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DATE: December 8, 2016

***** For Immediate Release *****

Statement on Selection of Governor Terry Branstad as U.S. Ambassador to China

Iowa Sister States is thrilled that Governor Terry E. Branstad has been selected as the next U.S. Ambassador to China.

In 1983, Governor Branstad signed the Iowa-Hebei sister state agreement. At that time, there was very little trade between Iowa and China. Only a few professional delegations visited Iowa, and delegations from Iowa to Hebei were limited to perhaps one or two per year. In 1985, when he was an official from Hebei Province, Chinese President Xi Jinping participated in one of those delegations. That visit to Iowa was his introduction to the United States, and it changed his world view.

Today, thanks in part to our sister state relationship, hundreds of citizens travel between Iowa and Hebei annually. They travel to learn from education exchanges, promote tourism, and begin and renew business partnerships. Data from the Global Trade Atlas shows that 20 years ago, China ranked 24th on a list of Iowa's largest trade partners. In 2015, China was Iowa's 3rd largest trade partner. This growth is possible thanks to our relationship with China, lasting more than 30 years. It's a relationship that would not be possible without the hard work of step-by-step citizen diplomacy on both sides. A sense of trust and friendship plays a part in each and every exchange.

When President Xi Jinping returned to Iowa in 2012 to reconnect with old friends he met in the 80s, the smiles and handshakes were genuine. More visits have occurred since then, with hugs upon arrival, and tears shed during departure. But every goodbye now carries the promise of another visit in the near future.

Governor Branstad had great foresight when he asked Luca Berrone, staff of the Iowa Development Commission Trade Division, to create the Iowa Sister States program. There is no way that anyone could have predicted that a visitor from Hebei would be president of China, or that the same Iowa governor that nurtured and supported the sister state program would someday be picked to be the U.S. Ambassador in China, where he will work with his old friend President Xi as a bridge between our two nations.

On behalf of the volunteers with Iowa Sister States, we wish both the Governor and Mrs. Branstad much success in their new diplomatic roles. We feel this appointment is a win for citizens both in Iowa and in Hebei that have honored, respected and participated in the relationship for more than 30 years.

For more information about Iowa Sister States, its history, and its relationship with Hebei, visit IowaSisterStates.org. Follow its presence on social media on Facebook (facebook.com/IowaSisterStates) or Twitter (@IASisterStates).