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In my first three weeks at the Statehouse, I have come to a conclusion. Pardon the sports analogy, but it seems to me that the Legislature and Governor are always playing defense. The Legislature as a body is entirely reactive. The budget mess we are currently dealing with is a prime example. Every interest group, state agency, political party, state elected official is lamenting the cuts that are going to be made to their respective entities. Yes, these cuts do need to be made. It is the law in Iowa that we must have a balanced budget as opposed to Washington D.C. and their practices of deficit spending. These cuts should be a positive thing for the taxpayers of Iowa. Like any business that goes thru hard times, the cutting of excess can make government leaner and more efficient in the long run. So, let's make the cuts and move on. The question I have for the Legislature: where should we move?

Why don't we focus on ways to not let this happen again? Why don't we focus on improving our business climate by making Iowa a more attractive state for employers? Why don't we focus on the issue of Iowa now being a middle of the road state in terms of educating our young people? Many of us can remember when Iowa's schools were ranked in the top five in the nation. It was not that long ago. I have yet to hear one sentence on why Iowa's education ranking has dropped so dramatically. Real questions need to be asked and ANSWERED. Instead, the focus is simply on either more money or not enough money to fund existing government programs. Iowa needs to be on the offense and take advantage of these tough economic times. Now is the time for us to advertise our state as a place where a business can come and prosper. Now is the time for us to prepare our young people for the global economy that they are about to enter. Now is the time to face the facts that we are in budget crisis, make the necessary cuts, and move forward. Iowans deserve a Legislature that is proactive and will not only take care of the present, but also the future.

Finally, the Legislature did some good for the people of Iowa affected by the floods of 2008. The House and Senate unanimously passed our first bill for the 2009 legislative session. It is now on the Governor's desk and will be signed into law next week. This bill was the first meaningful act performed by the Legislature for the flood victims. This legislation will allocate \$56 million to Iowans who are still not living in their homes, pay for other unmet needs of the victims, and pay for assistance to cities and counties affected by the disaster. The bill also authorized the creation of the Rebuild Iowa Office to coordinate state activities with rebuilding efforts in Iowa. The details of this newly created bureaucracy are still sketchy and the majority party failed to elaborate on exactly how many new employees this office will include and who these employees will be. House Republicans offered amendments to answer these questions which were quickly shot down. This bill is not perfect. I will add that I find it shameful that it has taken the Legislature over half a year to finally get some direct help to Iowans devastated by the floods. It is better late than never, but this was too late in my opinion.

Peter Cownie (R-West Des Moines), represents District 60 in the Iowa House of Representatives. The district includes most of West Des Moines in Polk County. He can be reached via e-mail at Peter.Cownie@legis.state.ia.us or by phone at 281-3221.