



Food safety institute makes Obama's budget

President added \$8M for training in B.C.

Elizabeth Willis • *The Enquirer* • February 16, 2010

President Barack Obama amended his fiscal 2011 budget Friday to include a proposed \$8 million for the Battle Creek-based International Food Protection Training Institute.

U.S. Rep. Mark Schauer, D-Bedford Township, spoke Monday about the provision, which could lead to a major expansion of the food safety institute in downtown Battle Creek.

The institute is a key component in the Cereal City's plan to become a national leader in food safety and to revitalize its downtown business district.

An additional 20 to 25 highly skilled employees -- making an average salary of \$75,000 plus benefits -- could be hired, said Stephen Benoit, an institute board member and president and chief operating officer of the National Center for Food Protection.

At Monday's announcement, dozens of empty desks stood ready for employees to develop in-person and online training programs for food inspectors nationally and globally in the institute's new offices at 49 W. Michigan Ave. Improved training is intended to prevent the kinds of widespread food-borne outbreaks that have made hundreds of people sick and killed many others in recent years.

"To keep our food safe, we need to ramp this up to a much greater level," Schauer said.

Benoit thanked Schauer for securing the \$8 million inclusion to the president's budget.

"We wouldn't be in there if it wasn't for the efforts of Congressman Schauer," he said.

The funding is a big step up from the \$1 million initial investment Schauer secured as a freshman congressman to help create the institute.

"We did start out with me in a closet," Benoit said

jokingly. "And we've grown up to maybe half a dozen (staff), and we'll get there to 25 in the near future."

Already, 300 food inspectors from across the United States have traveled to Battle Creek for multiple-day training sessions in 2009, and another 1,000 students are expected to attend the institute in 2010, Benoit said.

With the proposed \$8 million investment, the institute anticipates serving 2,000 to 3,000 students in 2011 and providing Web-based training to an additional 5,000 food inspectors, he said.

"We've been working with the FDA on a collaborative basis ever since this began, and I think there is widespread recognition within the agency, as well as within the food protection community, that we are the national training center for food safety in the country," Benoit said.

Schauer said he is continuing work with the Food and Drug Administration to secure long-term funding for the institute.

"It's an incremental process," he said. "We just have to continue to work the process and work it tirelessly."

Schauer said he is hoping to secure a minimum five-year contract between the FDA and the institute that would support it at the current \$8 million proposed funding level. He considers this his top



legislative priority.

"It's going to take a sustained, ongoing legislative effort as well as a sustained, ongoing community effort," he said. "It's clear what this will do nationally to help maintain safe food, but the impact it will have to downtown Battle Creek and the entire revitalization effort is also clear."

Benoit said an additional 2,000 to 3,000 students spending multiple days training in downtown Battle Creek means up to 15,000 more nights per year in local hotels and more restaurant patrons.

Schauer also thanked the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for financially supporting Battle Creek's effort to make the Cereal City a recognized center for food safety. The Kellogg Foundation is pledging a total of \$35 million toward the downtown revitalization project.

"That's not just investing in Battle Creek, but investing in health care, investing in our people," Schauer said.

Elizabeth Willis can be reached at 966-0684 or ewillis@gannett.com.