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Dear Governor and Chris Branstad,

I'm very sorry to hear that your family has had to move out of the governor's mansion due to health complications from black mold. I do hope that Chris heals quickly and the home is properly fixed.

I'd like to invite you to take this as an opportunity to protect the health of all Iowans.

I, too, have been harmed by mold in a State-owned home. There are many eerie similarities between your situation and mine... and some distinct differences.

I had water running through the basement of my poorly-maintained University of Iowa house for six months, experiencing a mysterious array of illnesses before I was diagnosed with a new mold allergy. I travel a lot for my work and, like Chris, I felt fine while abroad; only to get sick as a dog when I returned to my home.

I assume that the governor is treated better than common Iowans. My complaints were ignored by the University of Iowa business office, which did not take the mold very seriously. I tried to get local building inspectors to look at my situation, but they reported they could not inspect state-owned buildings.

As you probably now know: Iowa has no law regulating indoor air quality and mold. Europeans, half of the U.S. population, and many in other industrialized countries are protected by codes which identify mold as a human hazard requiring regulation. Iowans are not protected in rental properties or state buildings, nor do they have guidelines to follow to protect themselves and their loved ones.

Hopefully, your status will shield you from having to seek legal remedies from the state, but if you wind up in my situation, let me warn you: it can become a discombobulating Alice-in-Wonderland experience. While dealing with my illnesses, fatigue, and the loss of most of my personal possessions, I also had to contend with state employees and officials who out-and-out lied to me about the circumstances. I was confused for the longest time, until I learned that they operate under the premise that state employees cannot be sued for lying. Indeed, state

lawyers have sought to have my lawsuit dismissed because of this perceived “license to lie.”
Weird, huh?

Finally, I hope you have good health insurance and can afford expert advice from the private sector. As a citizen I turned to public health departments, public health “experts”, and even the state hygienic lab and found very few answers. I got lots of advice on how to clean a building or dispose of my affected possessions, but surprisingly little information about how to heal my body. There seems to be a dearth of understanding on the human effects of mold and how to best improve the lives of those who have been sensitized.

After an unintentional four-year education in All Things Mold, it is my assessment that Iowans are not well-protected from the dangers of toxic mold and this state is ill-prepared for mold outbreaks.

What can you do as governor? For one, use this opportunity to make state agencies aware of the dangers of mold and their responsibility to protect the public. Then you can help to usher in laws that protect Iowans from exposure to toxic molds in state buildings and commercial properties. You can encourage the Iowa Board of Regents to improve their property management and dispose of the rule that bars third-party health inspectors from assessing state-owned rental units. (As it stands now, the fox is guarding the chicken coop...)

Finally, Iowa can serve the world by taking the lead in determining how best to treat those who are affected by mold. Yes “prevention is better than cure,” but when exposure becomes toxic, we need to know the best practices that will restore the person to full productivity and health.

In regards to this last item, let me offer a challenge. In my lawsuit against the State I have asked for two things: to be reimbursed my expenses; and \$250,000 in punitive damages for being such knuckleheads about the matter. (OK. An apology would be nice, too...)

Let’s turn this into a win-win: let’s craft an agreement that the state will keep the \$250,000, match it with another \$250,000 and use the \$500,000 to fund a blue-ribbon panel to advise the state on mold regulations and fund research at the University of Iowa on the treatment of people with toxic mold exposure.

What do you think?

-- Cliff

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