means Committee, and, along with IPP Executive Director David Osterberg, reviewed the report with the State Auditor, David Vaudt.

Budget and tax policy analysis extended beyond state issues to the federal level for IPP and IFP staff in 2005. At the urging of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state groups took a hand at helping advocates and the media see the impact of revolutionary policy shifts occurring in Washington. IPP involvement included the production of fact sheets, generally authored by Assistant Director Mike Owen, that gleaned information from various national and state sources to “connect the dots” about the choices being made to cut taxes for the wealthy and cut services for low-income working families. At the same time as these budget debates, there was considerable discussion of the “reform” of Social Security – carving revenue out of the trust fund to enable private accounts. IPP staff helped other organizations in Iowa explain the potential consequences of these proposals – an effort that collectively helped to stop these efforts in 2005. In the past, we have tried to help with development of an Iowa fair-tax coalition, which has been difficult to achieve in a formal manner. Our work with other organizations in the state surrounding federal budget and Social Security issues, however, has helped to strengthen our ties with many of the same groups we would like to see band together to work for a sustainable, fair tax system in the state.

**Work and the Plight of the Middle Class**

Job quality continued to be the watchword for IPP in 2005, which saw completion of IPP’s largest project thus far: *Nonstandard Jobs, Substandard Benefits* by Fisher, Research Associate Elaine Ditsler, Senior Research Consultant Colin Gordon of the IPP, and David West of the Center for a Changing Workforce. IPP coordinated this 2 1/2-year study, funding for which was secured by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa through the U.S. Department of
Labor (DOL). This work was augmented by a grant from The Commonwealth Fund, which published a separate report by Fisher, Ditsler and Gordon. As of this December 2005 writing, the research is continuing to draw fresh attention to the legions of nonstandard workers who are ineligible for health insurance benefits as well as to the fact that the number of uninsured Americans may be understated in government surveys. In March, Fisher presented a summary of the research to the Task Force on the Future of Health Insurance in Washington. Fisher and Osterberg later traveled to Washington and made presentations both to DOL and Senator Harkin, while Ditsler made a presentation in Washington at the Institute for Women’s Policy Research conference. Fisher also met with officials at the Census Bureau to argue that changes are needed in the Current Population Survey to identify discount card users.

Every two years, we publish *The State of Working Iowa*. The 2005 edition, authored by Gordon, Ditsler and Fisher, again concentrates on economic data most important to working families. The report expanded on a trend we tracked in our monthly Iowa job analysis over the past two years, demonstrating the extremely slow pace of job recovery in Iowa from the 2001 national recession. It also showed the trend of fewer fringe benefits in the jobs that are being created compared to those that were lost, and the continuing low-wage status of Iowa jobs.

Two of the authors of Nonstandard Jobs, Substandard Benefits for the IPP, Senior Research Consultant Colin Gordon, center, and Research Associate Elaine Ditsler, right, discuss the research with host Al Kern on Iowa Public Radio’s “Talk of Iowa” program.
Our monthly Iowa job analyses started in 2003 with the JobWatch project coordinated by the Economic Policy Institute in Washington. We determined in more than two years of this effort that our work offered a perspective that media were not likely to receive from official sources, particularly the historical context that has demonstrated Iowa’s slow recovery. This has raised IPP visibility as a resource for policy makers and the media who are interested in solid job analysis.

**Environment and Energy Policy**

Water quality has become a huge issue in the state of Iowa and IPP has been there to help Iowans understand the sometimes confusing rhetoric surrounding the issue. IPP released papers produced on contract with academic researchers on watershed protection, wastewater management and water-quality concerns associated with the growing use of concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs. The latter report, by Carol J. Hodne, struck a nerve with the industrial agriculture establishment, which predictably attacked the report. However, the report remains the best summary of scientific literature available to help Iowans understand the impact of these operations on their communities.

Perhaps we saw our biggest policy impact in 2005 in the area of renewable energy. A paper by IPP Research Associate Teresa Galluzzo demonstrated the economic benefits of small, locally owned wind-generation systems. As she was examining this, a state tax credit bill for small producers was offered in the Iowa General Assembly. Advocates and legislators on both sides of the aisle used Galluzzo’s paper in pressing for passage of the legislation, which has been signed into law by Governor Tom Vilsack. This work was noticed beyond Iowa’s borders, as Galluzzo was invited to Toronto to make a presentation at a community wind conference.

Galluzzo also produced fact sheets about the economic and environmental impacts of Iowa’s bottle-deposit law. Advocates for an expanded bottle-deposit law (to include more types of containers and improve recycling opportunities) used her fact sheets in March and April to press their case. There was no action on the issue in 2005, but it may return in 2006.

**Outreach**

Iowa Policy Project reports are made available to the media and public at news conferences and on our website, www.iowapolicyproject.org. Iowa Fiscal Partnership reports are posted at www.iowafiscal.org. While we circulate these reports ourselves, the most important ways we have found to reach Iowans is through follow-up newspaper columns and public
presentations to diverse audiences around the state. We believe our straightforward approach encourages more traffic to our websites and more attention from the media, who regularly call our researchers for a fact-based perspective.

Aside from published materials and presentations to organizations, IPP representatives presented testimony in 2005 to the state Senate Ways & Means Committee and before a special executive branch-legislative branch panel examining governance issues in Iowa. They made presentations to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Division of Employment and Training of the U.S. Department of Labor. In addition, IPP representatives have testified at hearings on rules for the new Grow Iowa Values Fund, the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill, Iowa water-quality regulations, and the quality of media coverage on public policy issues.

IPP representatives are routinely asked for one-on-one meetings with government officials and political candidates seeking a full understanding of issues before them, and frequently invited to make presentations to small and large organizations both inside and outside Iowa.

**Organization**

The IPP has settled into a permanent staff of five. This includes three full-time staffers working out of the Iowa City office – Owen, Ditsler and Galluzzo – supervised by the part-time executive director, Osterberg, and part-time research director, Fisher, whose duties are expanding. Gordon, as senior research consultant, is also a regular contributor to the Iowa Policy Project’s work.

**Funding and Board Direction**

Foundations, government grants, labor organizations and individuals provide the base of funding for the Iowa Policy Project. The Joyce Foundation funding has been an important part of our budget since the early days of IPP, but changes in its geographic funding strategies will lead IPP to seek help from other sources. The Stoneman Family Foundation has committed to three more years of support for IPP’s work in the Iowa Fiscal Partnership as part of the State Fiscal Analysis Initiative, a network of state organizations coordinated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. As mentioned previously, The Commonwealth Fund and the Department of Labor provided funding for the nonstandard work study. IPP also received a grant from the Iowa Finance Authority for a study of homelessness in Iowa, which will be published in January 2006. Finally, IPP receives essential support from trade unions, individuals and other organizations within Iowa, which not only funds IPP research, but also helps our organization meet state matching requirements for foundation grants. Fund-raising duties for IPP are guided by the executive director, but now involve all staff and board members in some manner, giving everyone in the organization a stake in assuring we have the resources to fulfill our mission.

The IPP Board of Directors has remained steady for two years. Officers are Roberta Till-Retz, president; Janet Carl, vice president; and Lyle Krewson, secretary. Other board members are Lana Ross, Mark Smith and Tony Smith. Kay Johansen serves as Treasurer.
2005 Publications


2/22/05 Analysis: Bush Budget Whacks Iowa Services. (IFP) 2-page release on CBPP report.


3/22/05 Saving Iowa’s Agland Tax Dollars for Conservation. By Teresa Welsh. 6 pages.

3/30/05 In the Budget Balance: Scales Tipped Against Low-Income Working Iowans. (IFP) 1 page “fiscal facts” sheet, plus press release: Services at Stake for Iowans in Congressional Budget Talks.

3-4/05 Facts about Iowa’s “Bottle Bill.” 2-page fact sheets by Teresa Welsh in March and April:
• “Litter Reduction and Recycling”
• “Economic Impacts of Existing Recycling Policy”
• “An Outdated Law in 2005” (Need for update)


4/14/05 Small Packages, Big Benefits: Economic Advantages of Local Wind Projects. By Teresa Welsh Galluzzo. 8 pages.

4/19/05 Iowa’s Personal Income Tax: Reform for Iowans at Any Age. By Charles Bruner and Mike Crawford. (IFP). 10 pages.


5/05/05 Beyond the Medicaid Spin: Real Cuts to Real People. (IFP) 1 page “policy points” sheet.

5/06/05 Unbalanced Bottom Line: A Quick Look at Implications for Iowa in the Federal Budget. (IFP) 1 page “policy points” fact sheet.

6/06/05 Hunger in the Heartland: A Portrait of Need in Northeast Iowa. By Maureen Berner. (IFP) 10 pages. Plus four fact sheets, released in advance of the report:
• “Understanding Food Aid in the U.S. and Iowa”
• “A Portrait of Hunger in Iowa”
• “Who Receives Food Assistance?”
• “Effectiveness of Public, Private Food Assistance”
6/17/05 Food Stamps: A 7 Percent Solution. (IFP) 1 page “policy points” fact sheet.


7/14/05 Spinning Off Responsibility: Governors Ask Already Burdened Medicaid Clients to Pay More. (IFP) 1 page “policy points” fact sheet.

8/01/05 Medicaid at 40: A Service That Works, For Americans Who Need It. (IFP) 2-page “policy points” fact sheet summarizing Medicaid performance at anniversary of program.

8/30/05 Stagnant Signs for Iowa Household Budgets. (IFP Press Release on Census)


10/07/05 Ecological Wastewater Management in Iowa: Hope for Iowa’s Small Communities. By Scott Wallace, Gene Parkin, Brett Ballavance and Ryan Brandt. 78 pages.

10/19/05 IowaCare: Need for Caution. By Charles Bruner, Victor Elias and Kelli Soyer. (IFP) 14 pages.


12/12/05 On the Chopping Block: Outline of Iowa Beneficiaries and Threats to Federal Services. (IFP) 3-page “backgrounder” fact sheet.

Monthly Iowa Jobs Report Analysis, same day as release from Iowa Workforce Development.