

IN THE IOWA DISTRICT COURT FOR POLK COUNTY

IOWA ATHEISTS AND FREETHINKERS, INC., Plaintiff, v. KIM REYNOLDS, in her official capacity as Governor of the State of Iowa, et al., Defendants.	Case No. CVCV069066 PLAINTIFF'S APPENDIX IN SUPPORT OF RESISTANCE TO MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT

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1. Answers to Interrogatories

IOWA DISTRICT COURT FOR POLK COUNTY

IOWA ATHEISTS AND
FREETHINKERS, INC.,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

KIM REYNOLDS, in her official
capacity as Governor of the State
of Iowa; MEGAN HALL, in her
official capacity as Records
Custodian of the Office of the
Governor of the State of Iowa;
STEVEN E. BLANKINSHIP, in
his official capacity as General
Counsel of the office of the
Governor of the State of Iowa; and
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
OF THE STATE OF IOWA,

Defendants.

CASE NO. CVCV069066

DEFENDANTS' ANSWERS TO
PLAINTIFF'S FIRST SET OF
INTERROGATORIES

Defendants Kim Reynolds, in her official capacity as Governor of
the State of Iowa; Megan Hall, in her official capacity as Records
Custodian of the Office of the Governor of the State of Iowa; Steven E.
Blankinship, in his official capacity as General Counsel of the office of
the Governor of the State of Iowa; and Office of the Governor of the
State of Iowa (collectively, the "Defendants"), pursuant to Iowa Rule of

Civil Procedure 1.509, submits the following answers and objections to Plaintiff's interrogatories.

Respectfully submitted,

BRENNA BIRD
Attorney General of Iowa

ERIC WESSAN
Solicitor General

/s/ Chad D. Brakhahn
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Counsel for Defendants

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on January 30, 2026, I served the foregoing document on counsel of record for each party to the action by e-mail in compliance with Iowa R. Civ. P. 1.442(2) and Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.401(a) with no hard copy to follow.

/s/ Chad D. Brakhahn

INTERROGATORY NO. 1: Identify each Person who answered, provided information for an answer, or who You otherwise contacted or with whom You otherwise consulted, excluding Your legal counsel, for each of the Interrogatories herein. Delineate Your answer by each Interrogatory made and, as with all Your answers to these Interrogatories, include all information regarding the Person noted in the Definitions above with respect to “Identifying” them.

ANSWER: Mason Mauro, Taryn Frideres, Jake Nicholson, Annie Hayes, Megan Hall and with assistance from legal counsel.

INTERROGATORY NO. 2: Identify all Persons likely to have discoverable information, and describe in detail the subjects of that information, that You may use to support Your claims and defenses in this matter. Do not limit Your answer to that information required by Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 1.500(1)(a)(1), but include as well in Your answer an Identification of Persons whom You may use solely for impeachment, if known.

ANSWER: The following people may have discoverable information and may be contacted through counsel for Plaintiffs:

Mason Mauro
State Capitol, 1007 E Grand, Des Moines, IA
50319,
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov.
Created Withheld Media Prep documents.

Jacob (“Jake”) Nicholson
State Capitol, 1007 E Grand, Des Moines, IA
50319,
Jacob.nicholson@governor.iowa.gov
Party to Withheld Text Message.

Taryn Frideres
State Capitol, 1007 E Grand, Des Moines, IA
50319
taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov
Received and reviewed certain Withheld Media
Prep documents.

Jen Green

Hoover State Office Building, 1305 E. Walnut St.
Des Moines, IA 50319
jen.green@ag.iowa.gov
515.281.5171
Received and reviewed certain Withheld Media
Prep documents.

Annie Hayes
State Capitol, 1007 E Grand, Des Moines, IA
50319
annie.hayes@governor.iowa.gov
Received Withheld Media Prep documents.

Kim Reynolds
State Capitol, 1007 E Grand, Des Moines, IA
50319
annie.hayes@governor.iowa.gov
Received and reviewed certain Withheld Media
Prep documents.

Steven Blankinship
Hoover State Office Building, 1305 E. Walnut St.
Des Moines, IA 50319
steven.blankinship@ag.iowa.gov
515.281.5171
Prepared Open Records response.

Megan Hall
State Capitol, 1007 E Grand, Des Moines, IA
50319
megan.hall@governor.iowa.gov
515.725.3517
Records custodian for Open Records Request.

INTERROGATORY NO. 3: Identify the following Persons, and include, for each, their job title, the agency or government entity in which they are employed, and their work responsibilities and duties. For each, Identify also the Person with supervisory authority over them, and any Person over whom they have supervisory authority. Include in Your answer the foregoing information was it was the time of Plaintiff's Open Records Request to the present, and describe any changes to the same, including the date on which such change was made and the reasons therefor.

- Megan Hall
- Steven E. Blankinship
- Adam Steen
- Trisha Quijano
- Taryn Frideres
- Jacob Nicholson
- Kraig Paulsen
- Mason Mauro
- Annie Hayes
- Jen Green

ANSWER: Adam Steen served as the Director of the Department of Administrative Services at the time of the Open Records Request. He was appointed by Governor Kim Reynolds. His job responsibilities and duties are referenced in Iowa Code Section 8A.104. He served in that position until August 19, 2025.

Trisha Quijano served as an Administrative Assistant 2 in the Department of Administrative Services at the time of the Open Records Request, under the supervision of Nathan Reckman. She currently serves in that position. Her job responsibilities and duties are included as an attachment.

Kraig Paulsen served as the Director of the Department of Management at the time of the Open Records Request. He was appointed by Governor Kim Reynolds. He currently serves in that position. His job responsibilities and duties are referenced in Iowa Code Section 8.5.

Taryn Frideres served as the Chief of Staff in the Office of the Governor at the time of the Open Records Request, under the supervision of Governor Kim Reynolds. Her employment in the

Governor's Office started on January 19, 2021, she became COS on December 1, 2022 and currently serves in that position.

Jacob Nicholson served as the Chief Operating Officer in the Office of the Governor at the time of the Open Records Request, under the supervision of Taryn Frideres. He currently serves in that position. His job responsibilities and duties are included as an attachment.

Jen Green served as the Director of Communications in the Office of the Governor at the time of the Open Records Request, under the supervision of Taryn Frideres. She currently is the communications director in the Office of the Attorney General. She was employed in the Governor's Office from August 1, 2024, until June 13, 2025.

Mason Mauro served as the Deputy Communications Director and Press Secretary in the Office of the Governor at the time of the Open Records Request, under the supervision of Taryn Frideres. He currently serves in that position.

Steven Blankinship served as General Counsel in the Office of the Governor at the time of the Open Records Request, under the supervision of Taryn Frideres. He currently is the Deputy Attorney General. He was employed in the Governor's Office until July 10, 2025.

Megan Hall served as Paralegal & Records Custodian in the Office of the Governor at the time of the Open Records Request. She was under the supervision of Taryn Frideres. Her job responsibilities and duties are included as an attachment (Administrative Assistant 2). She was employed in the Governor's Office until January 26, 2026. She currently is Deputy Communications Director for the Senate Republican Caucus.

Annie Hayes served as the Executive Assistant to the Governor at the time of the Open Records Request, under the supervision of Governor Kim Reynolds. She currently serves in that position.

INTERROGATORY NO. 4: Identify all other Persons, whom You have not already identified in Your answer to Interrogatory Nos. 1, 2, and 3, who you believe to have knowledge or information concerning the Public Records at Issue, and describe in detail the knowledge or information You believe them to have.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory. The Interrogatory calls for the disclosure of information protected by the attorney-client and/or work product privileges. The Interrogatory is vague regarding the meaning of “knowledge or information concerning the Public Records at Issue” and the Interrogatory may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of information requested which is unclear from the Interrogatory.

INTERROGATORY NO. 5: Identify all other Persons who you believe to have knowledge or information concerning the facts or issues raised in the Petition and Answer, whom You have not already identified in Your answer to Interrogatory Nos. 1, 2, 3, or 4, and describe in detail the knowledge or information You believe them to have.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory. The Interrogatory calls for the disclosure of information protected by the attorney-client and/or work product privileges. The Interrogatory is vague regarding the meaning of “knowledge or information concerning the Public Records at Issue” and the Interrogatory may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of information requested which is unclear from the Interrogatory.

INTERROGATORY NO. 6: For each of the Withheld DAS Records and Withheld Media Prep Records, Identify the Person or Persons who (a) requested the record be prepared or determined the record should be prepared; (b) drafted or oversaw the drafting, revision, review, and completion of the record; (c) received or reviewed the record; or (d) transmitted the record to another Person. For each Person so Identified, provide the date or dates on which they (a) prepared or determined the record should be prepared; (b) drafted or oversaw the drafting, revision, review, and completion of the record; (c) received or reviewed the record; and/or (d) transmitted the record to another Person, and Identify such Person or Persons receiving the record. Identify all Communications arising out of or relating to the foregoing.

ANSWER: Concerning DAS Records, the Governor's office requested these documents be prepared by DAS and Adam Steen directed staff to prepare the document. The following DAS employees would have drafted, overseen the drafting of, or reviewed these DAS records: Ryan West, Erin Reinders, Ben Keenan, Valerie Van Kooten, Paul Carlson, Nathan Reckman, Andrea Macy, Tami Wiencek, Adam Steen, and Trisha Quijano. Tami Wiencek is DAS's legislative liaison

and would have inserted the bullet point primarily at issue in this matter.

Trisha Quijano notified DAS staff on November 18, 2024, the document template was ready for edits. The above identified staff edited the document on November 18, 2024, and November 19, 2024. The document was sent by Trisha Quijano to Adam Steen on November 20, 2024, for final approval. Adam Steen approved the document on November 20, 2024, and Trisha Quijano sent the document to Taryn Frideres, Jacob Nicholson, and Kraig Paulsen on November 20, 2024.

The DAS Records were created at the request of the Governor's office as a mechanism to create an executive level report out to the Governor concerning matters related to the ongoing operation of the department. The information within the record contains facts and not opinion compiled by the employees identified.

Concerning Withheld Media Prep Records, Mason Mauro, as press secretary, typically creates a media prep document on his own initiative and occasionally may do so as requested by the Chief of Staff. When an issue to be addressed in a media prep document has received previous news coverage, Mauro will review that previous coverage to determine

the questions asked, how the Governor responded to those questions, and he considers additional questions that could be asked. Because Satanic Temple held an event at the State Capitol in 2023, Mauro performed a Google search for media articles or coverage of that event and the Governor's response to prepare the first Withheld Media Prep Record.* He did not make any copies of the media articles or coverage he reviewed.

Mauro then created each of the first, third and fourth Withheld Media Prep Records on his desktop. The second Withheld Media Prep Record is a copy of the first Withheld Media Prep Record. The fifth Withheld Media Prep Record is a copy of the fourth Withheld Media Prep Record.

Mauro then transferred the first, third and fourth Withheld Media Prep Records on the day each Record was created to a SharePoint electronic drive known as IGOV Shared. Media prep documents created in 2024 are accessed through the following files: General > Comms Team > Media > Media Prep > 2024 Media Prep, and put the Records in a file labelled "Media Prep."

Mauro put the first Withheld Media Prep Record in a subfile labelled as “November 2024.” Mauro put the third and fourth Withheld Media Prep Records in a subfile labelled as “Media Prep December 2024.” Access to that file is limited to IGOV staff and only used by the Communications Director and the Deputy Communications Director/Press Secretary. Documents in that drive are shared by Mauro or Green with others in IGOV on an as needed basis. Such Records are typically shared with Frideres.

Mauro created the first two Withheld Media Prep Records on November 25, 2024 for an upcoming Thanksgiving press conference. Mauro believes he created the first two Withheld Media Prep Records on his own initiative.

As to the Satanic Temple, both of those Withheld Media Prep Records created in November contain identical language. He did not discuss those Records with Jen Green, Director of Communications and does not recall discussing those Records with anyone else in IGOV.

The first Withheld Media Prep Record was emailed by Mauro to the Governor and copied Hayes on November 25, 2024. Mauro also

emailed the second Withheld Media Prep Record to the Governor and copied Annie Hayes and bcc'd Frideres that same day.

The Record created November 25th was also shared with Molly Severn, Deputy Chief of Staff & Legislative Liaison and Lillie Brady, agricultural policy advisor. This Record was shared with them because the Record included a topic that was within Brady's policy area. This topic was completely unrelated to the Satanic Temple. Brady reported to Severn. Neither Brady nor Severn had any involvement with any aspect of the Withheld Media Prep Records regarding the Open Records Request.

As to the three remaining Withheld Media Prep Records, Mauro created those Records for a December 18, 2024 press conference. He does not recall discussing those Withheld Media Prep Records with Jen Green, Director of Communications or anyone else in IGOV. He did share the fourth and fifth Withheld Media Prep Records with Frideres and Green. Specifically:

- The third Withheld Media Prep Record was emailed on 12.15.24 by Hayes to the Governor;
- The fourth Withheld Media Prep Record was emailed on 12.17.24 @ 7:15 pm by Frideres to the Governor and

copied Hayes and Green. That record was emailed by Green to Frideres on 12.18.24; and

- The fifth Withheld Media Prep Record was emailed on 12.17.24 @7:22 pm by Frideres to the Governor and copied Hayes and Green. That record was emailed by Green to Frideres on 12.18.24;
- The fourth and fifth Withheld Media Prep Record was emailed on 12.18.24 by Green to Frideres @3:09 and 3:22 pm.

All email senders and recipients would have reviewed the Withheld Media Prep Record sent by or to them, with the exception of Hayes. In particular, the Governor reviewed the first, second and third Withheld Media Prep Records and discussed the same with Frideres.

*The privilege log references five Withheld Media Prep Records. References herein to such a Record by number corresponds with the order in which such Records appear in the Privilege Log. For example, Mauro's email to the Governor, Hayes and Frideres is referred to as the second Withheld Media Prep Record.

INTERROGATORY NO. 7: For each of the Withheld DAS Records and Withheld Media Prep Records, describe in detail the facts and circumstances arising out of and relating to their creation. For example, though without limitation: describe in detail the reasons for which the record was created and the purpose for which it was intended; if you contend the record reflects an advisory opinion or recommendation as to a course of conduct relating to a particular decision or policy, state as much and describe the relevant decision or policy in detail, including the statutory or regulatory authority under which it was made or adopted, the date on which it was made or adopted, the Person or Persons responsible for making or adopting it, the process by which the decision or policy was reached, formulated, and promulgated, and the role of the record in such process; and state whether the record contains fact, opinion, or a mixture of both, and describe such facts or opinions, including their source (whether Document, Communication, or otherwise, and Identifying such as the case may be), location (for example, by page number, heading, paragraph, etc.), and context within the record. Include the foregoing, but do not limit Your answer to the foregoing, but include as well all

other facts and information that You believe establish the context in which the record was created.

ANSWER: See response to Interrogatory No. 6.

INTERROGATORY NO. 8: For each of the Withheld DAS Records and Withheld Media Prep Records, Identify all Documents, other than those Identified in Your answer to Interrogatory No. 7, reviewed, referenced, or relied upon in their preparation. Identify further all other Documents to which the each gave rise, if any.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory. The Interrogatory is vague regarding the information requested. Depending on the scope of the Interrogatory, the Interrogatory may seek information that is not relevant to the subject matter of the pending action or reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence.

Subject to and without waiving these objections, the Withheld DAS Records did not give rise to any other documents. For Withheld Media Prep Records, there are no responsive documents other than those already identified in Defendants' discovery responses.

INTERROGATORY NO. 9: For each of the Withheld DAS Records and Withheld Media Prep Records, Identify all Communications, other than those Identified in Your answer to Interrogatory No. 6, arising out of or relating thereto.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory, The Interrogatory is vague regarding the information requested. The Interrogatory may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of information requested which is unclear from the Interrogatory. The Interrogatory may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege.

Subject to and without waiving the objection, relevant communications related to the Withheld DAS Records have been provided as part of the document production. For Withheld Media Prep Records, Frideres reviewed the Withheld Media Prep Records with the Governor to prepare her for each press conference.

INTERROGATORY NO. 10: Describe in detail all facts on which You base Your assertion that You may withhold the Withheld DAS Records from the public under an “executive privilege.”

ANSWER: Before the Court is a pending motion for summary judgment that lays out in detail why executive privilege protects disclosure of the requested documents. Defendants expressly incorporate all arguments made in the motion for summary judgment and its attachments. Without waiving any further defense, some aspects of arguments consistent with those raised in the brief will be presented in response to this interrogatory.

The Iowa Supreme Court has long recognized the existence of executive privilege. *See, e.g., Belin v. Reynolds*, 989 N.W.2d 166, 178 (Iowa 2023). In *Belin v. Reynolds*, the Supreme Court explained that executive privilege protected intrusions that require intruding “into the defendant’s decision-making process.” *Id.* at 176. That included defendant’s “thinking,” and “internal conversations.” *Id.* at 177. And it included “potentially privileged information” like the “inner workings of the Governor’s office.” *Id.*

The Iowa Supreme Court has interpreted the Iowa Constitution to acknowledge that the Governor cannot do her job without support from competent staff. *Ryan v. Wilson*, 300 N.W. 707, 712 (Iowa 1941). Recognizing the “kindred nature to the power and authority” granted under the Iowa Constitution, *Ryan* recognized that sometimes the Governor would need to receive written information from her employees. *Id.* And because the “responsibilities and duties of the Governor of the State are many and burdensome and important” that there could be occasion when she must “rely upon the assistance of many other officers and employees of the State.” *Id.* That reliance and function needed to perform the job is even more vital now in 2025 than when the Court recognized that reliance in 1941. And the risk of disclosure may lead the Governor’s advisors away from offering candid advice.

And that reflects longstanding practice, too. In 2009, several agencies asserted executive privilege responding to questions sent to those agencies by the Legislature. Stmt. of Undisputed Material Facts ¶ 2 ¶ 2 (citing Legislative Services Agency, Administration and Regulation Appropriations Subcommittee, Compilation of Department

Responses to Subcommittee Questions (Feb. 11, 2009), available at <https://perma.cc/47L6-LZLS>). That includes the then-named Iowa Utilities Board, the Iowa Insurance Division, the Governor’s Office on Drug Control Policy, and the Department of Inspections and Appeals. *Id.* at 44, 48 (“We must respectfully decline to answer this as we have been requested to respect the Governor’s claim of Executive Privilege.”), 61 (“It’s our understanding that on this matter the Governor’s Office has claimed executive privilege a position—with due respect—we are compelled to honor.”), 63 (“Although Executive Privilege must be honored . . .”). Then, even the Legislature respected executive privilege protected recommendations made by agencies and their staff to the Governor.

Defendants easily meet the threshold to establish a *prima facie* case for the assertion of executive privilege. Defendants produced more than 600 pages of documents and only withheld seven documents for executive privilege. Stmt. of Undisputed Material Facts ¶¶ 5, 7 (citing App. 24-38). Defendants produced a log with details about the withheld documents that contain all the necessary information to establish a *prima facie* case. *Id.* ¶ 8 (citing App. 38). That log shows that the only

three senior staff members on the emails were the Governor's Chief of Staff, her Communications Director, and her Press Secretary. *Id.* ¶ 9 (citing App. 38.). The subject of the withheld emails includes "Media Prep Doc." *Id.* ¶ 10 (citing App. 38.).

Communicating with the people of Iowa is a core component of the Governor's role. The Chief of Staff is the Governor's gatekeeper—ensuring the smooth flow of information from all manner of sources to the Governor. The Governor's Communications Director and Press Secretary are responsible for ensuring the Governor is adequately prepared to communicate her message and to respond to the press.

The record production withheld documents Bates Stamped Nos. 4–7, which Defendants assume are the documents referenced in this interrogatory. Those documents consist of an executive agency report prepared for the Governor's benefit by the Iowa Department of Administrative Services. Those documents include information and guidance to the Governor related to her executive cabinet agency. The documents were intended to assist the Governor in performing the powers and duties of executive office. The DAS information requested here are documents intended to inform the Governor are performing a

key role to ensure that the Governor has the best information so that she can be informed and inform others. And the risk of disclosure may lead the Governor's advisors away from offering candid advice.

INTERROGATORY NO. 11: Describe in detail all facts on which You base Your assertion that You may withhold the Withheld Media Prep Records from the public under an “executive privilege.”

ANSWER: Before the Court is a pending motion for summary judgment that lays out in detail why executive privilege protects disclosure of the requested documents. Defendants expressly incorporate all arguments made in the motion for summary judgment and its attachments. Without waiving any further defense, some aspects of arguments consistent with those raised in the brief will be presented in response to this interrogatory.

The Iowa Supreme Court has long recognized the existence of executive privilege. *See, e.g., Belin v. Reynolds*, 989 N.W.2d 166, 178 (Iowa 2023). In *Belin v. Reynolds*, the Supreme Court explained that executive privilege protected intrusions that require intruding “into the defendant’s decision-making process.” *Id.* at 176. That included defendant’s “thinking,” and “internal conversations.” *Id.* at 177. And it included “potentially privileged information” like the “inner workings of the Governor’s office.” *Id.*

The Iowa Supreme Court has interpreted the Iowa Constitution to acknowledge that the Governor cannot do her job without support from competent staff. *Ryan v. Wilson*, 300 N.W. 707, 712 (Iowa 1941). Recognizing the “kindred nature to the power and authority” granted under the Iowa Constitution, *Ryan* recognized that sometimes the Governor would need to receive written information from her employees. *Id.* And because the “responsibilities and duties of the Governor of the State are many and burdensome and important” that there could be occasion when she must “rely upon the assistance of many other officers and employees of the State.” *Id.* That reliance and function needed to perform the job is even more vital now in 2025 than when the Court recognized that reliance in 1941. And the risk of disclosure may lead the Governor’s advisors away from offering candid advice.

And that reflects longstanding practice, too. In 2009, several agencies asserted executive privilege responding to questions sent to those agencies by the Legislature. Stmt. of Undisputed Material Facts ¶ 2 ¶ 2 (citing Legislative Services Agency, Administration and Regulation Appropriations Subcommittee, Compilation of Department

Responses to Subcommittee Questions (Feb. 11, 2009), available at <https://perma.cc/47L6-LZLS>). That includes the then-named Iowa Utilities Board, the Iowa Insurance Division, the Governor’s Office on Drug Control Policy, and the Department of Inspections and appeals. *Id.* at 44, 48 (“We must respectfully decline to answer this as we have been requested to respect the Governor’s claim of Executive Privilege.”), 61 (“It’s our understanding that on this matter the Governor’s Office has claimed executive privilege a position—with due respect—we are compelled to honor.”), 63 (“Although Executive Privilege must be honored . . .”). Then, even the Legislature respected executive privilege protected recommendations made by agencies and their staff to the Governor.

Defendants easily meet the threshold to establish a *prima facie* case for the assertion of executive privilege. Defendants produced more than 600 pages of documents and only withheld seven documents for executive privilege. *Stmt. of Undisputed Material Facts* ¶¶ 5, 7 (citing *App.* 24-38). Defendants produced a log with details about the withheld documents that contain all the necessary information to establish a *prima facie* case. *Id.* ¶ 8 (citing *App.* 38). That log shows that the only

three senior staff members on the emails were the Governor's Chief of Staff, her Communications Director, and her Press Secretary. *Id.* ¶ 9 (citing App. 38.). The subject of the withheld emails includes "Media Prep Doc." *Id.* ¶ 10 (citing App. 38.).

Communicating with the people of Iowa is a core component of the Governor's role. The Chief of Staff is the Governor's gatekeeper—ensuring the smooth flow of information from all manner of sources to the Governor. The Governor's Communications Director and Press Secretary are responsible for ensuring the Governor is adequately prepared to communicate her message and to respond to the press.

Each of those senior roles on emails relating to "Media Prep" are performing a key role to ensure that the Governor has the best information so that she can be informed and inform others.

Communicating with her constituents is a long-recognized and core component of the Governor's role. And the risk of disclosure may lead the Governor's advisors away from offering candid advice.

INTERROGATORY NO. 12: Describe in detail all facts on which You base Your assertion that You may withhold the Withheld Text Message Records from the public under an “executive privilege.”

ANSWER: Before the Court is a pending motion for summary judgment that lays out in detail why executive privilege protects disclosure of the requested documents. Defendants expressly incorporate all arguments made in the motion for summary judgment and its attachments. Without waiving any further defense, some aspects of arguments consistent with those raised in the brief will be presented in response to this interrogatory.

The Iowa Supreme Court has long recognized the existence of executive privilege. *See, e.g., Belin v. Reynolds*, 989 N.W.2d 166, 178 (Iowa 2023). In *Belin v. Reynolds*, the Supreme Court explained that executive privilege protected intrusions that require intruding “into the defendant’s decision-making process.” *Id.* at 176. That included defendant’s “thinking,” and “internal conversations.” *Id.* at 177. And it included “potentially privileged information” like the “inner workings of the Governor’s office.” *Id.*

The Iowa Supreme Court has interpreted the Iowa Constitution to acknowledge that the Governor cannot do her job without support from competent staff. *Ryan v. Wilson*, 300 N.W. 707, 712 (Iowa 1941). Recognizing the “kindred nature to the power and authority” granted under the Iowa Constitution, *Ryan* recognized that sometimes the Governor would need to receive written information from her employees. *Id.* And because the “responsibilities and duties of the Governor of the State are many and burdensome and important” that there could be occasion when she must “rely upon the assistance of many other officers and employees of the State.” *Id.* That reliance and function needed to perform the job is even more vital now in 2025 than when the Court recognized that reliance in 1941. And the risk of disclosure may lead the Governor’s advisors away from offering candid advice.

And that reflects longstanding practice, too. In 2009, several agencies asserted executive privilege responding to questions sent to those agencies by the Legislature. Stmt. of Undisputed Material Facts ¶ 2 ¶ 2 (citing Legislative Services Agency, Administration and Regulation Appropriations Subcommittee, Compilation of Department

Responses to Subcommittee Questions (Feb. 11, 2009), available at <https://perma.cc/47L6-LZLS>). That includes the then-named Iowa Utilities Board, the Iowa Insurance Division, the Governor’s Office on Drug Control Policy, and the Department of Inspections and appeals. *Id.* at 44, 48 (“We must respectfully decline to answer this as we have been requested to respect the Governor’s claim of Executive Privilege.”), 61 (“It’s our understanding that on this matter the Governor’s Office has claimed executive privilege a position—with due respect—we are compelled to honor.”), 63 (“Although Executive Privilege must be honored . . .”). Then, even the Legislature respected executive privilege protected recommendations made by agencies and their staff to the Governor.

Defendants easily meet the threshold to establish a *prima facie* case for the assertion of executive privilege. Defendants produced more than 600 pages of documents and only withheld seven documents for executive privilege. Stmt. of Undisputed Material Facts ¶¶ 5, 7 (citing App. 24-38). Defendants produced a log with details about the withheld documents that contain all the necessary information to establish a *prima facie* case. *Id.* ¶ 8 (citing App. 38).

The withheld text message is Bates Stamp 608, which is a nonresponsive communication to the record request located between two responsive communications in a text thread. That text message was intended to provide high level information and guidance to the Governor and her senior staff related to an executive level cabinet agency. Producing that type of candid advice from a high level staff member frustrates and inhibits the Governor's ability to receive candid, fulsome, and robust information in the future.

INTERROGATORY NO. 13: For each of the Withheld Text Message Records, Identify the Persons who authored the message, sent the message, or received the message, and provide the date or dates on which such occurred.

ANSWER: The withheld portion of the December 9, 2024 text involves communication between Nicholson and Steen.

INTERROGATORY NO. 14: For each of the Withheld Text Message Records, describe in detail the facts and circumstances arising out of and relating to their transmittal. For example, but without limitation, state, for each: the purpose for which the message was sent; whether the information contained in the message was requested prior to its transmittal, and, if so, by whom; what responsibility or duty of office or employment the Person transmitting the message was intending to fulfil, if any; whether the information contained within the message consisted of fact, opinion, or recommendation, and the source on which it was based; and whether the information contributed or related to any decision or policy and, if so, what decision or policy, by whom, and how the information so contributed or related.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory to the extent it seeks information protected by executive privilege. Based on the court's order and without waiving the claim of executive privilege, Defendants provide the following response to this Interrogatory.

Without waiving the previously asserted objections, the withheld topic was completely unrelated the Satanic Temple and addressed a

matter raised in a recent DAS agency report prepared by Steen and had been reviewed by Nicholson.

INTERROGATORY NO. 15: For each of the Public Records at issue: (a) state where the document and any copies thereof are located or stored, whether electronically or in hard copy, and when they were located or stored in this location; (b) Identify each Person in possession, custody, or control of the Public Record at Issue; (c) Identify each Person with access to the Public Record at Issue; (d) for each Person Identified in (b) or (c), state their job title, government agency, office, or department of employment; (e) state the date on which such Persons Identified in (b) or (c) was granted, obtained, or assumed such possession, custody, control, or access of the Public Record at Issue; and (e) describe in detail the reason for which each such Person Identified in (b) or (c) was granted, or the means by which they obtained or assumed, such possession, custody, control, or access to the Public Record at Issue.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory. The Interrogatory is vague regarding the documents requested. To the extent the Interrogatory seeks information regarding each of the 611 documents produced, the Interrogatory is overly broad and unduly burdensome and does not seek information that is relevant to the

subject matter of Plaintiff's action or reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible information. This Interrogatory, in effect, seeks foundation for each document. That is not reasonable. If Plaintiff identifies any specific documents that it believes requires further authentication, Defendant reserves the right to supplement this Answer with more detail.

Without waiving such objections, each Public Record is stored on the State of Iowa's information technology system operated by DOM DoIT, with the exception of the Withheld Text Messages. Matthew Behrens, State Chief Information Officer of DOM DoIT, is responsible for maintenance of such stored information, with the exception of the Withheld Text Messages. Behrens would have had access upon creation of any of the Public Records, with the exception of the Withheld Text Messages. The text messages are maintained on the Chief Operating Officer's mobile device.

Emails produced in the Public Records with "iowa.gov" are only available to the sender, recipient(s) and DOM DoIT prior to production to the Requester. It is unknown who the Requester has provided such information and when that occurred.

DAS's relevant records are electronic and located in the department's Google Drive. Trisha Quijano is the only DAS employee with current possession of this file. Her job title is Administrative Assistant 2 and she works for DAS in the Office of the General Counsel. She created the template for this document on November 18, 2024, and maintained access through its completion on November 20, 2024, and until present.

Once the response to the Open Record Request was created, such documents were maintained in the SharePoint electronic drive identified as "IGOV Legal." Access to IGOV Legal is limited to IGOV staff: Senior Legal Counsel, General Legal Counsel, Deputy Legal Counsel, and paralegal.

INTERROGATORY NO. 16: Identify all Persons involved in the preparation of Your response to Plaintiff's Open Records Request. Describe their involvement in detail and Identify all Documents and Communications arising therefrom.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory because the Interrogatory calls for the disclosure of information protected by the attorney-client and/or work product privileges

Without waiving such objections, Steve Blankinship, who was General Counsel for IGOV at the time of production, assembled the responsive Open Records and had communications with the Requestor. Megan Hall, as IGOV Records Custodian, communicated with the Requester.

INTERROGATORY NO. 17: Identify all Documents, including electronically stored information and other tangible things, that You may use to support Your claims or defenses in this matter, unless already Identified in Your answers to these Interrogatories. Do not limit Your answer to that information required by Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 1.500(1)(a)(2), but include as well in Your answer an Identification of Documents You may use solely for impeachment, if known. If the Documents You intend to use are limited solely to the Public Records at Issue, state as much.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory to the extent it seeks information protected by the work-product privilege or otherwise outside the scope of permissible discovery. Defendants have not determined which documents Defendants will offer at the trial of this matter or which documents Defendants may use for impeachment. Defendants will disclose their exhibits in accordance with all applicable pre-trial deadlines.

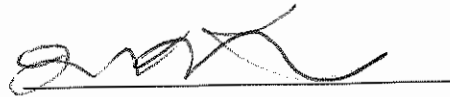
INTERROGATORY NO. 18: Identify any Person (a) with whom You have communicated regarding the Petition and/or Answer; (b) to whom You have transmitted a copy of the Petition or Answer; and/or (c) who has communicated with You regarding the Petition and/or Answer. Identify any such Communications.

ANSWER: Defendants object to this Interrogatory because the Interrogatory calls for the disclosure of information protected by the attorney-client and/or work product privileges.

VERIFICATION

I, Jacob Nicholson, Chief Operating Officer for the Governor,
certify under penalty of perjury and under the laws of the State of Iowa
that the answers to interrogatories are true and correct to the best of
my knowledge and belief.

Date: January 30, 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Nicholson", is written over a horizontal line.

2. Responses to Request for Production

IOWA DISTRICT COURT FOR POLK COUNTY

IOWA ATHEISTS AND
FREETHINKERS, INC.,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

KIM REYNOLDS, in her official
capacity as Governor of the State
of Iowa; MEGAN HALL, in her
official capacity as Records
Custodian of the Office of the
Governor of the State of Iowa;
STEVEN E. BLANKINSHIP, in
his official capacity as General
Counsel of the office of the
Governor of the State of Iowa; and
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
OF THE STATE OF IOWA,

Defendants.

CASE NO. CVCV069066

DEFENDANTS' RESPONSES TO
PLAINTIFF'S FIRST SET OF
REQUESTS FOR PRODUCTION

Defendants Kim Reynolds, in her official capacity as Governor of the State of Iowa; Megan Hall, in her official capacity as Records Custodian of the Office of the Governor of the State of Iowa; Steven E. Blankinship, in his official capacity as General Counsel of the office of the Governor of the State of Iowa; and Office of the Governor of the State of Iowa (collectively, the "Defendants"), pursuant to Iowa Rule of Civil

Procedure 1.512, provides the following responses to Plaintiff's requests for production of documents.

Request No. 1: Each of the Withheld DAS Records, and any draft thereof.

Response: Defendants object to this Request, because this Request seeks documents protected from disclosure by executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Defendants are withholding documents in response to this Request.

Request No. 2: Each of the Withheld Media Prep Records, and any draft thereof.

Response: Defendants object to this Request, because this Request seeks documents protected from disclosure by executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Defendants are withholding documents in response to this Request.

Request No. 3: Each of the Withheld Text Message Records.

Response: Defendants object to this Request, because this Request seeks documents protected from disclosure by executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Defendants are withholding documents in response to this Request.

Request No. 4: All Documents that You Identified, or which reflect Communications that You Identified, in Your Answers to Plaintiff's First Set of Interrogatories.

Response: Defendants object to this Request, because this Request seeks documents protected from disclosure by executive privilege. Defendants object to this Request to the extent this Request seeks documents protected by the attorney-client and work product privileges. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Defendants are withholding documents in response to this Request.

Subject to and without waiving the objection above, see the documents produced as DEF000001-668, which include responsive communications.

Request No. 5: All Documents that You referenced or on which You relied in preparing your Answers to Plaintiff's First Set of Interrogatories, excluding attorney–client privileged communications.

Response: Defendants object to this Request, because this Request seeks documents protected from disclosure by executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Defendants are withholding documents in response to this Request.

Subject to and without waiving the objection above, see see the documents produced as DEF000001-668, which include responsive documents.

Request No. 6: All Documents that You may use to support Your claims or defenses in this matter. Do not limit Your response to those Documents required by Iowa Rule of Civil Procedure 1.500(1)(a)(2), but include as well in Your response all responsive Documents, even if You may use them solely for impeachment.

Response: Defendants object to this Request to the extent it seeks information protected by the work-product privilege or otherwise outside the scope of permissible discovery.

Defendants have not determined which documents Defendants may use to support its claims or defenses in this matter or which documents Defendants may use for impeachment. Defendants will disclose their exhibits in accordance with all applicable pre-trial deadlines.

See the documents produced as DEF000001-668.

Request No.7: All Documents reflecting Communications You exchanged relevant to the facts or subjects of the Petition and Answer

with those Persons You Identified in Your Answers to Plaintiff's Interrogatory Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Response: Defendants object to this Request. The Request is vague regarding the documents requested. The Request may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of documents requested which is unclear from the Request. The Request may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Plaintiffs may be withholding documents in response to this Request, depending on the scope of the Request.

Subject to and without waiving the objection above, see the documents produced as DEF000001-668, which include responsive communications.

Request No. 5 [sic]: All Documents reflecting Statements arising out of or relating to the facts or issues alleged in the Petition and Answer, whether or not separately Identified in Your Answers to Plaintiff's Interrogatories.

Response: Defendants object to this Request. The Request is vague regarding the documents requested. The Request may be overly broad

and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of documents requested which is unclear from the Request. The Request may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Plaintiffs may be withholding documents in response to this Request, depending on the scope of the Request.

Request No. 6 [sic]: Any Document reflecting a decision made or policy formulated in reliance on any of the Public Records at Issue; or, any Document reflecting a decision or policy giving rise to or to which any of the Public Records at Issue relate.

Response: Defendants object to this Request. The Request is vague regarding the documents requested. The Request may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of documents requested which is unclear from the Request. The Request may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Plaintiffs may be withholding documents in response to this Request, depending on the scope of the Request.

Request No. 7 [sic]: All Documents referenced, relied upon, consulted, or in any way used in the preparation of any of the Public Records at Issue.

Response: Defendants object to this Request. The Request is vague regarding the documents requested. The Request may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of documents requested which is unclear from the Request. The Request may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Plaintiffs may be withholding documents in response to this Request, depending on the scope of the Request.

Request No. 8: An organizational chart sufficient to display the relationship between Defendants, the Persons Identified in Your Answer to Interrogatory No. 3, and all other Persons who requested, prepared, transmitted, or possessed the Public Records at Issue.

Response: See DEF000033.

Request No. 9: All calendar entries reflecting a meeting, whether in person, by phone, or through other means, at which a Public Record at Issue was discussed, reviewed, or shared.

Response: Defendants object to this Request. The Request is vague regarding the documents requested. The Request may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of documents requested which is unclear from the Request. The Request may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Plaintiffs may be withholding documents in response to this Request, depending on the scope of the Request.

Subject to and without waiving the objections, see DEF000001-668, which may include responsive documents.

Request No. 10: All Documents reflecting minutes, notes, or other record of a Communication relating to the Public Records at Issue.

Response: Defendants object to this Request. The Request is vague regarding the documents requested. The Request may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of documents requested which is unclear from the Request. The Request may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4),

Plaintiffs may be withholding documents in response to this Request, depending on the scope of the Request.

Subject to and without waiving the objections, see DEF000001-668, which may include responsive documents.

Request No. 11: All Documents reflecting a request for public records in response to which You invoked an “executive privilege.”

Response: Defendants object to this Interrogatory because the Interrogatory does not seek information that is relevant to the subject matter of Plaintiff’s action or reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible information.

Request No. 12: All Documents reflecting Your responses to requests for public records in which You invoked an “executive privilege.”

Response: Defendants object to this Interrogatory because the Interrogatory does not seek information that is relevant to the subject matter of Plaintiff’s action or reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible information.

Request No. 13: Any Document reflecting the job description of any Person who drafted any of the Public Records at Issue.

Response: See DEF000022-29.

Request No. 14: Any Documents reflecting Communications arising out of or relating to Your response to Plaintiff's Open Records Request.

Response: Defendants object to this Request. The Request is vague regarding the documents requested. The Request may be overly broad and unduly burdensome, depending on the scope of documents requested which is unclear from the Request. The Request may seek documents protected from disclosure by the attorney-client and work product privileges and executive privilege. Pursuant to Rule 1.512(b)(4), Plaintiffs may be withholding documents in response to this Request, depending on the scope of the Request.

Subject to and without waiving the objections, see DEF000001-668, which may include responsive documents.

Request No. 15: Any Documents reflecting Communications Identified in Your answer to Interrogatory No. 18.

Response: None.

Respectfully submitted,

BRENNA BIRD
Attorney General of Iowa

ERIC WESSAN

Solicitor General

/s/ Chad D. Brakhahn

CHAD D. BRAKHAHN, AT0010883

Assistant Attorney General

Department of Justice

Hoover State Office Building, 2nd
Floor

Des Moines, IA 50309

Telephone: (515)281-5164

Eric.Wessan@ag.iowa.gov

Chad.Brakhahn@ag.iowa.gov

Counsel for Defendants

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on January 30, 2026, I served the foregoing document on counsel of record for each party to the action by e-mail in compliance with Iowa R. Civ. P. 1.442(2) and Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.401(a) with no hard copy to follow.

/s/ Chad D. Brakhahn

3. Defendants' Document Production Set One

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Jason Benell** <jasonbenell@gmail.com>

Date: Wed, Dec 18, 2024 at 1:43 PM

Subject: FOIA Request

To: Records [IGOV] <Records@governor.iowa.gov>, <adam.steen@iowa.gov>, Wiencek, Tami <tami.wiencek@iowa.gov>

Open Records Request Under Iowa Code Ch. 22

Dear Records Custodian:

This letter is a request under Iowa Code Ch. 22 by the Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers.

Records Requested

- **Any and all non-privileged documents, including but not limited to: electronic communications or records, containing, related to, or concerning the cancellation, disposition, or discussion of the Satanic Temple of Iowa's family event on December 14th, 2024**
- **Copies of all other records requests made on or after December 1st, 2024 that were submitted pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 22, related to any of the above records, including but not limited to requests made by the Des Moines Register, The Satanic Temple of Iowa, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, all responses, documents, and attachments thereto.**

Because Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers is a non-profit public interest organization, and a fee waiver in this case serves the public interest, we request a fee waiver.

However, if such a waiver is denied, please inform us in advance of fulfilling the request and provide an itemized estimate of reasonable costs, so that we may discuss alternative and more cost-efficient methods to comply with this request.

Response Required

If you are unable to comply with all or part of this request, please contact us to discuss options. Under Iowa Code Ch. 22, a reasonable delay shall not exceed twenty days, and ordinarily shall not exceed 10 business days.

Any assertion of privilege against disclosures of the information requested should be made in writing and within that period.

Additionally, we ask that records containing protected information still be provided, and that any specific protected information be redacted, rather than withholding the record itself. Please do not withhold a response if you are able to provide some records more quickly than others: we prefer to receive records as they become available.

Please contact me with any questions about this request. I may be reached by email at jasonbenell@gmail.com, president@iowaatheists.org, or by phone at 515-537-6520

Electronic records sent by email are preferred.

Respectfully,

Jason Benell

President

Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR OF IOWA
Governor Kim Reynolds

January 9, 2025
Jason Benell
jasonbenell@gmail.com

Re: Request to Inspect Public Records, R406

Dear Jason,

On December 18, 2024, we received your request to inspect certain records. It is our understanding that you are seeking the following records:

1. Any and all non-privileged documents, including but not limited to: electronic communications or records, containing, related to, or concerning the cancellation, disposition, or discussion of the Satanic Temple of Iowa's family event on December 14th, 2024
2. Copies of all other records requests made on or after December 1st, 2024 that were submitted pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 22, related to any of the above records, including but not limited to requests made by the Des Moines Register, The Satanic Temple of Iowa, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, all responses, documents, and attachments thereto.

All records returned were reviewed based on the search term(s) provided in order to determine whether they were responsive to your request and what, if any, records needed to be redacted and/or excluded based on confidentiality or privilege.

Attached to the e-mail correspondence is a data file containing the record(s) sought.

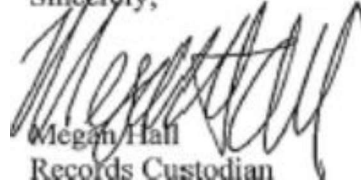
There were records withheld or redacted based on confidentiality and/or privilege.

1. Attorney client privilege and attorney work product privilege
2. Executive privilege

This is a complete production of your records request

Although a diligent search for responsive records occurred, if any additional records are subsequently located following this production, then we will notify you in writing.

This production of records does not waive the confidentiality or privilege of any document or record under any applicable provision of the Iowa Open Records Act, chapter 22 of the Iowa Code, or other law.

Sincerely,

Megan Hall
Records Custodian



STATE OF IOWA

KIM REYNOLDS
GOVERNOR

February 28, 2025

VIA E-MAIL ONLY

Thomas D. Story
Legal Counsel
American Civil Liberties Union
Thomas.Story@aclu-ia.org

Re: **Executive Privilege**

Dear Mr. Story:

The Iowa Governor's Office (IGOV) received an Iowa Freedom of Information Act (IFOIA) request from your client, Jason Benell of the Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers, related to records in the possession of IGOV involving the Satanic Temple of Iowa and their request to display various satanic content and images to children on December 14, 2024, at the Iowa State Capitol. This request was assigned the following unique tracking number: **R406**.

I. R406 Record Production

The record production for R406 consisted of 611 pages. IGOV redacted three (3) documents based on attorney-client privilege and/or attorney work product. *See* R406 Batestamp Nos. 1-3, 114, and 609-610; *see also* Iowa Code §§ 227.4(4), 622.11, *Horsfield Materials, Inc. v. City of Dyersville*, 834 N.W.2d 444, 463 (Iowa 2013).

There were seven (7) documents redacted based on executive privilege. *See* R406 Batestamp Nos. 4-7, 9-13, 97-101, 228-231, 496-498, 500-502, and 608). Batestamp Nos. 4-7 consist of an executive agency report prepared for the benefit of the Governor by the cabinet director for the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS). The document provides information and guidance to the Governor related to her executive cabinet agency, which assists the Governor in performing the powers and duties of the executive office. *See generally* Iowa Code §§ 8A-102 –

8A-104, 8A-322. This confidential – or closed – record contains a single line that would be responsive to your client’s request. Batestamp No. 608 is a communication from the director of DAS that, although nonresponsive to the R406 request (it is located in between two responsive communications within a text thread), it is also a communication designed to provide high level information and guidance to the Governor and her senior staff related to an executive level cabinet agency.

Each of the remaining documents that were redacted consist of “prep documents” that were prepared for the Governor by her senior staff to assist her in performing the duties and powers of the office. Much of the material on these documents, although privileged, is nonresponsive.

These communications were intended to be confidential, and the disclosure of them would frustrate and inhibit the Governor’s ability to receive candid, fulsome, and robust information in the future. Stated differently, the release of this information would interfere with the Governor’s ability to perform the powers and duties of the office in the most effective manner for the benefit of Iowans. It is in the public interest that the Governor receives such information when making decisions.

All documents were redacted following a review by the Governor’s legal counsel.

II. Open Records

It is important to note at the outset, information in the possession of the government – local, state, and federal – irrespective of whether it is in the possession of the executive, legislative, or judicial branch should *generally* be made available to the public and, equally, it should be accessible amongst the coequal branches of government. It is good public policy to provide the public with access to as much information as possible.

Broad access to government information, however, was not the historical norm in either Iowa or the United States. Rather, such access – and the presumption of openness – is a recent legislative advent. The Freedom of Information Act, commonly known as FOIA, was enacted by Congress in 1966 to give the American public greater access to the federal government’s records. *See* Senate Bill 1160 (1966). FOIA was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on July 4, 1966.¹ In Iowa, Senate File 537 was approved on July 28, 1967, by Governor Harold E. Hughes.²

Consequently, FOIA became law 178-years, 9-months, and 17-days after the U.S. Constitution was adopted. And, IFOIA became law 110-years, 4-months, and 25-days after the Iowa Constitution was adopted. The adoption of public record laws – decades before the widespread use of transitory forms of communication – is an important achievement for the American public.

There were widespread issues leading up to this legislation related to government secrecy, which ultimately resulted in the federal government, and numerous states, enacting laws related to public records around the same timeframe. During World War II the country witnessed an immense growth of the federal government coupled with the wartime need for a high degree of secrecy.

¹ <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/foia/FOIARelease66.pdf>

² <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=62&ba=SF%20537>

World War II was followed by the Cold War era. Both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations responded with many information and security restrictions being placed on government records.

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9834, known as the “Loyalty Order,” which directed the attorney general to compile a list of communist organizations and to ferret out communist influence in the federal government.³ The Loyalty Order allowed for the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the establishment of the House Un-American Activities Committee.⁴ A political atmosphere of heightened secrecy and increased suspicion resulted. Americans’ distrust of the government during this period was great.

John Moss of California had been the target of disloyalty allegations during his state legislative campaign and subsequent congressional campaign.⁵ Moss took office in 1953 as the congressional representative for California’s Third Congressional District.⁶ He was known to take great issue with the federal government’s propensity towards secrecy and he became an advocate for open government.

In 1956 Kent Cooper, the executive director of the Associated Press, popularized the phrase “right to know” in his book by the same name.⁷ Cooper wrote: “American newspapers do have the constitutional right to print . . . but they cannot properly serve the people if governments suppress the news.”⁸

Editors became so concerned about the denial of information to the press and the public that they commissioned Harold Cross, a leading newspaper lawyer and counsel to the New York Herald Tribune, to prepare a report on federal, state, and local information rights.⁹ Cross’s report was published in 1953 under the title, “The People’s Right to Know.”¹⁰ It was funded by American Society of Newspaper Editors.¹¹

Ultimately, Congress created a Special Subcommittee on Government Information in 1955, which is known as the “Moss Subcommittee,” as it was chaired by John Moss.¹² Every federal agency that testified before the Moss Subcommittee opposed a federal records law that, generally, created a presumption of openness with respect to federal records.¹³

A detailed report on the availability of government records was later issued by the Moss Subcommittee, which noted that Congress was concerned that the threat to freedom of information

³ Hogan, Michael J., *A Cross of Iron*, p 254 at note 7 (1998) (citing Executive Order No. 9835, 3 C.F.R. Supp. 2 (1947)).

⁴ \$4 Million For Probes, 9 Cong. Q. Almanac 69 (1953).

⁵ Interview by Donald B. Seney with John E. Moss, Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives, in Sacramento, Cal., 15 (Oct. 3, 1989), <http://archives.cdn.sos.ca.gov/oral-history/pdf/oh-moss-john.pdf>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Foerstel, Herbert N., *Freedom of Information and the Right to Know*, p. 15 (1999).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.* at 17.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 21.

¹³ See Federal Public Records Law: Hearing on H.R. 5012 Before the Subcomm. on Foreign Operations and Gov’t Info. of the H. Comm. on Gov’t Operations, 89th Cong. 1 passim (1965) (statement of Rep. John E. Moss, Chairman, H. Subcomm. on Foreign Operations and Gov’t Info).

“is the almost unlimited claim of executive privilege now being made by executive agencies to withhold information from the public, the press and the congress.” Editorial, *Executive Privilege*, Des Moines Register (10/26/1959).

The use of this executive privilege during this timeframe covered almost any executive agency record no matter how far removed from the decision-makers and agency heads. Both Congress and, the following year the Iowa General Assembly, each passed legislation which opened up government records to the public. They did provide an exception to these transparency laws for themselves.

Our public record laws were designed to get information that was neither confidential nor privileged to the public, rather than, all information. IGOV values transparency; however, the availability of information is not without limitation. And, the release of such information should not limit the chief executive’s ability to either obtain information or detract from the performance of her constitutional duties. The concept of executive privilege predates open record laws, and the legislature does not have the authority to limit the chief executive’s constitutional privilege in this regard.

It is unfortunate that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) fails to appreciate the constitutional role of a governor in our three-tiered system of government. The duties, privileges, and powers of a governor are complex, varied, and vast. A governor, the state-level equivalent of the president of the United States, has the greatest responsibility over the affairs of our state and the welfare of its citizenry.

The concept of executive privilege has long been recognized in American jurisprudence, and it is important to review such history in the context of open record laws.

III. Executive Privilege

Executive power is an inherent power within the constitution *irrespective* of whether it is the United States Constitution (for the president) or the Iowa Constitution (for the governor). The ACLU’s assertion that executive privilege does not exist in Iowa is misguided. Neither the Iowa Supreme Court nor the Iowa Court of Appeals have *ever* held that there is not an executive privilege in Iowa. Although the judicial branch has not had the occasion to flesh out the contours of such privilege since enactment of IFOIA in 1967, it nonetheless exists.

For perspective, the United States Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787, and ratified by the states between 1787 and 1790. It went into effect in 1789. “Since the beginnings of our nation,” recognized the Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, “executive officials have claimed a variety of privileges to resist disclosure of information the confidentiality of which they felt was crucial to fulfillment of the unique role and responsibilities of the executive branch of our government.” *In re Sealed Case*, 121 F.3d 729, 736 (D.C. Cir. 1997). The most common of these privileges is broadly known as executive privilege.

In 1796, for example, the House of Representative requested information from President George Washington in connection to the Jay Treaty and Great Britain. President Washington refused based

on executive privilege. He noted, “[t]he nature of foreign negotiations requires caution, and their success must often depend on secrecy; and even when brought to a conclusion a full disclosure of all measures, demands, or eventual concessions which may have been proposed or contemplated would be extremely impolite; for this might have a pernicious influence on future negotiations or produce immediate inconveniences, perhaps danger and mischief, in relation to other powers.”¹⁴

Our history is replete with examples of executive privilege. The first explicit recognition of executive privilege came in *Marbury v. Madison*, 5 U.S. 137 (1803). Specifically, Chief Justice John Marshall stated that there was a privilege to withhold confidential communications between the executive and their aides, while retaining for the court the power to decide the extent of that privilege.

The existence of such privilege was equally known when Iowa became a state. Iowa was organized as a territory of the United States on June 12, 1838 (following the Louisiana Purchase).¹⁵ The first constitutional convention in Iowa relating to statehood was held in 1844.¹⁶ A proposed constitution was adopted; however, it was rejected by voters on April 7, 1845.

A second constitutional convention was held in 1846.¹⁷ Iowa voters approved the constitution on August 3, 1846.¹⁸ On December 28, 1846, President James K. Polk signed a law that recognized the state of Iowa as the 29th state of the United States.¹⁹

The General Assembly (Third) enacted the Iowa Code 1851, effective July 1, 1851. *See* 3 G.A., Ch. 98, § 5. The initial Iowa Code in 1851 – following statehood – recognized that “[a] public officer ***cannot be examined as to communications*** made to him in official confidence, when the public interests would suffer by the disclosure.” Iowa Code 1851, § 2395 (Emphasis added). This law has remained unchanged for more than 173 years. *Compare* Iowa Code (2025) § 622.11. An absurd result would be reached if such information could otherwise be obtained through IFOIA.

This evidentiary rule related, essentially, to depositions, discovery requests, and testimony. Explicit language would not have been needed related to public record requests at this time as there was no general right to information by the public and, in fact, no legislative body – state or federal – had adopted any such sunshine law until more than a century later (in the 1960s).

Iowa’s third constitutional convention was held in 1857, which resulted in the adoption of Iowa’s Constitution on March 5, 1857. It is a bedrock principle that a three-tiered government, such as we have with both our federal and state governments, act as a checks and balance amongst the branches. The separation-of-powers doctrine requires that a branch of government not impair another in the performance of its constitutional duties. *Klouta v. Sixth Judicial Dist. Dept. of Correctional Services*, 642 N.W.2d 255, 260 (Iowa 2002) (internal citations omitted).

¹⁴ https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/gw003.asp

¹⁵ <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/ICA/850349.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/law/statutory/constitution/constConventions/conventionDocuments?year=1844>

¹⁷ <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/law/statutory/constitution/constConventions/conventionDocuments?year=1846>

¹⁸ <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/ICNST/780453.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://maint.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/29th-congress/session-2/c29s2ch1.pdf>

The Iowa Constitution provides:

“The powers of the government of Iowa shall be divided into three separate departments - - the legislative, the executive, and the judicial: and no person charged with the exercise of powers properly belonging to one of these departments shall exercise any function appertaining to either of the others, except in cases hereinafter expressly directed or permitted.”

Iowa Const. art. 3, § 1. It is a fundamental principle that one branch of government is not permitted to intrude upon the powers of another branch of government. *State v. Ragland*, 836 N.W.2d 107, 117 (Iowa 2013); *see also Schwarzkopf v. Sac County Bd. of Sup'rs*, 341 N.W.2d 1, 5 (Iowa 1983) (The separation-of-powers principle is violated if legislature purports to use powers not granted to it by Constitution or usurps powers granted by it to another branch.); *State v. District Court of Jefferson County*, 238 N.W. 290, 293 (Iowa 1931) (General Assembly possesses legislative power of state except so far as it is withheld by Constitution.); *McSurely v. McGrew*, 118 N.W. 415, 419 (Iowa 1908) (State constitution is not a grant but a limitation on legislative power, so that the Legislature may enact any law not expressly or inferentially prohibited by Constitution).

The framers of the Iowa Constitution recognized that the constitution “shall be the supreme law of the state, and any law inconsistent therewith, shall be void. The general assembly shall pass all laws necessary to carry this constitution into effect.” Iowa Const. art. 12, § 1. This means that the resolution of any conflict between the Iowa Constitution and Iowa Code chapter 22 with respect to executive privilege would be resolved in favor of the former.

The Iowa Constitution further provides that “[t]he supreme executive power of this state shall be vested in a chief magistrate, who shall be styled the governor of the state of Iowa.” Iowa Const. art. 4, § 1. The governor “shall transact all executive business with the officers of government, civil and military, and *may require information in writing from the officers of the executive department upon any subject* relating to the duties of their respective officers.” Iowa Const. art. 4, § 8 (Emphasis added). It is the duty of the governor that they “shall take care that the laws are faithfully executed.” Iowa Const. art. 4, § 9.

In a landmark executive privilege case following enactment of the federal FOIA, *U.S. v. Nixon*, the United States Supreme Court recognized the importance of confidential communications:

The expectation of a President to the confidentiality of his conversations and correspondence, like the claim of confidentiality of judicial deliberations, for example, has all the values to which we accord deference for the privacy of all citizens and, added to those values, is the necessity for protection of the public interest in candid, objective, and even blunt or harsh opinions in Presidential decisionmaking. A President and those who assist him must be free to explore alternatives in the process of shaping policies and making decisions and to do so in a way many would be unwilling to express except privately. These are the considerations justifying a presumptive privilege for Presidential communications. The privilege is fundamental to the operation of Government and inextricably rooted in the separation of powers under the Constitution.

418 U.S. 683, 708 (1974).

With these constitutional provisions in mind, as observed in *Nixon*, 418 U.S. at 705, “the privilege can be said to derive from the supremacy of each branch within its own assigned area of constitutional duties.” And later (*id.* at 708): “The privilege is fundamental to the operation of Government and inextricably rooted in the separation of powers under the Constitution.” *See also United States v. Reynolds*, 345 U.S. 1, 6 n. 9 (1953), *Dellums v. Powell*, 561 F.2d 242, 246 (D.C. Cir. 1977), cert. denied, 434 U.S. 880 (1977); and *Ethyl Corporation v. Environmental Protection Agency*, 478 F.2d 47, 51 (4th Cir. 1973).

IV. Iowa Precedence

Executive privilege – asserted by a governor – has been used by numerous governors since enactment of IFOIA in 1967. *See, e.g.,* Ross, Jonathan, *Vilsack Restricts Public from Accessing Documents*, Des Moines Register (10/15/2005) (citing executive privilege, governors have exerted control over certain records); Kauffman, Clark, *Consultant’s Report Not Ready for Public, Governor’s Office Says*, Des Moines Register (9/4/2009) (Culver has asserted executive privilege in keeping records confidential). Despite such use, there has not been a court in Iowa in the 57-years following enactment of IFOIA where it has been held that governors do not have executive privilege.

An authority on IFOIA is Professor Arthur Earl Bonfield. “Bonfield is much more than a casual observer. In his 45 years at the University of Iowa Law School, he has worked with the Legislature as the principal drafter of amendments to the open meetings law and the open records law.” Gearino, Dan, *Iowa’s Open Record Laws Are Confusing, Professor Says*, Quad-City Times (9/7/2007). Professor Bonfield noted that with “too much sunshine in government, serious practical problems may emerge.” Bonfield, Arthur E., Presentation to Joint Interim Study Committee on Freedom of Information, Open Meetings, and Public Records, (9/6/2007) (located at: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/SD/6542.pdf>); *see also* Bowden, Mark, *‘Sunshine’ May Cause Heartburn, But Cancer?*, The Gazette (9/10/2007) (“University of Iowa professor Arthur Bonfield, an expert on Iowa’s sunshine laws, told lawmakers last week that too much “sunshine” causes a “cancer” in government, making it ineffective and inefficient.”).

On November 9, 2007, during a Freedom of Information, Open Meetings, and Public Records Study Committee, it was noted in the minutes (p.9) during an exchange between Senator Mary Lundby and Professor Arthur Bonfield of the University of Iowa, regarding a draft proposal that would allow for the identity and qualifications of an applicant for employment to be released, that:

Senator Lundby. Would this requirement be applicable to the Governor when department heads and directors are selected? *Professor Bonfield stated that the Governor’s executive privilege authority would likely override the requirements of this statute.*

(Emphasis added).

During this same period (2007), the State Archivist, Gordon Hendrickson, requested that the legislature consider including an executive privilege definition. In a statement from Hendrickson issued on September 6, 2007, he noted that State Archives holds gubernatorial records for all of Iowa's governors and within those records are matters that fall into the category of executive privilege. He was concerned with determining whether there becomes a point in time when the confidentiality protection ends, and the record should become public. *See* Statement of Gordon O. Hendrickson, Ph.D., State Archivist before the Freedom of Information, Open Meetings, and Public Records Legislative Interim Study Committee (9/6/2007).

A. Iowa Judicial Branch

The Iowa Supreme Court, in dicta, recognized the viability of a deliberative process privilege (a form of executive privilege). In discussing the corollary to mental process privilege – the deliberative process privilege – the Iowa Supreme Court in *Office of Citizens' Aide/Ombudsman v. Edwards*, 825 N.W.2d 8, 19 (Iowa 2012), noted “[b]y contrast, the judicial deliberative privilege is absolute.” (citing *In re Enforcement of a Subpoena*, 463 Mass. 162, 972 N.E.2d 1022, 1033 (2012) (“This absolute privilege covers a judge's mental impressions and thought processes in reaching a judicial decision, whether harbored internally or memorialized in other nonpublic materials.”)).

The concept of judicial deliberative process privilege appears to have been embraced – and rightfully so – by the Iowa Judicial Branch. In 2019, the Iowa Standard, an independent news source in Sioux City, reported that following a public record request for communications involving Chief Justice Mark Cady that the State Court Administrator, Todd Nuccio, responded with “deliberative process privilege,” as a basis to withhold a number of communications related to the chief justice.²⁰ Although the Iowa Constitution does not explicitly provide for a judicial deliberative privilege, it is an implied privilege that allows the judicial branch to effectively perform its constitutional duties.

B. Iowa Legislative Branch

Although the legislative branch has exempted itself from IFOIA, it does enjoy a legislative privilege grounded on separation-of-powers principles. The Iowa Supreme Court held “that the Iowa Constitution contains a legislative privilege that protects legislators from compelled document production and that the privilege extends to communications with third parties where the communications relate directly to the legislative process of considering and enacting legislation.” *Smith v. Iowa District Court for Polk County*, 3 N.W.3d 524, 527 (Iowa 2024).

“Legislative *privilege* is an evidentiary privilege that serves to protect a legislator from being required to produce documents or testify in court proceedings.” *Id.* at 530 (emphasis is original). “It may arise in situations like here where the legislator is not a party to the underlying suit.” *Id.* (citation omitted). “Turning to our constitution, we conclude that three provisions of the Iowa Constitution support recognizing a legislative privilege: article III, section 1, which expressly provides for separation of powers between the three branches of government . . .” *Id.* at 534.

²⁰ See <https://theiowastandard.com/tis-exclusive-chief-justice-cady-secretly-helped-coordinate-opposition-to-judicial-selection-bill-in-iowa/>

C. Iowa Executive Branch

Without touching upon the outer contours of an executive branch privilege, there is certainly a privilege for the chief executive. In *State ex rel. Shanahan v. Iowa Dist. Court for Iowa County*, 356 N.W.2d 523, 526-527 (Iowa 1984), it was argued that certain materials held by the Division of Criminal Investigation for the Department of Public Safety were protected by executive privilege, which was “derived from the doctrine of separation of powers in both our State and federal constitutions.” (citing Iowa Const. Art. III, § 1; U.S. Const. Art. I, § 1; Art. II, § 1; Art. III, § 1; *United States v. Nixon*, 418 U.S. 683, 706, (1974) (“[T]he privilege can be said to derive from the supremacy of each branch within its own assigned area of constitutional duties.”)).

As the Iowa Supreme Court was able to resolve the issues on narrower grounds (application of a qualified privilege under Iowa Code Section 622.11), it declined to address the executive privilege argument. *Id.* at 527.

In *Belin v. Reynolds*, 989 N.W.2d 166 (Iowa 2023), executive privilege was also raised but in the context of *timeliness* in responding to public record requests. The Iowa Supreme Court found that issues related to (i) whether a governor is subject to chapter 22, (ii) are records “government records,” versus nongovernment records, and (iii) whether the government records were made available do not involve an inquiry into: a governor’s “decision-making processes.” *Id.* at 177.

The Iowa Supreme Court noted that a response to the record requester in that instance does “not depend on the defendants’ thinking,” and “does not depend on the defendants’ internal conversations” or “any of the inner workings of the Governor’s office.” *Id.* These comments by the Iowa Supreme Court indicate that records that do evidence a governor’s “thinking,” involve “internal conversations,” or the “inner workings of the office” would be protected. As to timeliness, “we see no reason why the plaintiffs cannot advance timeliness claims without inquiring into political questions or *invading executive privilege*.” *Id.* at 178 (emphasis added).

Ultimately, this opinion tells us that the Governor is subject to IFOIA but that the Iowa Supreme Court is attentive to separation-of-powers and executive privilege. Stated differently, executive privilege relates to the content of a communication and *not* the procedures related to responding to a public record request, such as, the thoroughness of a search or the delay in responding to a request.

Even in states with constitutions that do not contain an express formal separation-of-powers clause, executive privilege has been recognized. For example, in *Freedom Foundation v. Gregoire*, 178 Wash.2d 686, 696 (WA 2013), the Washington Supreme Court stated:

We have long described the separation of powers as one of the cardinal and fundamental principles” of our state constitutional system. Our constitution does not contain a formal separation of powers clause. Nonetheless, the very division of our government into different branches has been presumed throughout our state's history to give rise to a vital separation of powers doctrine.

(internal citation and quotation marks omitted). The Washington Supreme Court went onto “recognize the executive communications privilege as an exemption to the PRA [Public Records Act] comports with the decisions of our sister states.” *Id.* at 697. This court recognized that a public records act must give way to constitutional mandates and the constitution supersedes contrary statutory laws. *Id.* at 695.

V. Conclusion

There are numerous cases – state and federal – that discuss the nuances of executive privilege (e.g., executive communications privilege, deliberative process privilege, and mental process privilege) and the scope of such privilege (e.g., pre-decisional, post-decisional, proximity to the governor, etc.). These are complex issues and ones that would likely need to be addressed in a different forum.

The documents that were redacted have been preserved should you choose to pursue litigation in this matter. This response is not to be construed as a waiver or limitation of any additional arguments or defenses that could be raised regarding this matter.

Sincerely,



Steven E. Blankinship

Encl.

PRIVILEGE LOG					IGOV IFOIA 2024-R406
Date	Sender	Recipient	Subject	Privilege	Batestamp
11/20/2024 8:38 AM (UTC-06:00)	stannanrthompson6@gmail.com	stan.thompson@governor.iowa.gov taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov; jacob.nicholson@governor.iowa.gov; kraig.paulsen@iowa.gov; adam.steen@iowa.gov	Satanic Temple (Legal Memorandum on Religious Displays)	Iowa Code §§ 22.7(4), 622.11; <i>see also Horsfield Materials, Inc. v. City of Dyersville</i> , 834 N.W. 2d 444 (Iowa 2013)	1 to 3
11/20/2024 1:34 PM (UTC-06:00)	trisha.quijano@iowa.gov	[Gov Reynolds@governor.iowa.gov; annie.hayes@governor.iowa.gov	DAS Executive Agency Report	Satanic Temple referenced on p. 6. Executive Privilege.	4 to 7
11/25/2024 2:33 PM (UTC-06:00)	mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov	[Gov Reynolds@governor.iowa.gov; taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov; annie.hayes@governor.iowa.gov	Media Prep Doc	Satanic Temple referenced on p. 10. Executive Privilege.	9 to 13
11/25/2024 2:33 PM (UTC-06:00)	mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov		Media Prep Doc	Satanic Temple referenced on p. 98. Executive Privilege.	97-101
12/11/2024 10:49 AM (UTC-06:00)	megan.hall@governor.iowa.gov	eric.wessan@ag.iowa.gov	Satanic Temple (communication to attorney)	Iowa Code §§ 22.7(4), 622.11; <i>see also Horsfield Materials, Inc. v. City of Dyersville</i> , 834 N.W. 2d 444 (Iowa 2013)	114
12/15/2024 6:30 PM (UTC-06:00)	annie.hayes@governor.iowa.gov	[Gov Reynolds@governor.iowa.gov;	Media Prep Doc	Satanic Temple referenced on p. 229. Executive Privilege.	228-231
12/18/2024 3:09 PM (UTC-06:00)	jen.green@governor.iowa.gov	taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov	Media Prep Doc	Satanic Temple referenced on p. 496. Executive Privilege.	496-498
12/18/2024 3:22 PM (UTC-06:00)	jen.green@governor.iowa.gov	taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov	Media Prep Doc	Satanic Temple referenced on p. 500. Executive Privilege.	500-502
12/9/2024 7:00 AM (UTC-06:00)	Jacob Nicholson (text)	Adam Steen (text)	DAS Executive Agency Report	Non-Responsive (related to DAS Executive Report). Executive Privilege.	608
12/14/2024 11:12 AM (UTC-06:00)	Jacob Nicholson (text)	Adam Steen (text)	Satanic Temple (communicating legal advice provided by counsel, Stan Thompson)	Iowa Code §§ 22.7(4), 622.11; <i>see also Horsfield Materials, Inc. v. City of Dyersville</i> , 834 N.W. 2d 444 (Iowa 2013)	609-610



CHESTER J. CULVER
GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

PATTY JUDGE
LT. GOVERNOR

Memorandum of Understanding on the Culver/Judge Administration Records

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dated 14th day of January, 2011, is entered into by the Honorable Chester J. Culver, Governor of the State of Iowa ("Transferor") and the State Historical Society of Iowa through its director, Cyndi Pederson, and Interim State Archivist, Jerome Thompson (hereinafter collectively referred to as "Transferee") relating to access to records of the Culver/Judge Administration.

Article I

Background and Objectives

- A. Transferor is the legal custodian of certain records and documents ("collection") governed by the State Records and Archives Act including, but not limited to, correspondence generated, sent, or received by him, Lt. Governor Patty Judge, and the staff of the Office of Governor during his term as Governor of the State of Iowa.
- B. Both parties believe that it is in the public interest to consolidate, preserve, and maintain on a long-term basis at the State Archives of Iowa this collection in a manner appropriate to its nature and character as part of the historical record of this State and Nation.
- C. The purpose of this MOU is to strike the appropriate balance between the desire to ensure broad public access to Transferor's material and the privacy protections afforded under the law to people that have communicated with the Governor's Office during the Transferor's tenure as Governor.

Article II

Framework of the MOU

- A. Transferor agrees to:
 - 1. Designate those items constituting the collection that are located within the Office of the Governor and Lt. Governor or that up to this time have been stored on state property before noon, January 14, 2011.
 - 2. Make arrangements to migrate electronic records and emails onto a single, portable hard drive to be transferred as part of the collection. The transferor and his agent shall retain a copy of these electronic records and emails.

3. Make reasonable efforts to transfer to transferee the collection in accordance with established record series retention and disposition schedules.
4. Indicate at the time of transfer on the State Historical Society's Transfer of Custody form any materials of the collection that are likely to contain information that may contain confidential information as provided by law by notating any conditions and restrictions on access to, or use of such files, folders, and boxes. All electronic records stored on the portable hard drive and all email records are to be considered restricted access records.
5. From time to time designate in writing an agent or agents to act on his behalf with respect to matters set forth herein.

B. Transferee agrees to:

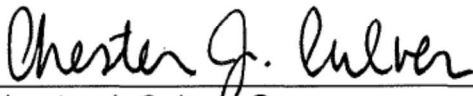
1. On or before January 14, 2011, arrange for physical transfer of the collection to a secure, environmentally appropriate storage area within its sole care, custody, and control.
2. Establish and maintain inventory control and be the custodian, subject to the conditions set forth herein, of the collection for the purpose of examining, cataloging, and evaluating the nature and extent of its historical value.
3. Permit the transferor or his agent with access to examine or copy any material from the collection in a manner that is consistent with public records and fair information practices of the Historical Division of the Department of Cultural Affairs, as may be amended from time to time.
4. For a period of 20 years following the execution of this MOU, notify transferor, or his agent, immediately upon receipt of any subpoena or any other authorized request to access, examine, or copy any material from the collection. Upon such notice with respect to materials in the collection, to which access has been conditioned or restricted, transferee shall provide transferor or his agent with reasonable opportunity to review the requested materials for the purpose of determining whether such materials contain information that should be treated as confidential under Chapter 22 of the Code of Iowa, other applicable Code sections, and common law confidentiality protections, such as the common law doctrines of attorney-client privilege, executive and deliberative privilege, or other applicable provisions of state or federal law.
5. Records from boxes or the portable hard drive to which access has been restricted shall not be released to anyone other than Transferor or his agent without Transferor's express written consent. Transferor or his agent shall seek legal advice from the Office of the Iowa Attorney General, as necessary, to determine whether any materials must be maintained as confidential. All other materials from the collection shall be readily accessible for examination. After the initial 20 years, the transferee shall allow access to the collection as otherwise permitted by law.
6. For the purpose of this agreement Transferor's agent shall be Steve Wandro, Attorney at Law, or any other person whom he may designate, in

writing, at a later time. Any revocation of the agency designation shall be made by Transferor, in writing.

C. The parties agree that:

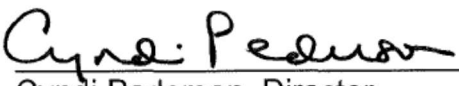
1. All the terms and provisions of this agreement shall be binding upon and inure to the benefit of and be enforceable by the respective successors and assigns of the parties.
2. This MOU may be amended from time to time by mutual consent in writing by both parties.
3. This MOU, together with the State Historical Society's Transfer of Custody forms and the single, portable hard drive, constitutes the entire agreement between the parties concerning the transactions contemplated by this agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties have duly executed this agreement on the date first written above.



Chester J. Culver, Governor

Dated: January 14, 2011



Cyndi Pederson, Director

Dated: January 14, 2011



Jerome Thompson, Interim Archivist

Dated: January 14, 2011

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
CULTURAL AFFAIRSTERRY E. BRANSTAD, GOVERNOR
KIM REYNOLDS, LT. GOVERNORMARY COWNIE, DIRECTOR
CHRIS KRAMER, DEPUTY DIRECTORIOWA
ARTS
COUNCILPRODUCE
IOWASTATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWASTATE HISTORICAL
MUSEUM OF IOWASTATE HISTORICAL
LIBRARY & ARCHIVESSTATE
HISTORIC
SITESSTATE HISTORIC
PRESERVATION
OFFICE OF IOWAIOWA
HISTORICAL
FOUNDATIONMemorandum of Understanding
Branstad Administration Gubernatorial Records

This Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") is entered into and is deemed effective as of the 24th day of May, 2017 by and between the Honorable Terry E. Branstad, Governor of the State of Iowa ("Transferor") and the State Historical Society of Iowa ("Transferee") relating to access to records of the Branstad Administration.

Article I

Background and Objectives

- A) Transferor is the legal custodian of certain records and documents (the "Collection") governed by the State Records and Archives Act including, but not limited to, correspondence generated, sent, or received by him, Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds, and the staff of the Office of Governor during his term as Governor of the State of Iowa (from January 14, 2011 to May 24, 2017).
- B) Both parties believe that it is in the public interest to consolidate, preserve, and maintain on a long term basis at the State Archives of Iowa at the State Historical Society of Iowa the Collection in a manner appropriate to its nature and character as part of the historical record of this State and Nation.
- C) The purpose of this MOU is to strike the appropriate balance between the desire to insure broad public access to Transferor's material and the privacy protections afforded under the law to the people that have communicated with the Governor's Office during the Transferor's tenure as Governor.

Article II

Framework of the MOU

- A) Transferor agrees to:
 - 1. Designate those items constituting the Collection that are or were located within the Office of the Governor and Lt. Governor as of the effective date of this MOU.
 - 2. Make arrangements to migrate electronic records and emails onto a portable hard drive or a separate server within the Office of the Chief Information Officer to be transferred as part of this collection.
 - 3. Make reasonable efforts to transfer to Transferee the Collection in accordance with established records series retention and disposition schedules.
 - 4. From time to time designate in writing an agent or agents to act on his behalf with respect to matters set forth herein.

B) Transferee agrees to:

1. For physical records comprising part of the Collection, Transferee in cooperation with Transferor, shall arrange for the physical transfer of such parts of the Collection to the extent practicable to a secure and environmentally appropriate storage location under Transferee's custody and control. For electronic records and/or digital parts of the Collection, at a time appropriate, Transferee in cooperation with Transferor and the Office of the Chief Information Officer, shall arrange for the physical transfer of such parts of the Collection to the extent practicable to a secure, environmentally, and electronically appropriate storage location under Transferee's custody and control, with a courtesy copy of such electronic records and/or digital parts of the Collection to also be provided to the Legal Counsel of the Office of the Governor. For the purposes of this MOU, the Legal Counsel of the Office of the Governor shall not be deemed to be the legal custodian of such electronic and/or digital parts of the Collection; the lawful custodianship of such electronic and/or digital parts of the Collection shall remain with Transferee.
2. Establish and maintain inventory control to be the legal custodian of the Collection, subject to the conditions set forth herein, for purpose of examining, cataloging, and evaluating the nature and extent of its historical value.
3. Permit the Transferor or his agent(s) with reasonable access to examine or copy any material from the Collection in a manner which is consistent with public records and fair information practices of the State Historical Society of Iowa, a Division of the Department of Cultural Affairs, as may be amended from time to time.
4. For a period of 10 years following the execution of this MOU, notify Transferor, or his agent(s), immediately upon receipt of any subpoena, open records request, or any other lawful request to access, examine, or copy any material from the Collection. Upon such notice, with respect to materials in the Collection, Transferee shall also provide Transferor or his agent(s) with reasonable opportunity, to the extent permitted by law, to review the requested materials for the purpose of determining whether such materials contain information that should be or may be treated as confidential under Iowa Code Chapter 22, other applicable sections of the Iowa Code, federal law, common law confidentiality protections, attorney-client privilege, deliberative privilege, executive privilege, or any other applicable legal authority. Transferor or his agent(s) may seek legal advice or professional guidance as to the handling, release, or protection of any materials requested from the Office of the Iowa Attorney General, or any other competent professional that Transferor or his agent(s) determine is convenient or appropriate, in order to determine whether or not any materials may be maintained as confidential or privileged. Transferee shall not release, permit to be examined or copied, or otherwise disseminate any materials requested unless and until Transferor or his agent(s) have had an actual opportunity to review such requested materials, make an independent determination as to whether or not any such materials should be or may be kept confidential, and have given Transferee express written permission to release the requested materials or any parts of the requested materials not deemed by Transferor or his agent(s) to be confidential or otherwise protected.
5. After the initial 10 years provided for in this MOU, the Transferee shall allow access to the Collection as otherwise permitted by law, provided, however, that Transferor reserves the right at any time to either extend or reduce such 10 year period unilaterally in writing.
6. For the purpose of this MOU, Transferor's agent(s) shall be Michael Bousselot, Margaret Hough, David Roederer, and Colin Smith, or any other person(s) whom he may designate in writing at a later time. Any revocation of the agency designation herein shall be made by Transferor, in writing.

C) The parties agree that:

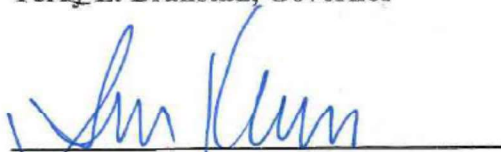
1. Any and all records contained in the Collection have the potential to contain legally confidential information in one of more particulars. While Transferor will strive to mark those parts of the Collection

that may contain legally confidential information prior to the transfer of the Collection to the Transferee, Transferee acknowledges that it is not possible for Transferor to mark all such potentially legally confidential parts of the Collection prior to Transfer. Determination as to the confidentiality (or not) of parts of the Collection shall be irrevocably vested with Transferor and his agent(s) on a case-by-case basis.

2. All the terms and provisions of this MOU shall be binding upon and inure to the benefit of and be enforceable by the respective successors and assigns of the parties.
3. This MOU may be amended from time to time by mutual consent in writing by both parties.
4. This MOU, together with the State Historical Society's Transfer of Custody forms constitutes the entire agreement between the parties concerning the transactions contemplated by this agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties have duly executed this agreement on the date first written above.


Terry E. Branstad, Governor


Susan Kloewer, Administrator

Class Code: 00709/90709

Iowa Department of Administrative Services – Human Resources Enterprise
Job Classification Description

Administrative Assistant 2

Definition

Performs administrative program work of a moderate to considerable scope and diversity assisting a manager or administrator with program responsibilities; performs related work as required.

The work examples and competencies listed below are for illustrative purposes only and not intended to be the primary basis for position classification decisions.

Work Examples

Handles complaints and requests for information or assistance regarding program operations; applies and interprets rules, policies, and regulations; gathers background information; and prepares appropriate responses.

Attends and represents management at regular and special meetings; participates in discussions and communicates management's positions on specific issues.

Serves as member of internal special committees; provides accurate and timely advice on matters necessary to implement directives and instructions.

Monitors progress toward program goals and objectives; identifies and investigates operational problems and recommends corrective actions (e.g., changes in forms, shifts, work distribution, and organizational structure).

Conducts special studies or research projects; develops study plans, coordinates research, and makes recommendations on implementation.

Maintains inventory/depreciation records and monitors organizational/program purchases for compliance with budget; gathers supporting data and prepares budget projections (e.g., salaries, support and travel).

Serves as contact person for purchasing, project coordination, personnel, and information management system issues.

Develops organizational/program policies, processes and procedures; monitors and solves problems related to implementation.

Monitors and records updates of legislation for state agencies and state legislators as it proceeds through the legislative process.

Organizes, manages and promotes the rental programs for particular state facilities and coordinates events held at those locations.

Competencies Required

Knowledge:

- Customer Service – Principles and processes for providing customer services, including customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluating customer satisfaction.

- Administration and Management – Business and management principles involved in strategic planning, resource allocation, human resources modeling, leadership technique, production methods, and coordination of people and resources.
- Clerical Procedures – Word processing, managing files and records, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.

Abilities:

- Speech Recognition – Identify and understand the speech of another person.
- Written Expression – Communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.
- Written Comprehension – Read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
- Oral Comprehension – Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- Oral Expression – Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.

Skills:

- Active Listening – Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
- Speaking – Talking to others to convey information effectively.
- Service Orientation – Actively looking for ways to help people.
- Writing – Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.

Minimum Qualification Requirements

Applicants must meet at least one of the following minimum requirements to qualify for positions in this job classification:

- 1) Graduation from an accredited four-year college or university with a bachelor's degree in any field, and experience equal to one year of full-time administrative support (e.g., screening visitors and callers; opening/distributing mail, typing/proofing documents, letters, and reports; organizing files; scheduling meetings/appointments; arranging travel; processing travel claims; ordering supplies/equipment) or technical support work (e.g., determining budget, personnel, and equipment needs; compiling/evaluating statistical, historical, economic, business, financial or technical program data; interpreting or securing compliance with laws, rules and regulations; reviewing operating records/reports and evaluating their effectiveness).
- 2) A total of five years of education and/or full-time experience (as described in number one) where thirty semester hours of accredited college or university course work in any field equals one year of full-time experience.
- 3) Current, continuous experience in the state executive branch that includes experience equal to 12 months of full-time work as an Administrative Assistant 1.

Effective date: 12/17 SA

Class Code: 14930

Iowa Department of Administrative Services – Human Resources Enterprise
Job Classification Description

Chief Operating Officer

Definition

Serves as the chief operating officer of a cabinet-level agency, providing policy-making authority level, professional management services through direct reports managing day to day activities; determines and develops operational strategy and policy in close conjunction with the department director and/or deputy director; performs related work as required.

The work examples and competencies listed below are for illustrative purposes only and not intended to be the primary basis for position classification decisions.

Work Examples

Supervises and evaluates the work of subordinates; recommends personnel actions related to selection, disciplinary procedures, performance, leaves, grievances, work schedules, and assignments; administers personnel policies and procedures.

Initiates and implements policy decisions impacting both the day-to-day and long-range operations of all facets assigned in support of its mission; coordinates these operations and keeps the Director and senior management informed of all major developments; establishes related policies and procedures to ensure all programs are administered in an efficient and timely manner and in compliance with state and federal law, regulations, administrative rules and board directives.

Plans, develops and establishes rules, policies and objectives; assists with the establishment and oversight of administering of programs as directed by legislation.

Oversees the development and implementation of internal policies and procedures for efficient work flow; oversees an efficient and timely budget and accounting process; establishes procedures for professional services contracts; collaborates with the Director, senior management, and other key staff as needed for orderly and efficient operation of the Division.

Analyzes organizational, operational, and/or legal issues and develops strategic solutions; guides staff members to establish appropriate priorities; periodically evaluates division performance on goals and objectives.

Provides input, interpretation and direction related to compliance on all programs and directives; gives direction/input on new or revised legislation which would impact programs; serves on various interagency committees.

Competencies Required

Knowledge:

- Administration and Management – Business and management principles involved in strategic planning, resource allocation, human resources modeling, leadership technique, production methods, and coordination of people and resources.

- Customer Service – Principles and processes for providing customer services, including customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluating customer satisfaction.
- Law and Government – Laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, and the democratic political process.
- Personnel and Human Resources – Principles and procedures for personnel recruitment, selection, training, compensation and benefits, labor relations and negotiation, and personnel information systems.
- English Language – The structure and content of the English language, including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.

Abilities:

- Law and Government – Understand and adhere to applicable laws, legal codes, administrative rules, and regulations.
- Written Expression – Communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.
- Oral Expression – Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
- Speech Clarity – Speak clearly so others can understand.
- Speech Recognition – Identify and understand the speech of another person.
- Deductive Reasoning – Apply general rules to specific problems to produce answers that make sense.
- Inductive Reasoning – Combine pieces of information to form general rules or conclusions.
- Originality – Come up with unusual or clever ideas about a given topic or situation, or to develop creative ways to solve a problem.
- Problem Sensitivity – Tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.

Skills:

- Judgment and Decision Making – Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one.
- Complex Problem Solving – Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions.
- Critical Thinking – Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
- Speaking – Talking to others to convey information effectively.
- Active Listening – Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- Management of Personnel Resources – Motivating, developing, and directing people as they work, identifying the best people for the job.
- Management of Financial Resources – Determining how money will be spent to get the work done, and accounting for these expenditures.

- Monitoring – Monitoring/Assessing performance of yourself, other individuals, or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action.
- Negotiation – Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences.
- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
- Writing – Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
- Active Learning – Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem-solving and decision-making.

Minimum Qualification Requirements

Applicants must meet at least one of the following minimum requirements to qualify for positions in this job classification:

- 1) Graduation from an accredited four-year college or university with a bachelor's degree and experience equal to eight years of full-time management/executive-level work.
- 2) All of the following (a, b, and c):
 - a. Six years of full-time management/executive-level work; and
 - b. A total of four years of education and/or full-time experience (as described in part a), where thirty semester hours of accredited college or university coursework in any field equals one year of full-time experience; and
 - c. A total of two years of graduate-level education and/or full-time experience (as described in part a), where twenty-four semester hours of accredited graduate college or university coursework in public administration, business administration, or a related field equals one year of full-time experience.
- 3) Current, continuous experience in the state executive branch that includes experience equal to six months of full-time work as a Public Service Executive or comparable management-level position.
- 4) Current, continuous experience in the state executive branch that includes experience equal to eighteen months of full-time work as a Public Service Manager 2 or comparable management-level position.

Effective date: 10/24 KC

Class Code: 00711/80711/90711

Iowa Department of Administrative Services – Human Resources Enterprise
Job Classification Description

Executive Officer 2

Definition

Performs non-supervisory program management work directing a program/organizational segment thereof that represents a moderate part of an agency's total operations, or serves as an executive assistant to a department director; performs related work as required.

The work examples and competencies listed below are for illustrative purposes only and not intended to be the primary basis for position classification decisions.

Work Examples

Assists supervisor by performing such duties as instructing employees, answering questions, distributing and balancing the workload, and checking work; may make suggestions on selection, promotions, and reassignments.

Develops a program/project plan including a mission statement, goals, objectives, policies, and procedures; determines necessary financial/technological resources, staffing requirements, and evaluation/reporting procedures.

Develops implementation/evaluation methodology and coordinates all aspects of the program/project in its various stages with individuals functionally assigned to the program/project.

Drafts internal procedures for improving coordination between staff, keeps employees informed of management goals/objectives, and ensures that new or revised procedures are implemented; works to maintain/improve relationships with internal agency components, community groups, and other state, local, or federal agencies.

Collaborates with agency management on organizational/financial management matters; evaluates/resolves operational problems and prepares supporting justification for equipment, facilities, budget, and staffing; attends management planning/policy-making meetings and provides input.

Maintains contact with businesses, interest groups, and other public/private organizations through written business communications (reports, letters, memos, and position papers) and makes oral presentations; serves in a leadership capacity or as a key player in activities that involve representatives from the community, business, politics, and service providers.

Drafts administrative rules, legislative proposals, policies, and procedures; determines impact and informs agency management, customers, and program/project staff.

Analyzes a variety of information (e.g., state and federal laws, rules, or regulations) and recommends solutions for resolving program/project administration problems.

Provides guidance and advice to management or other groups on programmatic, technical, or process-related topics.

Reviews relevant performance data to measure productivity or goal achievement or to identify areas needing cost reduction or program improvement.

As an executive assistant to a department director, performs a variety of administrative program duties including: collecting/analyzing program and related data for accuracy, soundness, feasibility, impact, and developing written action proposals; investigating customer (e.g., general public, legislature and interest groups) complaints/inquiries and drafting technical reports/correspondence explaining the department's position on policy issues that may be precedent-setting; planning, organizing, and managing special organizational projects; making formal presentations and representing/speaking for the director at meetings, conferences, etc.; and evaluating work organizational processes/operations for efficiency and effectiveness and recommending changes.

Competencies Required

Knowledge:

- Administration and Management – Business and management principles involved in strategic planning, resource allocation, human resources modeling, leadership technique, production methods, and coordination of people and resources.
- Law and Government – Laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, and the democratic political process.
- English Language – The structure and content of the English language, including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.
- Customer Service – Principles and processes for providing customer services, including customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluating customer satisfaction.
- Clerical Procedures – Word processing, managing files and records, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.

Abilities:

- Law and Government – Understand and adhere to applicable laws, legal codes, administrative rules, and regulations.
- Oral Comprehension – Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- Oral Expression – Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
- Written Expression – Communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.
- Written Comprehension – Read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
- Deductive Reasoning – Apply general rules to specific problems to produce answers that make sense.
- Inductive Reasoning – Combine pieces of information to form general rules or conclusions.
- Problem Sensitivity – Tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.

Skills:

- Active Listening – Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.

- Monitoring – Monitoring/Assessing performance of yourself, other individuals, or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action.
- Critical Thinking – Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
- Writing – Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
- Active Learning – Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem-solving and decision-making.
- Judgment and Decision Making – Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one.
- Service Orientation – Actively looking for ways to help people.
- Complex Problem Solving – Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions.

Minimum Qualification Requirements

Applicants must meet at least one of the following minimum requirements to qualify for positions in this job classification:

- 1) Graduation from an accredited four-year college or university with a degree in any field, and experience equal to four years of full-time professional-level work in program administration, program development, program operations, or management.
- 2) A total of eight years of education and/or full-time experience (as described in number one), where thirty semester hours of accredited college or university course work in any field equals one year of full-time experience.
- 3) All of the following (a, b, and c):
 - a. Two years of full-time professional-level work experience in program administration, program development, program operations, or management; and
 - b. A total of four years of education and full-time experience (as described in part a), where thirty semester hours of accredited college or university course work in any field equals one year of full-time experience; and
 - c. A total of two years of graduate-level education and full-time experience (as described in part a), where twenty-four semester hours of accredited graduate college or university course work in a public-service-related area (e.g., public or business administration, social work, public health, law, education, engineering) equals one year of full-time experience. Graduation from the Iowa Certified Public Manager Program is also equivalent to one year of full-time experience or education.
- 4) Current, continuous experience in the state executive branch that includes twelve months of full-time work as an Executive Officer 1 or comparable specific management-level position.

Effective date: 12/22 SA



Outlook

From Frideres, Taryn [IGOV] <Taryn.Frideres@governor.iowa.gov>

Date Tue 12/17/2024 7:15 PM

To Reynolds, Governor <Gov.KKR@governor.iowa.gov>

Cc Hayes, Annie [IGOV] <Annie.Hayes@governor.iowa.gov>; Green, Jen <Jen.Green@governor.iowa.gov>

 1 attachment (14 KB)

Gov:

See attached a draft media prep doc for tomorrow.

Taryn Frideres | Chief of Staff

Office of the Governor of Iowa

Governor Kim Reynolds

Iowa State Capitol

1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319

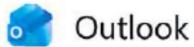
515-608-2617 mobile

taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov

www.governor.iowa.gov



Office of the Governor



From Frideres, Taryn [IGOV] <Taryn.Frideres@governor.iowa.gov>

Date Tue 12/17/2024 7:22 PM

To Reynolds, Governor <Gov.KKR@governor.iowa.gov>

Cc Hayes, Annie [IGOV] <Annie.Hayes@governor.iowa.gov>; Green, Jen <Jen.Green@governor.iowa.gov>

 1 attachment (15 KB)

Gov:

See attached a draft media prep doc for tomorrow.

Taryn Frideres | Chief of Staff

Office of the Governor of Iowa

Governor Kim Reynolds

Iowa State Capitol

1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319

515-608-2617 mobile

taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov

www.governor.iowa.gov



Office of the Governor

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 Fri 12/13/2024 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM IGOV - RM - Ray Conference Room Please join us in the Ray Conference room (Door G09) for a quick meeting.

Microsoft Teams [Need help?](#)

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 223 953 690 732

Passcode: CT6fD3bs

Dial in by phone

[+1 469-998-6043,,776330337#](#) United States, Dallas

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 776 330 337#

For organizers: [Meeting options](#) | [Reset dial-in PIN](#)

Tracking ...

Organizer

 Nicholson, Jacob
Sent on Thursday,
12/12/2024 at 5:15
PM

Attendees

▾ Accepted: 7

 IGOV - RM - R... Steen, Adam [D...
Required Bayens, Stephan
Required Thompson, Stan...
Required Frideres, Taryn [I...
Required Valencia, Patrick
Required Admussen, Willi...
Required

▾ Didn't respond: 1

 Blankinship, Ste...
Required





Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

DAS Department Report - 11/20/2024

1 message

Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Mon, Nov 18, 2024 at 8:46 AM

To: DAS Executive Leadership Team <DASExecutiveLeadershipTeam@iowa.gov>, Paul Carlson <paul.carlson@iowa.gov>, Christopher Sikich <christopher.sikich@iowa.gov>, Tuan Phan <tuan.phan@iowa.gov>

Good morning,

Following is the template for this week's DAS Department Report.



11.20.24 DAS Department Report

As this report is due to the Governor's Office by COB November 20, 2024, I ask that you please provide your updates to me by **close of business tomorrow - Tuesday, November 19.**

Thank you!

Trisha Quijano**Administrative Assistant**

Office of General Counsel

Iowa Department of Administrative Services

Hoover Building, 3rd Floor

1305 E Walnut St, Des Moines, IA 50319

515-725-2817 office

515-281-0753 fax

trisha.quijano@iowa.gov<https://das.iowa.gov>Department of
Administrative Services



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

DAS Department Report - Investigations

1 message

Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>
To: Andrea Macy <andrea.macy@iowa.gov>
Cc: Nathan Reckman <Nathan.Reckman@iowa.gov>

Mon, Nov 18, 2024 at 3:44 PM

Hi Andrea -

Would you please pull the updated numbers through tomorrow 11/19/2024 for the DAS Department Report due on Wednesday 11/20/2024?

The last report reflected the following information:

- Investigations:
 - Effective 10/8/24, DAS has adjusted how it tracks and counts the number of closed complaints and complaints provided to other agencies. The number of complaints sent to other agencies now includes all complaints a) alleging only workplace violence and b) being handled by other agencies in accordance with the updated policy language that went into effect on 8/5/24.
 - DAS currently has 26 open complaints and has closed 31 complaints in FY25. DAS has sent 15 sexual harassment and/or discrimination complaints to State agencies in FY25 in addition to 36 complaints alleging workplace violence or other allegations that are not encompassed by the statewide policies administered by DAS. This fiscal year, through 11/5/24, DAS has received 98 new complaints (compared to 83 new complaints through 11/5/23 and 67 new complaints through 11/5/22). There is 1 pending admin leave case, the report for which is currently pending review.

Thank you!

--

Trisha Quijano
Administrative Assistant
Office of General Counsel
Iowa Department of Administrative Services
Hoover Building, 3rd Floor
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515-725-2817 office
515-281-0753 fax
trisha.quijano@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>



Department of
Administrative Services



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

DAS Department Report - 11/20/2024

1 message

Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 1:34 PM

To: Taryn Frideres <taryn.frideres@governor.iowa.gov>, Jacob Nicholson <jacob.nicholson@governor.iowa.gov>, Kraig Paulsen <kraig.paulsen@iowa.gov>

Cc: Adam Steen <adam.steen@iowa.gov>

Bcc: Trisha Quijano <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

On behalf of Director Steen and the Department of Administrative Services, please see the attached Department Report - 11/20/2024 and one additional document, "Relevant Agency Data Metrics," which is an attachment to the report.

Thank you.

--

Trisha Quijano**Administrative Assistant**

Office of General Counsel

Iowa Department of Administrative Services

Hoover Building, 3rd Floor

1305 E Walnut St, Des Moines, IA 50319

515-725-2817 office

515-281-0753 fax

trisha.quijano@iowa.gov<https://das.iowa.gov>**Department of
Administrative Services**

2 attachments**11.20.24 DAS Department Report .docx**

31K

**Relevant Agency Data Metrics.pdf**

354K



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

DAS Department Report - 11/20/2024 Due COB Today

1 message

Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>
To: Adam Steen <adam.steen@iowa.gov>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 11:41 AM

The report is ready for your review and updates.

See link below:



11.20.24 DAS Department Report

Thank you!

--

Trisha Quijano
Administrative Assistant
Office of General Counsel
Iowa Department of Administrative Services
Hoover Building, 3rd Floor
1305 E Walnut St, Des Moines, IA 50319
515-725-2817 office
515-281-0753 fax
trisha.quijano@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>



Department of
Administrative Services



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Document shared with you: "11.20.24 DAS Department Report "

1 message

Trisha Quijano (via Google Docs) <drive-shares-dm-noreply@google.com>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 11:40 AM

Reply-To: Trisha Quijano <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

To: adam.steen@iowa.gov

Trisha Quijano shared a document



Trisha Quijano (trisha.quijano@iowa.gov) has invited you to **edit** the following document:



11.20.24 DAS Department Report

Open

Google LLC, 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 94043, USA
You have received this email because trisha.quijano@iowa.gov shared a document with you from Google Docs.

Google Workspace



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Re: DAS Department Report - 11/20/2024 Due COB Today

1 message

Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>
To: "Steen, Adam" <adam.steen@iowa.gov>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 1:21 PM

Thank you! Will do:)

On Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 12:37 PM Steen, Adam <adam.steen@iowa.gov> wrote:

I'm good with the report! Feel free to delete the no update enterprises ... I would but can't figure it out with my phone!

Thank you!

Adam

Adam Steen
DirectorIowa Department of Administrative Services
1305 E. Walnut Street, Des Moines, IA 50319
515-720-6176 mobile
adam.steen@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>On Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 11:41 AM Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov> wrote:
The report is ready for your review and updates.

See link below:



11.20.24 DAS Department Report

Thank you!

Trisha Quijano
Administrative Assistant
Office of General Counsel
Iowa Department of Administrative Services
Hoover Building, 3rd Floor
1305 E Walnut St, Des Moines, IA 50319
515-725-2817 office
515-281-0753 fax
trisha.quijano@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>Department of
Administrative Services

--

Trisha Quijano

Administrative Assistant

Office of General Counsel

Iowa Department of Administrative Services

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515-281-0753 fax

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<https://das.iowa.gov>



**Department of
Administrative Services**



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

DAS Department Report

1 message

Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 2:29 PM

To: Adam Steen <adam.steen@iowa.gov>

Cc: Nathan Reckman <Nathan.Reckman@iowa.gov>

Going forward, should I add Brenda Hall's name to the DAS Department Report as the contributor of updates obo the Library?

Thank you!

Trisha Quijano**Administrative Assistant**

Office of General Counsel

Iowa Department of Administrative Services

Hoover Building, 3rd Floor

1305 E Walnut St, Des Moines, IA 50319

515-725-2817 office

515-281-0753 fax

trisha.quijano@iowa.gov<https://das.iowa.gov>**Department of
Administrative Services**



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Invitation: IGOV REPORT DUE COB @ Every 2 weeks on Tuesday (Brenda Hall)

1 message

Trisha Quijano <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 1:15 PM

Reply-To: Trisha Quijano <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

To: Brenda Hall <brenda.hall@iowa.gov>, Mirela Jusic <mirela.jusic@iowa.gov>, Susan Churchill <susan.churchill@iowa.gov>, DAS Executive Leadership Team <dasexecutiveleadershipteam@iowa.gov>, Nick Miller <nick.miller@iowa.gov>, Erin Reinders <erin.reinders@iowa.gov>, Charlee Cross <charlee.cross@iowa.gov>, Tami Wiencek <tami.wiencek@iowa.gov>, Nathan Reckman <nathan.reckman@iowa.gov>, Ben Keenan <ben.keenan@iowa.gov>, Adam Steen <adam.steen@iowa.gov>, Michael Scott <michael.scott@iowa.gov>, Valerie Van Kooten <valerie.vankooten@iowa.gov>, Ryan West <ryan.west@iowa.gov>

New Deadline for IGOV Report

Please have your updates added to the IGOV report each week by 10:00 am - on Wednesdays.

When

Every 2 weeks on Tuesday

Guests

Trisha Quijano - organizer
Mirela Jusic
Susan Churchill
DAS Executive Leadership Team
Nick Miller
Erin Reinders
Charlee Cross
Tami Wiencek
Nathan Reckman
Ben Keenan
Adam Steen
Michael Scott
Valerie Van Kooten
Ryan West
Brenda Hall

View all guest info**RSVP** for brenda.hall@iowa.gov for all events in this series

Yes

No

Maybe

More options

1/28/26, 11:35 AM

State of Iowa Mail - Invitation: IGOV REPORT DUE COB @ Every 2 weeks on Tuesday (Brenda Hall)
E-FILED 2026 FEB 20 4:26 PM POLK - CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT

You are receiving this email because you are subscribed to calendar notifications. To stop receiving these emails, go to Calendar settings, select this calendar, and change "Other notifications".

Forwarding this invitation could allow any recipient to send a response to the organizer, be added to the guest list, invite others regardless of their own invitation status, or modify your RSVP. Learn more

 **invite.ics**
2K



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Re: DAS Department Report - 11/20/2024

1 message

Jusic, Mirela <mirela.jusic@iowa.gov>
To: "Quijano, Trisha" <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 10:19 AM

Done, thanks, mj

On Mon, Nov 18, 2024 at 8:46 AM Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov> wrote:

Good morning,

Following is the template for this week's DAS Department Report.



11.20.24 DAS Department Report

As this report is due to the Governor's Office by COB November 20, 2024, I ask that you please provide your updates to me by **close of business tomorrow - Tuesday, November 19.**

Thank you!

--
Trisha Quijano
Administrative Assistant
Office of General Counsel
Iowa Department of Administrative Services
Hoover Building, 3rd Floor
1305 E Walnut St, Des Moines, IA 50319
515-725-2817 office
515-281-0753 fax
trisha.quijano@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>

Department of
Administrative Services

--
Mirela Jusic, CPM
Chief Financial Officer
Division of Financial Management
Iowa Department of Administrative Services
1305 E Walnut St, Des Moines, IA 50319
Office: 515-281-5062
Mobile: 515-314-4215
Fax: 515-281-6140

mirela.jusic@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>Department of
Administrative Services

PLF. APP. 113

DEF 000054



Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Re: DAS Department Report - 11/20/2024

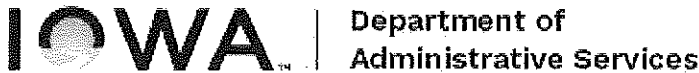
1 message

Cross, Charlee <charlee.cross@iowa.gov>
To: "Quijano, Trisha" <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov>

Mon, Nov 18, 2024 at 3:39 PM

None for GSE
Thanks!

Charlee Cross
Chief Operating Officer
General Services Enterprise
Iowa Department of Administrative Services
109 SE 13th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
515-725-2281 (desk)
515-802-1653 (mobile)
charlee.cross@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>



On Mon, Nov 18, 2024 at 8:46 AM Quijano, Trisha <trisha.quijano@iowa.gov> wrote:
Good morning,

Following is the template for this week's DAS Department Report.



11.20.24 DAS Department Report

As this report is due to the Governor's Office by COB November 20, 2024, I ask that you please provide your updates to me by **close of business tomorrow - Tuesday, November 19.**

Thank you!

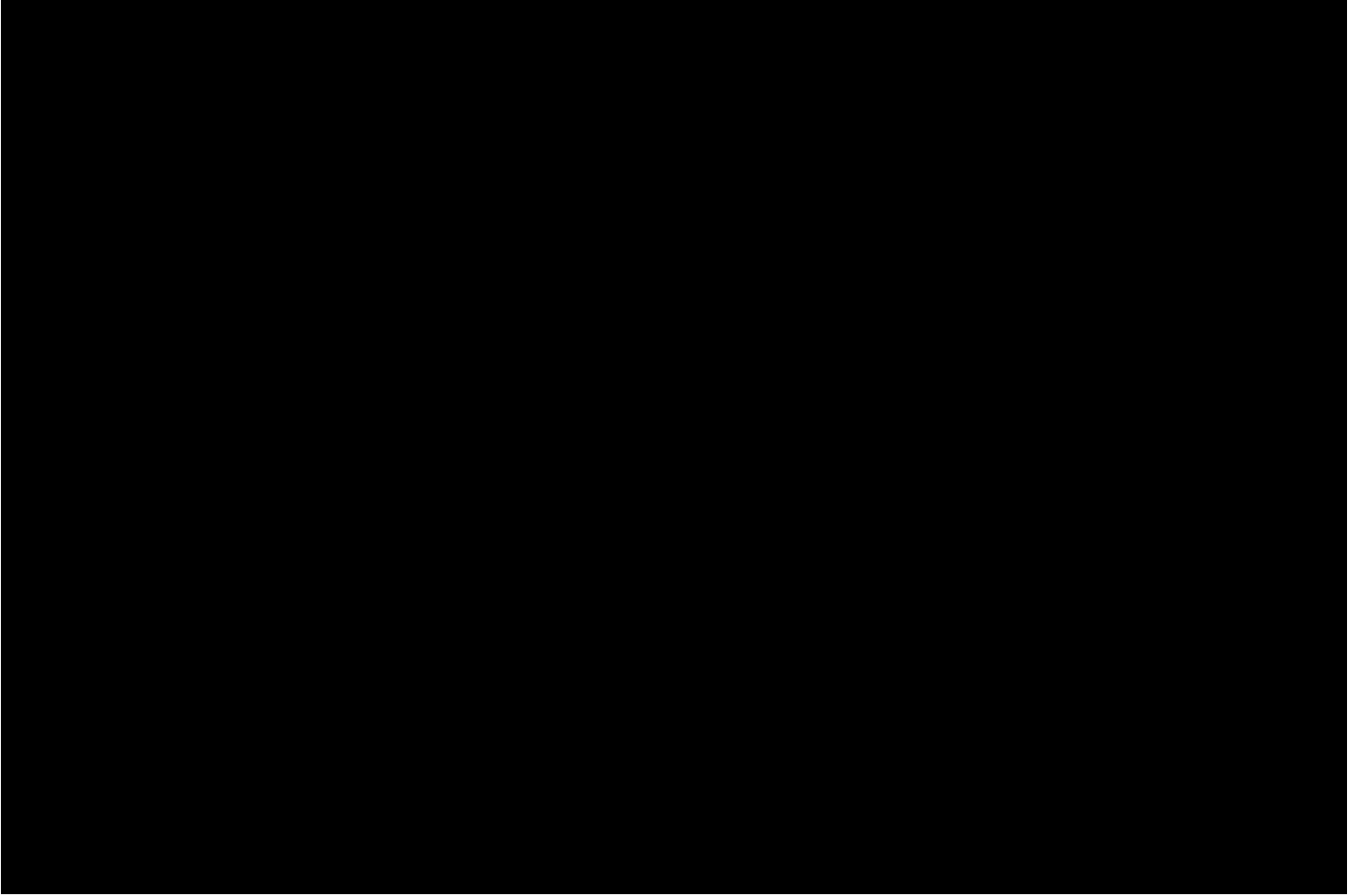
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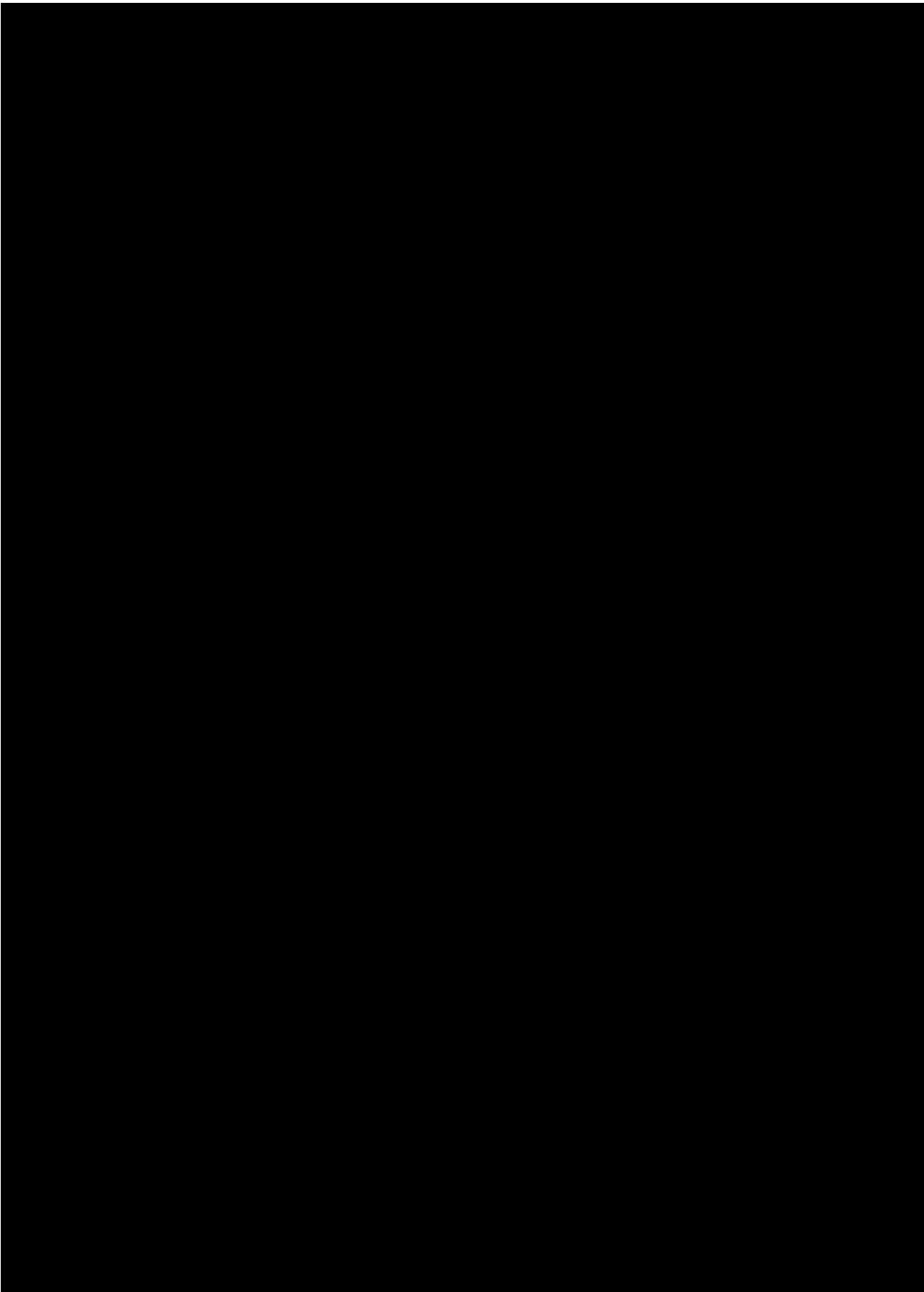
Trisha Quijano
Administrative Assistant
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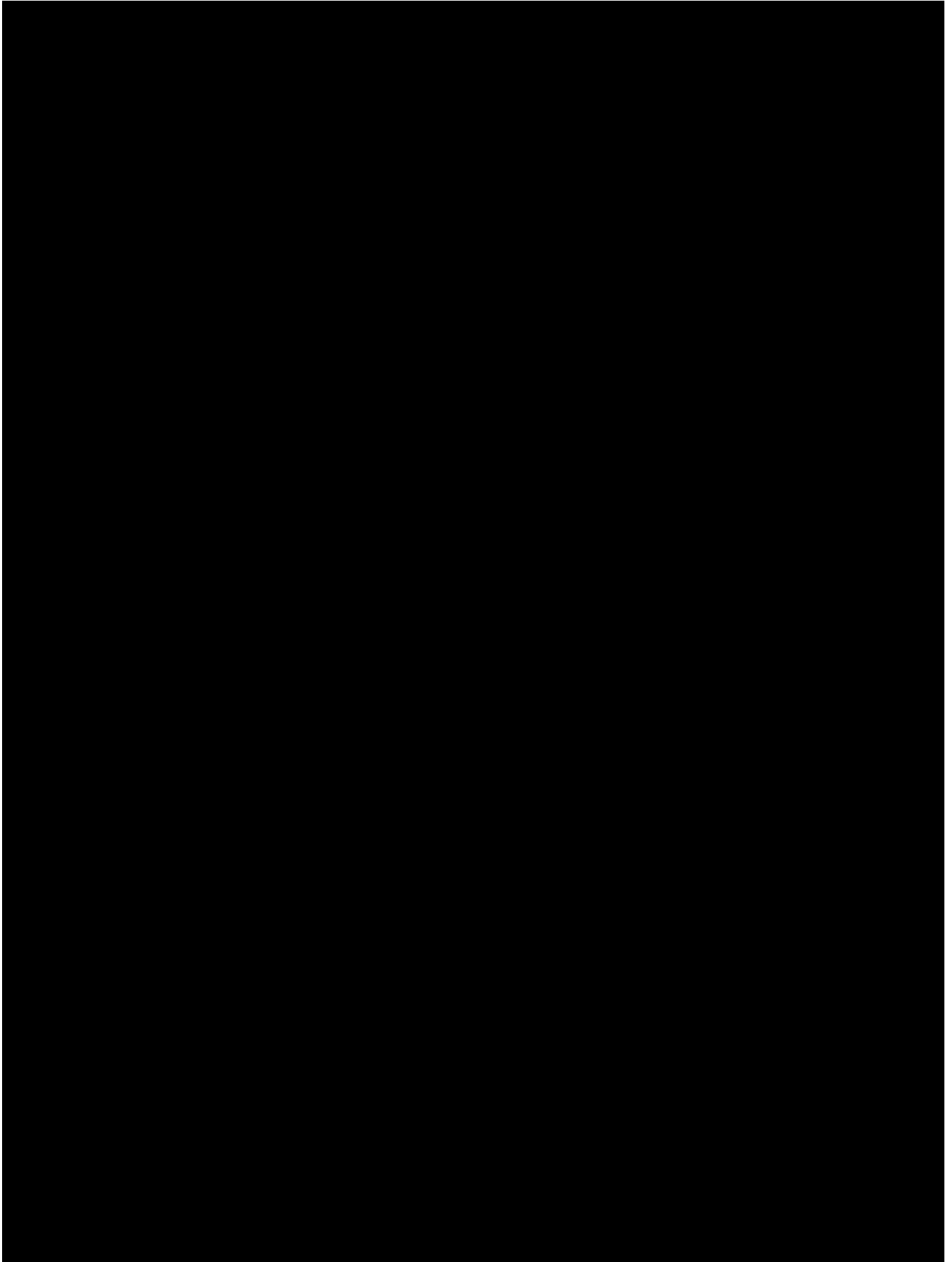


4. Defendants' Document Production Set Two

From: Stan Thompson
Subject:
To: Thompson, Stan [IGOV]
Sent: November 20, 2024 8:38 AM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: 2024-11-19 Memorandum on Religious Displays Final.pdf





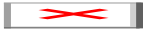


From: Quijano, Trisha
Subject: DAS Department Report - 11/20/2024
To: Frideres, Taryn [IGOV]; Nicholson, Jacob [IGOV]; Paulsen, Kraig
Cc: Steen, Adam [DAS]
Sent: November 20, 2024 1:34 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: 11.20.24 DAS Department Report .docx, Relevant Agency Data Metrics.pdf



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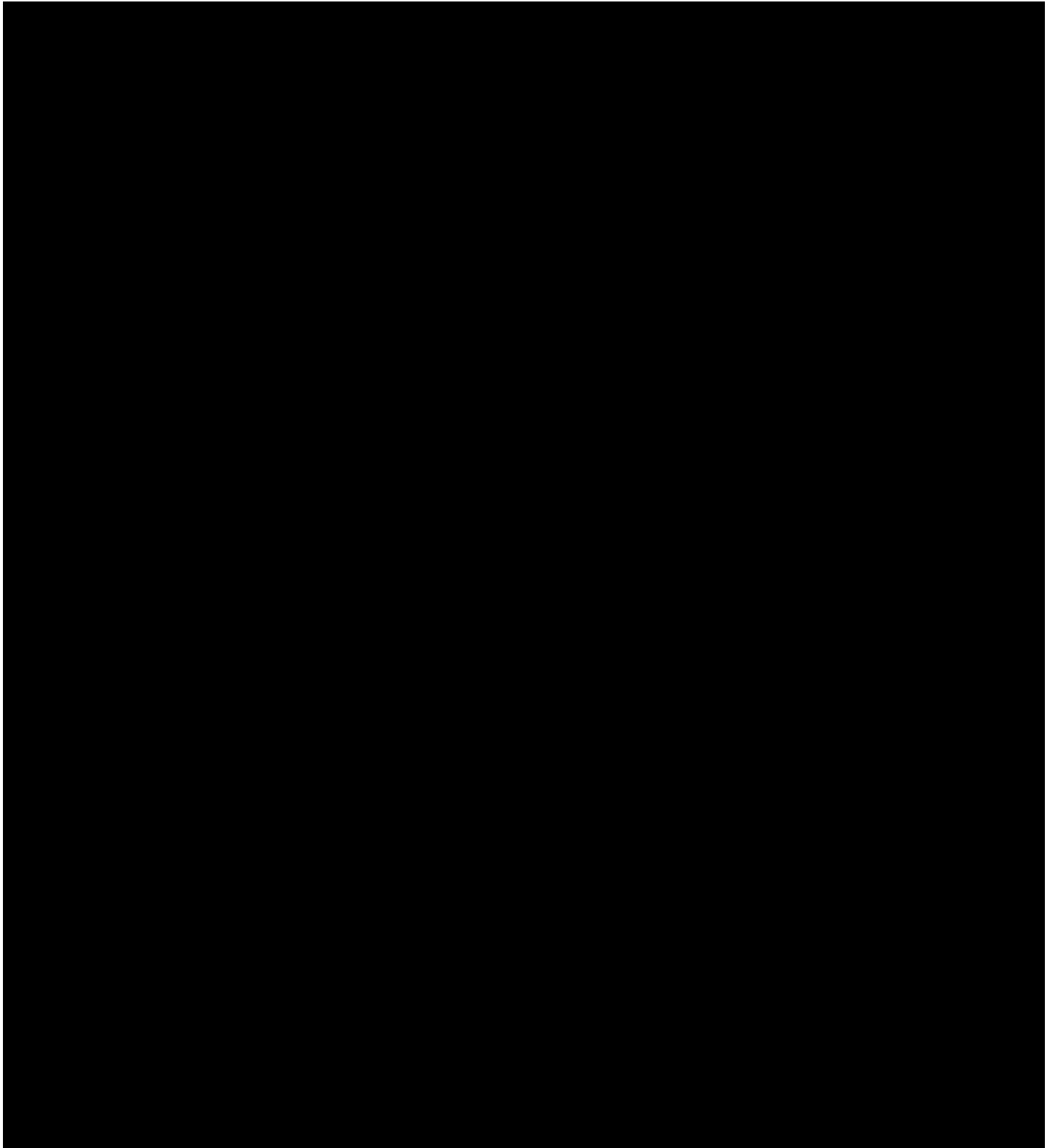
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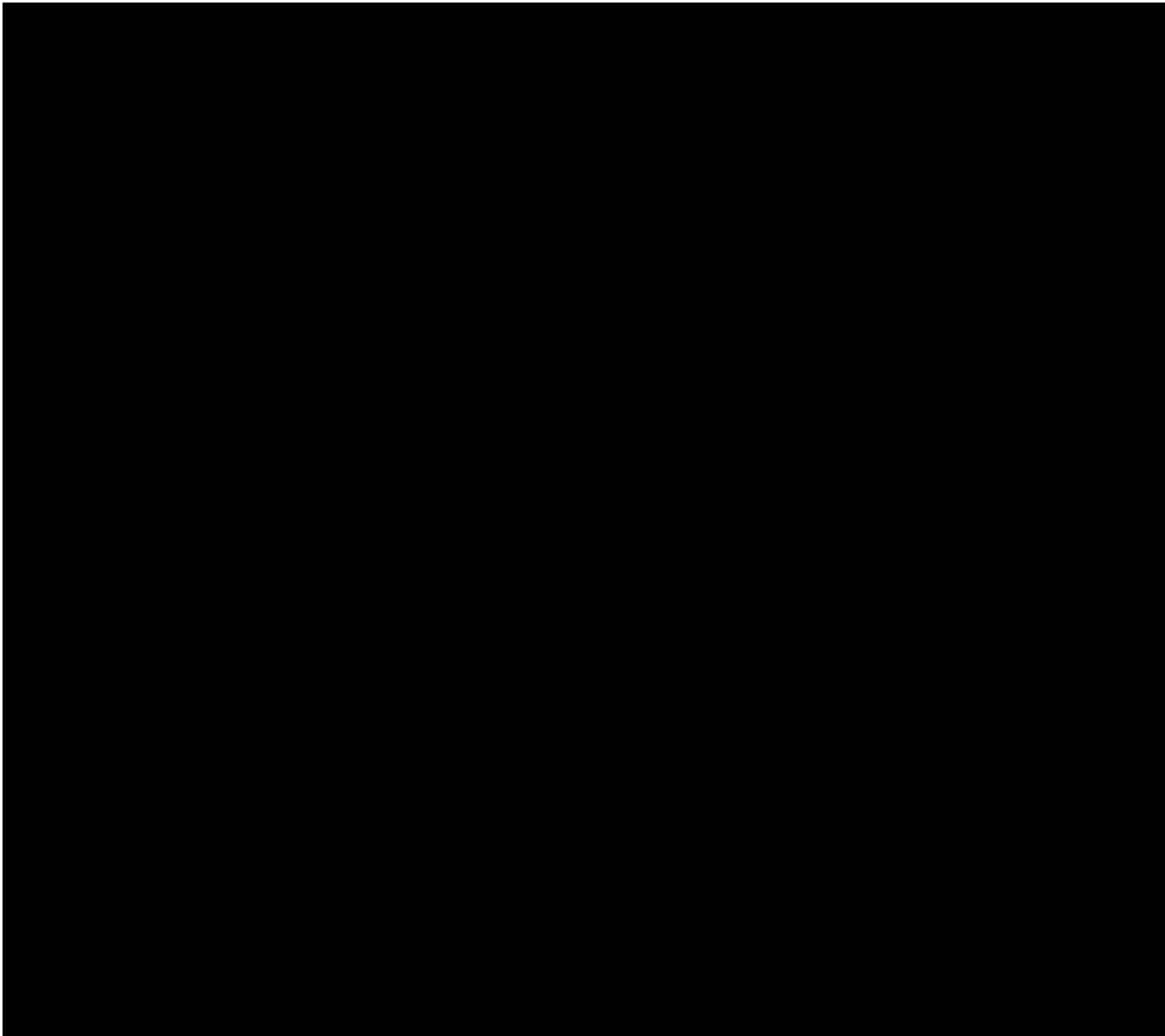


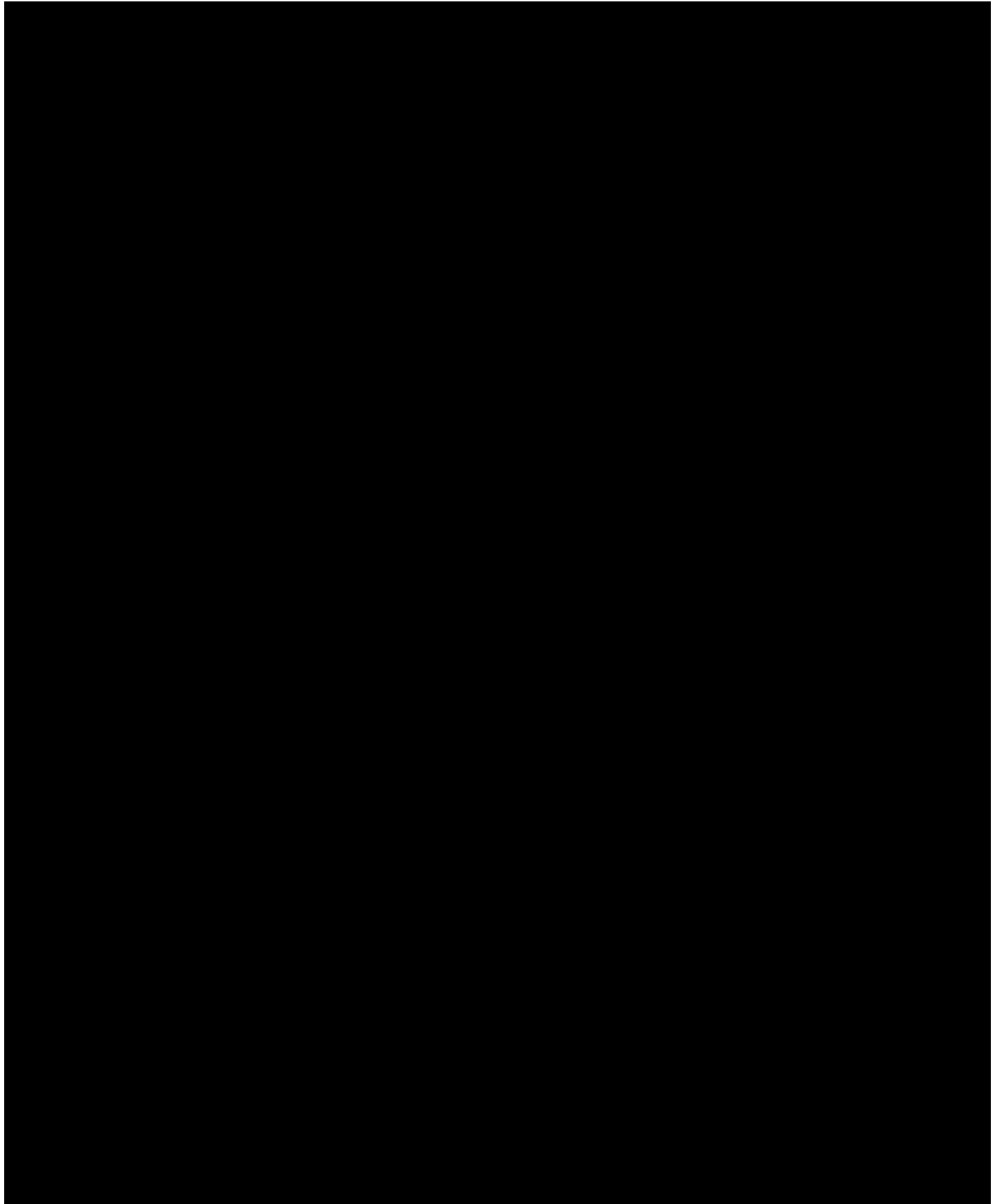
Department Report

Department: Department of Administrative Services

Date: 11/20/2024







From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Turkey pardon media prep doc
To: Reynolds, Governor
Cc: Hayes, Annie [IGOV]
Sent: November 25, 2024 2:33 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: 2024.11.26 Turkey Pardon Media Prep Doc.docx
Hi Gov--

Here's an updated media prep doc for questioning after the turkey pardon, tomorrow.

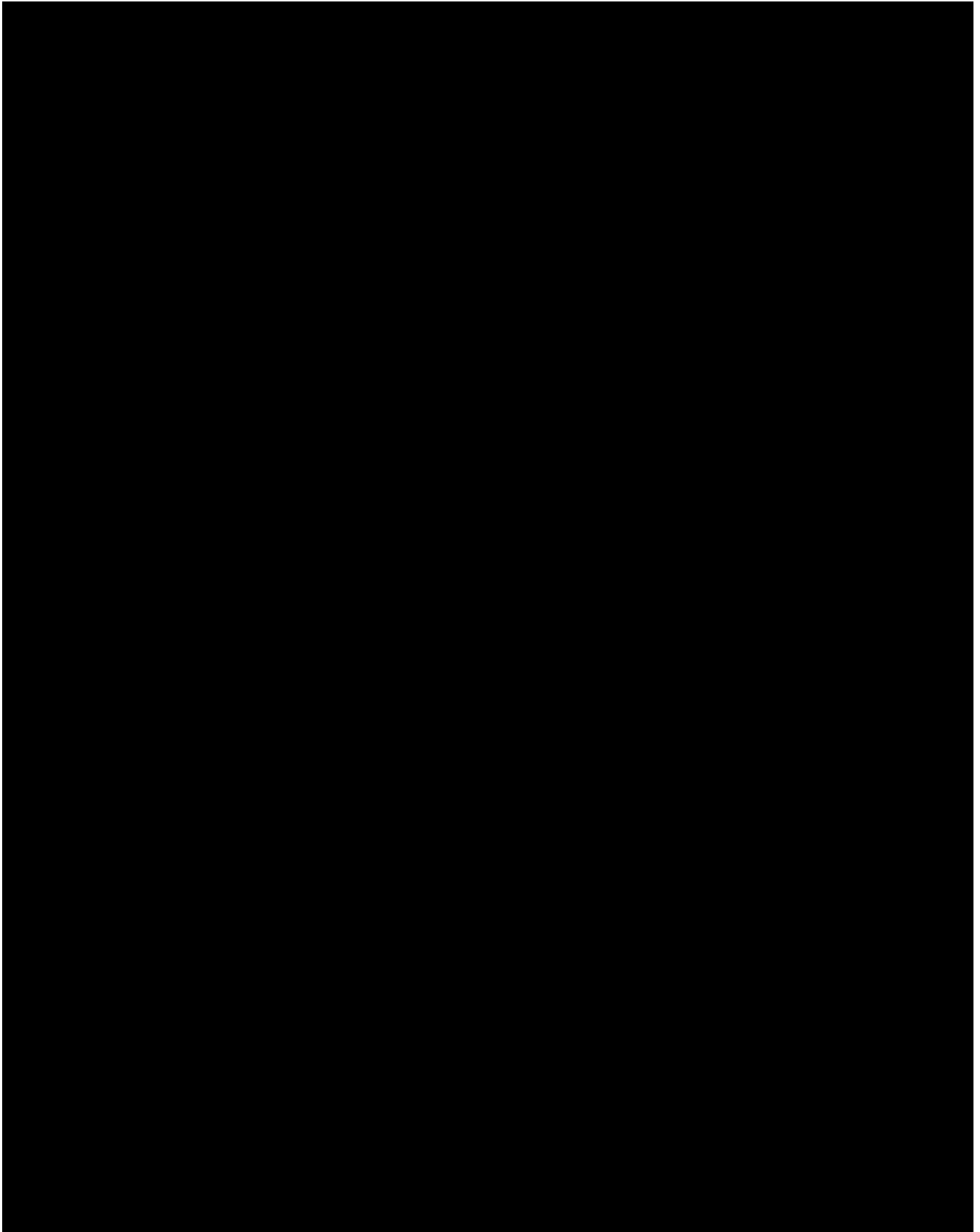
Let me know if you have any questions.

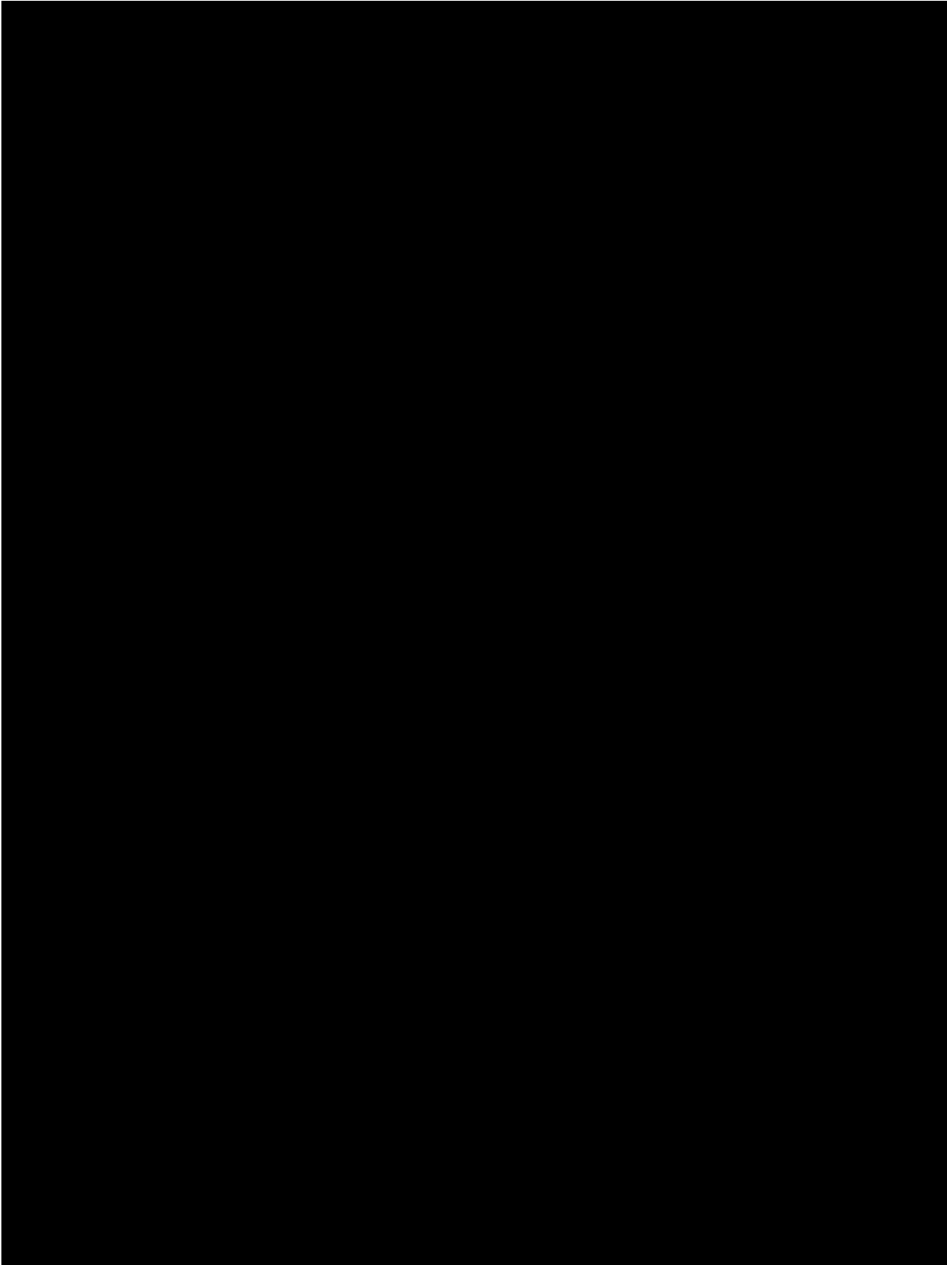
Thanks,
MM

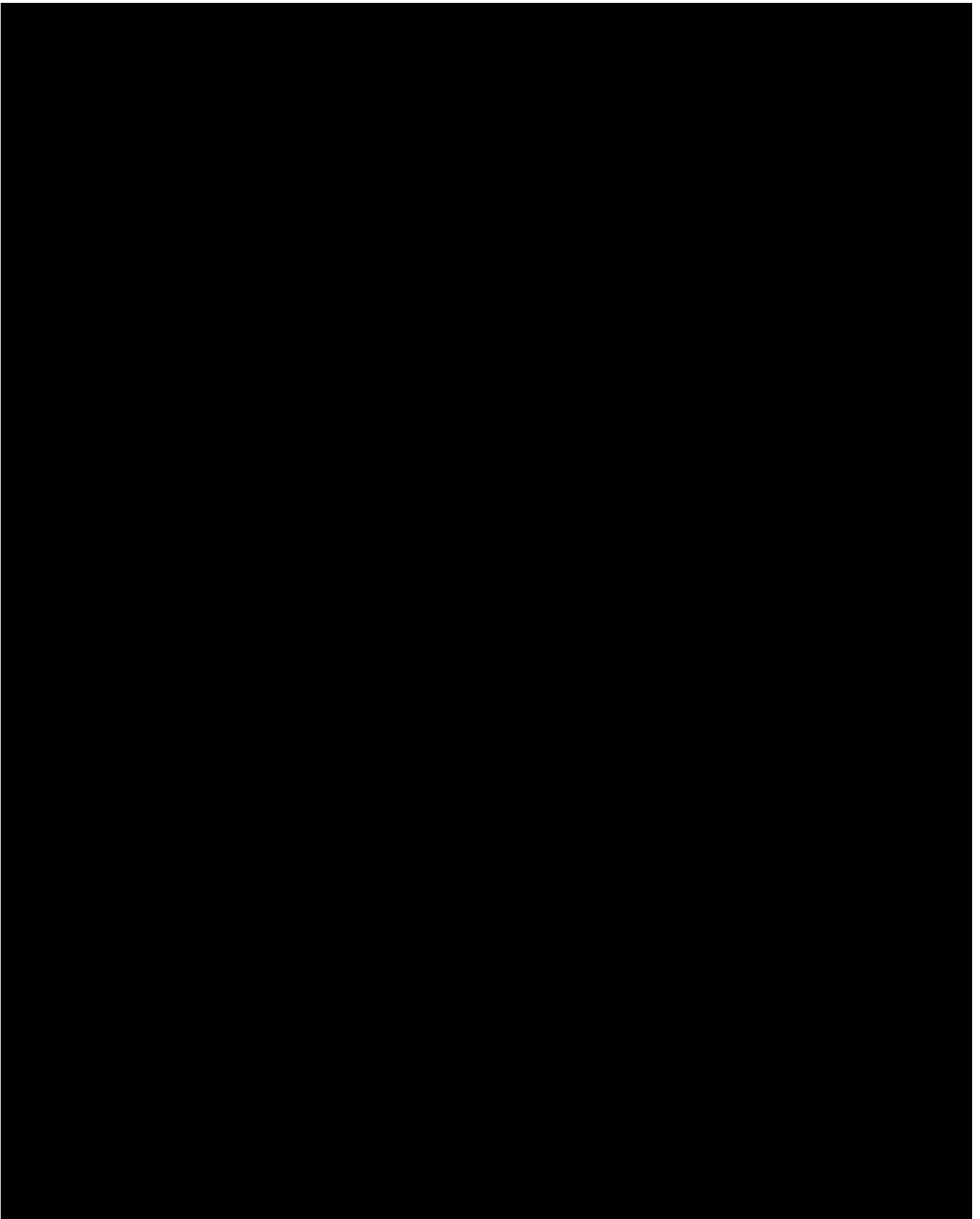
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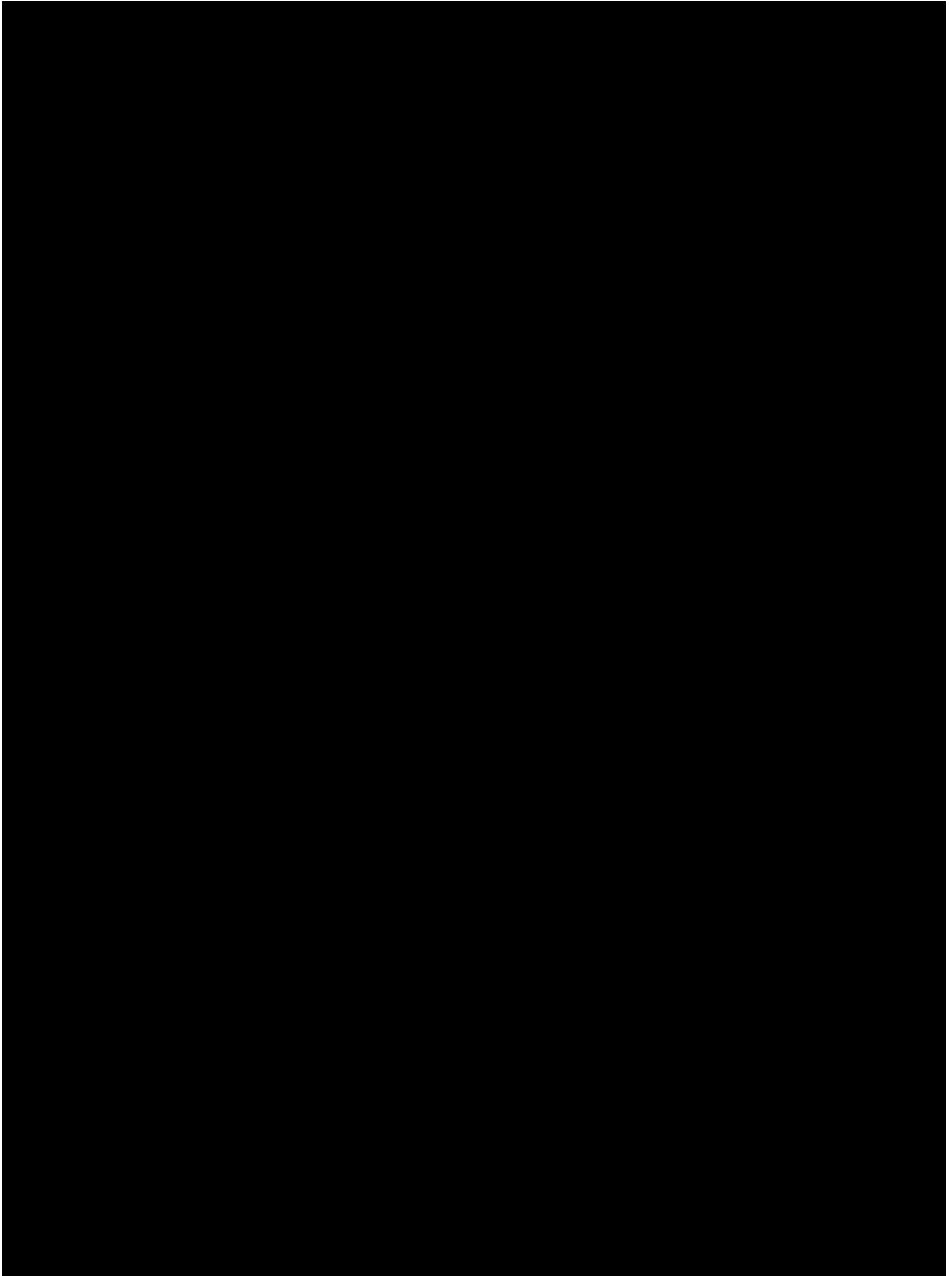


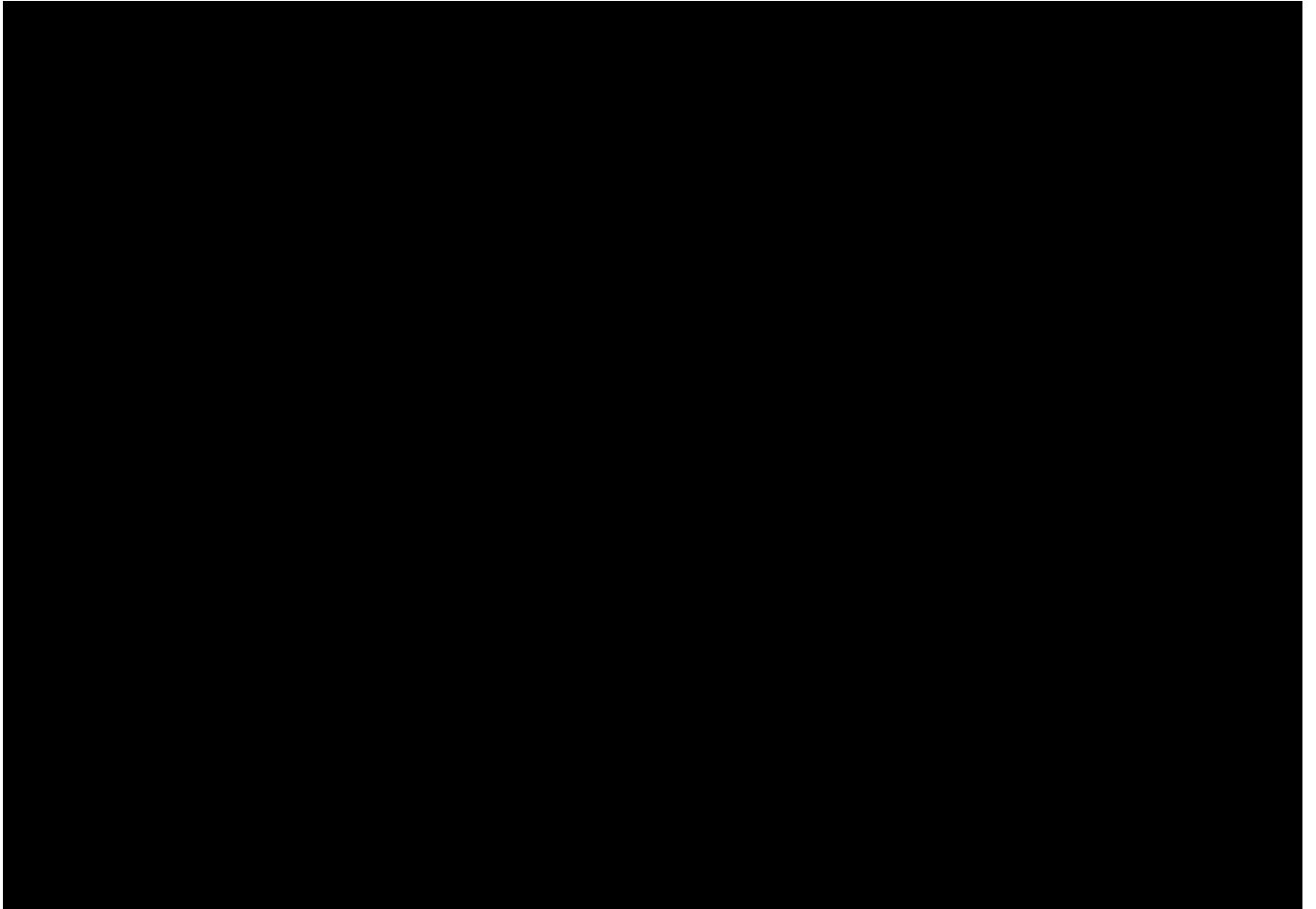
Office of the Governor











From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Evening Clips 12.17.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 17, 2024 11:10 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: IGOV Evening Clips 12.17.2024.docx

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IOWA NEWS:

Iowa News Now: 150+ groups call on Gov. Reynolds to reverse course and let Iowa join summer EBT program
Michael Howell

DES MOINES, Iowa — More than 150 groups and organizations are now calling on Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds to sign Iowa up for the Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) program for next summer.

Reynolds opted out of the program this past summer and asked the federal government to let Iowa create its own summer food program.

SUN Bucks gives \$40 per month on EBT cards to each child in a low-income family in the summer. Reynolds' office said her separate food program, which was denied a few weeks ago, would ultimately feed more kids. Her plan was to leverage bulk pricing to deliver three monthly boxes of healthy food to kids instead of sending them the money. The USDA denied the application, saying it does not meet the goal of SUN Bucks program.

Reynolds said she plans to pitch the idea once President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The new petition announced on Tuesday comes from 153 groups and organizations who signed on, calling for the governor to change her mind and send the USDA a letter of intent to participate in the SUN bucks program before the Jan. 1 deadline. They say parents and caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids.

You can read the full letter from the groups below and see what organizations have signed on to the cause.

Dear Gov. Reynolds,

We, the undersigned organizations, call on you to take action to ensure Iowa participates in the SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) program in 2025.

We are students. We are parents. We are people of faith. We are teachers. We are medical professionals. We are dietitians. We are farmers. We are social workers. We are staff and volunteers at food pantries and food rescue organizations. We are small business owners. We are advocates. We are union members. We are nonprofit leaders. We are county supervisors. We are Iowans.

Right now, hundreds of thousands of our neighbors across the state are facing food insecurity. Families are being forced to make impossible choices between putting food on the table or making rent. Rising costs are taking their toll on workers whose paychecks just aren't keeping up. Parents are skipping meals to make sure their kids are fed.

Food banks, food pantries, and other emergency feeding organizations are assisting record-breaking numbers of Iowans, including staggering numbers of people turning to help for the first time.

In a country as wealthy as the United States of America, and in a state with as rich an agricultural tradition as Iowa, no child should ever go hungry. No matter who takes care of them, no matter where they live, no matter what.

SUN Bucks would provide \$29 million in nutrition benefits to a quarter of a million children across the state next summer. While a \$40 monthly benefit per eligible child may not seem like a large amount, it would absolutely make a meaningful difference in the lives of Iowa families.

Parents and other caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids. Summer EBT is evidence-based policy, and has been shown to support healthy eating and reduce childhood food insecurity. SUN Bucks will not eradicate childhood hunger on its own, but it's one of the best tools we have. We shouldn't leave it on the table. We are in this together. All of us, as Iowans, have a shared future. And that future lies in the next generation.

We hope you will do the right thing.

The time to act is now.

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The Center Square: Op-Ed: Gov. Kim Reynolds sets the gold standard for state fiscal policy

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Gov. Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Gov. Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In FY 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in FY 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion, and \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by FY 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Gov. Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by the legislature. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest

property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Gov. Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "Blue State" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Gov. Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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Iowa News Now: Iowa presidential electors cast official vote for Trump and Vance

Skylar Tallal

Iowa's six presidential electors met Tuesday to officially cast their vote for president and vice president ahead of their inauguration next month.

Gov. Kim Reynolds presided over the meeting where Iowa's six presidential electors voted for Donald Trump and JD Vance, officially wrapping up the 2024 election here in Iowa.

"I will officially cast all six electoral votes for Donald J. Trump and JD Vance for President and Vice President of the United States of America," Gov. Reynolds (R) Iowa said.

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate says Iowa has one of the highest voter registration and turnout rates, with more than 1.6 million Iowans casting a ballot this past November, which is 74% of registered voters.

Trump got 55.73% of the vote in the state, carrying 94 of 99 Iowa counties with more than 927,000 Iowans selecting his name at the ballot box.

Iowa's News Now also heard from one of the electors about his interest in the process and why he chose to be an elector. Dallas Center-Grimes Community High School social studies teacher Jack Vanderflught said not only is it an important part to play in making the democratic process official, but he'll also be bringing that experience back to his classroom.

"You know in part because I've been a part of the process a long time, I thought it was an important role," Vanderflught said. "But I also did want to be able to share this with my students a little bit, so they have more of an insider view of what the process looks like and maybe encourage them to want to do it themselves."

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USA Today: President-elect Donald Trump sues Des Moines Register, Gannett over Iowa election poll

Bart Jansen

President-elect Donald Trump sued the Des Moines Register and its parent company, Gannett Co. Inc., over its publication of a poll before the election that he called "fraud and election interference" for saying he trailed his Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, in Iowa.

The lawsuit filed on Monday in Polk County District Court asks for unspecified damages under the state's Consumer Fraud Act. It seeks "accountability for brazen election interference committed by" the newspaper and pollster J. Ann Selzer over the poll published Nov. 2 — three days before the voting was completed — that showed Harris leading Trump by 3 percentage points in Iowa. Trump won the state by 13 percentage points.

The lawsuit also said the "egregious" polling miss in favor of Democrats came "just days before the most consequential election in memory," and that its results were apparently "leaked" because Democratic Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker mentioned the poll's findings during a meeting with Duke University alumni hours before the results were published.

"In my opinion, it was fraud and it was election interference," Trump told reporters Monday.

Lark-Marie Anton, a spokesperson for the Des Moines Register, said the company stands by its reporting and will vigorously defend the First Amendment.

"We have acknowledged that the Selzer/Des Moines Register pre-election poll did not reflect the ultimate margin of President Trump's Election Day victory in Iowa by releasing the poll's full demographics, crosstabs, weighted and unweighted data, as well as a technical explanation from pollster Ann Selzer," Anton said in a statement. "We stand by our reporting on the matter and believe this lawsuit is without merit."

Selzer told USA TODAY she had no comment on the lawsuit.

Gannett is also the parent company of USA TODAY.

Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Salem Civic Center, in Salem, Virginia, on Nov. 2, 2024.

Trump has sued media companies repeatedly with complaints about coverage of him. Some legal experts say Trump's comments and legal actions risk discouraging coverage of his incoming administration.

A federal judge dismissed Trump's \$475 million lawsuit against CNN in July 2023 over the cable network referring to his description of election fraud in 2020 as a "big lie."

ABC News reached a \$15 million settlement Dec. 14 with Trump over a George Stephanopoulos question to a House member in March about a lawsuit columnist E. Jean Carroll filed against Trump.

Stephanopoulos mischaracterized Trump as having been found liable for rape in a civil trial. A jury found him liable for sexual assault. Trump is appealing the verdict.

ABC issued a statement of regret and agreed to contribute the money to Trump's future presidential library.

Still pending is a \$10 billion federal lawsuit against CBS News that Trump filed in October. The lawsuit alleged

"election and voter interference" through the editing of an interview with Harris broadcast on "60 Minutes." The editing sought to "deceive, and mislead the public" to favor Harris, the lawsuit said.

CBS called the allegations "false" and said in a network statement "the interview was not doctored."

Trump: Lawsuits 'straighten out the press'

During his press conference Monday, Trump said of lawsuits against Gannett and CBS: "It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press."

Trump had previously called for an investigation of Selzer.

"She's a very good pollster," Trump said Monday. "She knows what she was doing."

Selzer wrote in a November analysis — before the lawsuit was filed — that she was uncertain what caused the poll results.

"To cut to the chase, I found nothing to illuminate the miss," she wrote.

Iowa attorney part of Trump legal team in case

Representing Trump in the case are attorneys Edward Paltzik of New York and Alan Ostergren of Des Moines.

Paltzik is listed on his LinkedIn site as litigation director for the National Constitutional Law Union, a nonprofit that described itself on its website as "the answer to the useless and radically leftist American Civil Liberties Union."

Ostergren is the former Muscatine County attorney. In private practice since 2020, he has represented a variety of Iowa conservatives and conservative organizations in litigation over constitutional and election issues.

In the run-up to the 2020 election, the Trump campaign, the Republican National Committee and other national groups hired Ostergren to intervene in a lawsuit over absentee ballot procedures, then to bring several more suits against counties he said were flouting the rules. He won both at the district and appeals court levels.

He also represented Republican Mariannette Miller-Meeks that year in her successful bid to be certified as the elected U.S. representative for Iowa's 1st Congressional District after recounts and challenges to her six-vote victory.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: McKinley, Keomah lakes among several slated for major restoration in 2025

Cami Koons

A report from the Lake Restoration Program with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources details the completion of several years-long restoration projects in 2024 and outlines major project plans in 2025.

The annual report is open to review and public comment through Dec. 18.

Michelle Balmer, who works with the program, said the lake restoration projects involve community partners, watershed studies and various forms of construction to “protect that lake for the next generation of users.”

“We see this as being not only important for environmental protection, but also it’s a service that all you Iowans get to utilize,” Balmer said. “We want to make sure they have quality places to go recreating.”

Since the program was established by the Legislature in 2006, it has removed 5 million cubic yards of excess sediment from lakes, enhanced 14,000 acres of wetlands and shallow lakes and has made use of \$167 million in funding from the state to improve 72 lakes across the state.

2024 major project completions

The report highlights four major projects the department considers completed or nearly completed from 2024. Major restorations were completed at Casey Lake in Black Hawk County, Silver Lake in Dickinson County, Three Mile Lake in Union County and a shallow lake and wetland project at West Swan Lake in Emmet County.

The four projects represent \$9.6 million in state allocated funds, federal grants and local partnerships.

According to the report, restoration at these lakes included the construction and restoration of sediment and nutrient control ponds, shoreline work, improvements to surrounding timber, sediment removal or fish habitat work, among other strategies.

Balmer said each project is different, but the Three Mile Lake project, for example, represents about seven years of work from initial watershed and community studies, to building new fish habitat and now waiting for the water to fill back up.

“We often spend a year or two learning more about the lake ... trying to understand what the issues are, why water quality is being negatively impacted,” Balmer said. “And then, what strategies can we try and employ that’ll help improve water quality, update infrastructure, improve habitat for aquatic life and provide better recreational opportunities.”

Balmer said at Three Mile Lake, the department was able to create two in-lake silt basins, which she described as berms that help to slow water down and allow the sediment to drop out before the water enters the lake.

Other practices like basins or terraces on state-owned land upstream help to keep sediment from washing into the lake.

Balmer said Three Mile lake is an important fishing destination for many Iowans and visitors to the state, and the lake also serves as a drinking water reservoir which were “important implications” for improving water quality at the lake.

Major projects slated for fiscal year 2025-2026

Balmer said like the other projects, those highlighted for the upcoming fiscal year have been in the works for several years, but are qualified as a major project this year due to large investments toward the restorations.

McKinley Lake in Union County will have an estimated \$3.58 million project to remove excess sediment, restore shoreline, add park amenities, upgrade parts of the dam and build an upstream wetland. The project is a 50-50 cost share between the Lake Restoration Program funds and the City of Creston.

Balmer said the department tries to couple restoration projects with other planned projects to make the most out of times when the campgrounds, roads or parks are closed.

Green Valley Lake and Prairie Rose Lake will undergo alum treatments in the spring to improve water quality by inactivating excess phosphorous in the water. This project is an estimated \$1.7 million.

Diamond Lake in Poweshiek County is slated to have \$455,000 in improvements to sediment control ponds and streambank erosion control.

The biggest investment will be at Lake Keomah in Mahaska County, which is scheduled to have shoreline stabilization, sediment removal, boat ramp improvements and upgraded dam and spillway components. According to the report, the project is estimated to cost \$4.3 million.

“Most of our lakes in the state are man made,” Balmer said. “That means there’s a dam that’s impounding water, essentially, and just like your house or any other major thing, there’s maintenance needed.”

Balmer said the Lake Keomah project has been in the works about 10 years. Past efforts have included improvements to surrounding timber and collaboration with homeowners along the lake. According to the report, the projects at Lake Keomah are estimated to wrap up between fiscal year 2027 and 2029.

The rest of the report details projects that are in earlier phases of planning, explains the department’s project selection process and further breaks down funding and project costs.

Balmer said Iowan can reach out to her with questions or comments on the report through Dec. 18.

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WHO13: State Auditor Rob Sand releases FY 23 audit for Iowa Judicial branch

Zach Fisher

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa state officials have been sparring over the Iowa Judicial Branch having \$26 million in misallocated funds, and an audit of the branch was released Tuesday morning.

State Auditor Rob Sand (D) released the audit for Fiscal Year 2023 for the branch. A coding error wrongly distributed the funds from unpaid debt collections over the last three fiscal years.

“Every single one of these programs had money sitting in their account this entire time,” said Auditor Sand (D).

The report shows the funds that were wrongly distributed to seven state funds, and includes a chart of the lowest monthly cash balance for each of the seven funds over the last three years. Sand used that to show the different funds still had enough money to continue providing the services as normal.

Those comments and the audit report comes after Republican lawmakers criticized Sand’s office for not warning lawmakers that there was an issue in coding. Sand at a news conference Tuesday said that it was changes made in a bill passed by Iowa Republicans in the 2020 session that started the coding issue.

“The lion’s share of it started when they passed these bills in June, making them live in July, and then in the following session they actually passed another bill making changes retroactively” said Sand. “So they were supposed to, in the judicial branch, not only change the coding but then go back and figure out, okay, how do we undo what we have been doing over the last year?”

Sand recommended that lawmakers act this session so those \$26 million can go to the correct funds in the judicial branch.

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WHO13: Iowa invests \$3.5M to give every 1st grader book packs to take home

Griffin Wright

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Iowa Department of Education spent \$3.5 million to give every 1st grader in the state book packs they can take home and keep to improve their reading skills.

The book packs contain multiple decodable books — books that have words kids can sound out and read at home to improve their literacy.

Council appoints Ankeny’s first female mayor

The books in the book packs are part of the curriculum based on the science of reading which, put simply, focuses on teaching kids to sound out parts of words and then putting them together to learn to read.

First-grade teacher Kari Osborne at Des Moines’ Findley Elementary School, said it’s important for parents to help their kids learn to read using the decodable book packs.

“Families don’t always know exactly what’s going on in our day. And so we would really want them to know that this is something that they’re working on. They’ve been working really hard on learning to read. And that’s our goal, is to get them to learn to read and to enjoy reading. So we want them to do this with their families at home too,” Osborne said.

On the first page of every book in the book packs is information on the reading skill the book focuses on and a QR code parents can scan for more information on how to instruct their kids.

To learn more about the decodable book packs visit the Department of Education’s website.

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WOI: Survey: Iowa farmland prices dip 3.1%, breaking five-year growth trend

Caleb Geer

DES MOINES, Iowa — The average value of Iowa farmland has fallen in 2024, according to the Iowa State Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) and the annual Iowa State Land Value Survey.

The state average decline of 3.1% breaks an upward trend in land value the state has seen over the past five years, according to CARD. Last year, state average land value was reported at a 3.7% increase over the previous year.

The average decrease in value of an acre of farmland was measured at \$369 by CARD, leading to an average value of \$11,467 an acre.

The decrease in value comes after a long growth in value and record-setting peak hit in 2023.

Land Value Survey — Overview

75 counties of Iowa's 99 reported a decrease in farmland value in the 2024 survey.

Counties

O'Brien County had highest average value per acre at \$15,921, after a reported decrease of 2.4% or \$392 from year before

Appanoose County had the lowest average value per acre at \$6,840, after a reported increase of 7.7% or \$486 from year before

Shelby County had the largest dollar amount loss in average value per acre, down \$1,170

Wayne County had the largest percentage amount loss in average value per acre, down 9.7%

Wayne County had the largest dollar amount increase in average value per acre however, up \$690

Decatur County had the largest percentage amount increase in average value per acre, up 10.5%

Osceola County had the lowest percentage and dollar value average increases, up 0.1% and \$3

Land quality

"Low quality" land across Iowa now averages \$7,450 per acre, down 2.8% or \$215

"Medium quality" land across Iowa now averages \$10,740 per acre, down 3.0% or \$335

"High quality" land across Iowa now averages \$13,930 per acre, down 2.6% or \$367

Most mentioned negative factor affecting decline in land value was lower commodity prices

Others negative factors were cited to include long-term interest rates, higher input costs and cash/credit availability

Most mentioned positive factor affecting land value was limited land supply

Others positive factors were cited to include strong yields, cash/credit availability and strong demand for land

CARD's web portal is available here, and offers visualization tools allowing for in-depth analysis and comparison.

Breaking the trend

"We saw land values rise for five straight years, including surges of 29% and 17%, which naturally leads to a reset or balancing in the market," said Dr. Rabail Chandio, who is responsible for the annual land survey. "If we look back to the previous peak in 2013, the market 'adjusted' with relatively small declines spread over a few years."

CARD cites the fact that "when adjusting for inflation, the 2024 average value is 2.5% lower than 2013's inflation adjusted values."

Chandio said that high interest rates of the previous two years have continued to affect farmland value, and that rate cuts are not enough yet to ease the pressure.

"It takes time—sometimes up to a decade—for interest rate changes to fully ripple through the land market," she said.

Increases in the face of statewide average decrease

The only counties to see increase or no change in average farmland value are:

Adair (0.9%)
Adams (3.8%)
Allamakee (3.8%)
Appanoose (7.7%)
Cedar (1.1%)
Clarke (5.3%)
Clinton (1.2%)
Decatur (10.5%)
Dubuque (3.7%)
Jackson (0.1%)
Jefferson (0.9%)
Jones (1.8%)
Linn (0.4%)
Lucas (5.7%)
Lyon (0.5%)
Madison (0.4%)
Monroe (0.6%)
Muscatine (0.8%)
Osceola (No change)
Ringgold (4.4%)
Taylor (5.3%)
Union (3.1%)
Van Buren (1.8%)
Wayne (10.3%)

The only crop-reporting district to report an increase in average value was the Iowa South Central District which most of the above counties are included in.

Only minimal decreases were seen in the other two southern districts, revealing a stable trend Chandio said.

CARD said the survey is based on "Reports by agricultural professionals knowledgeable of land market conditions, such as appraisers, farm managers, agricultural lenders, and actual land sales, and is intended to provide information on general land value trends, geographical land price relationships, and factors influencing the Iowa land market."

What factors are causing the decrease in value?

Survey respondents pointed to falling commodity prices and increasing input costs for farming as well. Farm income is expected to follow the decrease in land value, falling 4.1% according to CARD. However, this is a significantly smaller decrease than last year's reported fall of 17.4%.

However, livestock markets could bring some stability to collapsing farm income, Chandio said.

"While crop receipts are down, livestock receipts are up 8.4%, offering some balance," he said. "So, livestock markets, like cattle and hogs, have fared relatively better, but high input costs are still exerting enough pressure to keep margins very tight."

In the short term, survey respondents are expecting declines in the next year, with 58% figuring on continued drop in value. Most believed a fall of around 5% will occur.

In the long term however, looking at the next five years, 80% of respondents are expecting land values to increase, with 36% expecting an increase of 10-20%.

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WOI: Polk County Board of Supervisors approves new immigrant and refugee welcome center

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — A new immigrant and refugee welcome center is coming to Des Moines after receiving approval from the Polk County Board of Supervisors.

The board unanimously approved the welcome center, Global Neighbors, at its meeting Tuesday. The facility will be located at 1900 Carpenter Avenue. Officials said the location was strategically selected to be near bus routes and many other social service providers.

The goal of Global Neighbors is to provide a hub for refugees and immigrants to access services related to employment, housing and education, as well as help people transition into their new lives.

"Each person who enters Global Neighbors brings with them a unique story—a story of resilience, courage, and dreams for a better future," said Polk County Board Chair Angela Connolly. "This unique facility will ensure our newest residents have the resources available to make the transition to their new community as smooth as possible."

The facility will include a computer lab, classrooms and office spaces for immigrant and refugee-related nonprofits. On the exterior, the building will feature murals and landscaping.

"Vibrant colors of joy will be in the lobby, and open office spaces will provide warmth and natural light throughout the space. The designated private spaces will be acoustically sheltered to enable confidential and sensitive conversations," said Mak Suceska, manager of operations for Global Neighbors.

Redevelopment of the property will begin in early 2025, with the hopes of opening the facility by the end of 2025.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Auditor Rob Sand says his office did not ignore court spending errors

Robin Opsahl

Iowa Auditor Rob Sand disputed claims made by Republican leaders that his office was aware of a coding error that led to a misallocation of court debt funds years before taking action on the issue.

Sand held a news conference Tuesday about his report on the Iowa Judicial Branch, which found that \$27.5 million in court debt receipts had been misallocated due to a coding error. The report had followed up on letters sent to the auditor's office by House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen that more than \$53 million of these funds had been misallocated — an amount Sand

said was inaccurate.

In an October letter to Sand, Grassley wrote that the auditor's office had been alerted of a financial irregularity by the Department of Transportation in 2022, but that these issues were not mentioned in the judicial branch audits for fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

"I am writing to gain an understanding from you as to why your office has taken no action since being made aware of these drastic issues at least two years ago," Grassley wrote. "The State Auditor's office exists for this very purpose. When you are made aware of misallocated funds by a branch of government, it is your duty to lowans to investigate, alert the public, and seek to rectify the issue. Your inaction in this case is baffling and inexcusable. If there is any other explanation why it appears that the taxpayer's watchdog was sleeping on the job, I would be very interested to hear it."

Sand said the auditor's office has been in contact with officials from the state judicial branch and DOT multiple times after being notified of the issue in October 2022, and that the office remained in contact with the judicial branch in conducting internal and independent investigations into the issue.

According to the auditor's report, there were seven state funds that were under-allocated because of the error from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 — the largest being the Road Use Tax Fund, which was under-allocated by more than \$10.4 million, and the Victim Compensation Fund by \$7.2 million. In the same time period, the state general fund received an over-allocation of \$27.5 million, in addition to the SOS Revolving Fund being over-allocated \$90,174 and the Jury Witness Fund by \$74,166.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird released a statement in October criticizing the auditor's office for failing to catch the misallocation related to the Victim Compensation Fund that goes toward services like sexual assault examinations, medical reimbursements and counseling.

"No domestic violence victim should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave," Bird said. "The State's self-proclaimed 'taxpayer watchdog' failed at the most basic job of being an auditor: conducting an audit. Crime victims should not have to worry about whether victim services will be there when they need them."

But Sand pushed back against Bird's characterization of the issue, saying that the underfunded government accounts never ran out of money when they were impacted by the error.

Sand asked for an apology to his staff for the criticism of the auditor's office over this subject, and making it a "political" issue.

"I'm asking again, the people who distort the facts around this issue for political gain to publicly apologize to our staff — I would settle for a private apology to our staff that works on these issues," Sand said. "These accountants and the auditors in this office, they work long hours. It is a difficult profession to be in right now, ... Our employees know that their families and their friends are seeing these headlines, and they know that they're doing their job, they know that they are doing good quality work. But because of these attacks, they have to deal with it. They shouldn't have to, and they deserve an apology."

Paulsen, speaking with reporters Tuesday, said although the funds impacted by the error retained money despite the misallocation, it does not mean services — and their recipients in the state — were not affected by the lack of funds.

"You don't spend your bank account down to zero every month, and neither do state entities funded by court debt," Paulsen said. "When the funds run low, you cut back and so do state entities. Have citizens been harmed? That's a question the Legislature should ask."

While Sand said his office has never had staff with the ability to review coding to check for problems like in this case, Paulsen said the fact the misallocation occurred because of a coding error should not have prevented the office from being able to identify the funding irregularities.

“Don’t get bogged down in thinking auditing has anything to do with coding or programming a computer,” Paulsen said. “... [I]f that was the case, that you had to understand some computer language to audit, then how does the auditor of state do a single audit? How do they go from agency to agency? ... There’s still a few very small communities who use paper, but otherwise, there’s no government in the state of Iowa that doesn’t have their financials in the computer system. So if that’s a limitation, how do they ... do any of their audits? And the truth is, they do, because it’s not a limitation.”

The programming errors that led to the funds misallocations were found to have likely began after changes were made to the judicial branch’s information technology system for the process for distributing judicial fees and fines to government programs in 2020 and 2021, as directed by the Iowa Legislature.

While the error has been fixed moving forward, the misallocation that occurred in previous years cannot be fixed through administrative action, although the Legislature could take action when lawmakers reconvene in January 2025.

State Court Administrator Robert Gast said in a letter Dec. 6 that the judicial branch has implemented “new programming to correct programming errors in its case management system” as of Nov. 22, 2024, including retroactive corrections to distributions dating back to July 1, 2024. It has also contracted with a third party to review programming changes made to the branch’s IT system, is working with the state auditor “to set up an engagement to review the financial findings and verify that the over and under allocation numbers and the funds impacted as calculated by JBIT are accurate” and is developing an internal process to audit future programming changes.

“The branch cannot move funds that were misallocated in prior fiscal years,” Gast wrote. “We are interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders to correct all misallocations from FY21 through FY24.”

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids School District looking into virtual snow days

Emily Schrad

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Snow days in Iowa are almost unavoidable. But those winter days off, lead to more time in the classroom in late spring.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking at incorporating virtual learning to cut down on make-up days at the end of the year.

Schools across the state can use up to five virtual learning days a year, and the Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking to take advantage of those days during winter weather.

Chief of Schools Linda Reysack said students would have a variety of activities to work on, including physical work packets to take home or school work online.

"We are looking at having some online opportunities for students who can join by Google Classroom, some office hours from our staff, but really identifying activities that all students pre-K12 can do at home without technology," said Reysack.

Reysack said they started looking into the virtual snow day option when many families expressed the desire to be done with the year by the first week of June.

But she says right now opinions of the plan are still about 50/50.

"Some families and staff are very appreciative of the option to look at virtual learning. And other families say that it will be a hindrance to them because of childcare, but childcare will also be an issue whether we have a snow day and it's not virtual learning. So it is a very mixed bag," she said.

And while most students look forward to a day off in the snow...

"We don't want to take away the opportunity for students to get outside and play on those snow days," Reysack said.

Reysack said not every snow day will be a virtual learning day.

She added it will be on a case-by-case basis.

"At the beginning of this year, we let out early on a couple of different days due to the heat. So on days when students are already in school, learning is already occurring we have the opportunity then to send information home with our students and continue learning at home," Reysack said. "If the weather is predicted to be... if the wind chill is cold, we know that students probably will not be outside playing on those days and we have enough warning ahead of time, we would then let our students know and our families know that that might be a virtual learning day."

Reysack said packets would be sent home in the days before bad weather is in the forecast.

The final plan will be presented to the board in January. If it passes, it will be implemented starting next school year.

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KCRG: District Court reverses termination of Dubuque teacher heard using racial slur in social media video Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - A district court has reversed the decision to terminate the contract of a Dubuque Hempstead teacher who was fired after a video of him using a racial slur spread on social media.

Roger Poling, a Dubuque Hempstead High School staff member, was heard using a racial slur in front of a Black student in a short video in May 2023.

However, according to a ruling from the district court, the school board's decision to terminate Poling's

contract ignores the context surrounding the moment Poling said the slur.

The ruling says Poling had repeated the word back to the student in an attempt to explain the student's misconduct.

The court said while repeating the word is abhorrent, the Board's choice to ignore the context from which the exchange occurred diminishes the Board's finding of just cause.

Poling testified that when he tried to get students to return to their respective classrooms, one student gave a "smart" response to him, another pretended he didn't speak English, and a third student said to Poling, "whattcha looking at n[-word]."

When Poling addressed the student, the student asked, "what did I do," or "what did I say?"

To which Poling initially responded, "you know what you said."

After more questioning from the student, Poling said, "you said, 'whattcha looking at n[-word].'"

Students are then heard yelling in response to what Poling said in the short video that went viral. However, the court said the surveillance video, which shows more of the context, also shows the student rush off, laughing or smiling.

The court in its ruling called the Dubuque Community School Board's decision "reactive, rather than initiative-taking," in terms of how it addressed the issue.

It also said the Board's decision was not based on substantial evidence, and that it was "irrational and arbitrary, weighing the entirety of the roughly five minute encounter against Poling's past performance, and by relying on improperly admitted evidence to do so."

The court said the school board also missed a teachable moment in which it could have instructed students and teachers on the mutual respect required in a school to promote a safe and inclusive environment.

With his termination reversed, Poling is reinstated.

The Dubuque Community School District responded by saying it "is obviously disappointed in the ruling of the Iowa District Court and we believe the Board acted appropriately in the matter. We are working with the district's legal counsel to review the decision in its entirety and determine next steps, including discussing potential options for appeal of the decision."

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KCRG: Iowa State Auditor: No programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors
Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa (KCRG) - Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand says no programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors.

On Tuesday morning, Sand's office released a report of the Iowa Judicial Branch for the fiscal year that ended in June 2023.

In a letter in October, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley wrote that the Iowa Judicial System had misallocated more than 53-million dollars since 2021 because of a computer error.

Republicans blamed Sand for not alerting them.

But Sand released a detailed timeline that both the Governor's office and Judicial system were well aware of the issue.

He says this was the result of last second changes to Iowa law, that didn't give them enough time to procedures in place, leading to the errors.

While the audit shows that problems are being fixed, Sand says Iowa lawmakers will need to make changes to reallocate the misappropriated funds.

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Iowa News Now: \$55.1 million plan to bring affordable housing community to Dubuque

Tyler Downey

DUBUQUE, Iowa — A housing development company has announced plans to build a \$55.1 million affordable housing community in Dubuque.

The Annex Group, the company behind the project, says the housing community will be geared towards households whose income level is at or below 70% of the area median income.

They're calling it "Union at the Marina" and it will be built in a currently vacant lot at 2660 Kerper Boulevard in Dubuque.

Union at the Marina will feature two four-story buildings that will have a total of 201 units and include one, two and three-bedroom options.

"We are thrilled to bring this project to Dubuque," David Wesner, VP of Development for The Annex Group, said. "The city has been a catalyst in addressing their housing need, and we are honored to be able to work with them to meet the overwhelming demand in their community. With floorplans to meet the needs of different households, as well as a dynamic amenity package including a rooftop deck with views of the river, we think this property will be a place people enjoy living."

Residents at the east end of the community will have a view of the river. Two schools, a park, pharmacy, grocery store and post office are all nearby and there will be several different amenities for residents, including a playground, community center, fitness center, picnic area, dog walking area and on-site property management.

Union at the Marina is expected to open in fall of 2026.

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The Gazette: Iowa courts implement new program to correct error that misallocated \$27.5M

Erin Murphy

DES MOINES — A coding error that caused Iowa courts to misallocate over \$27.5 million in court fees has been addressed and a new program was implemented last month, Iowa Judicial Branch officials have said.

In a report released Tuesday by the State Auditor's Office, the Iowa Judicial Branch said on Nov. 22 the courts implemented new programming to correct previous errors that led to the misallocations. The changes will ensure the future distribution of court fees works as required by state law, the Judicial Branch said in the report.

In Iowa, funds paid to the courts in the form of fines, fees and penalties in criminal cases are distributed to various sources, including state funds for victim compensation, emergency services, road infrastructure, county attorneys and the state's general fund.

Under the state's distribution system, clerks of courts enter court fees into a coding program that is supposed to channel those funds to the proper source. But the Iowa Judicial Branch in October revealed that coding errors sent more than \$27.5 million to the state's general fund instead of some of those other state funds and programs. The courts had been investigating the issue for more than two years.

According to the Judicial Branch's investigation, more than \$10.4 million should have gone to the state fund that supports infrastructure work on roads and bridges, \$7.2 million should have gone to a state program that helps victims of violent crimes with certain expenses, and \$4 million should have gone to a fund that supports juvenile detention homes.

The Iowa general fund, where most of the allocations were sent by error, currently has a \$2 billion surplus, according to the state's nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency.

According to the Iowa Judicial Branch, the programming issues arose in the 2021 state budget year after lawmakers changed the court fees distribution system during the 2020 and 2021 legislative sessions.

The new laws in consecutive years required programming changes to the distribution system. A report from the National Center for State Courts said the state law changes created confusion in implementing the new coding.

In the report Tuesday, the State Auditor Rob Sand's office recommends the Judicial Branch complete necessary programming changes to ensure the proper allocation of court debt. The report also recommends the Judicial Branch work with Iowa Department of Management and the Iowa Legislature to address the erroneous allocations.

Sand's report also recommends that future funding changes made by the Iowa Legislature not take effect "until state branches and agencies have sufficient time to accurately and carefully make all necessary changes."

A Judicial Branch spokesman said Tuesday that the courts cooperated fully with the auditor's office and does

not dispute any of its findings.

The Judicial Branch also in its report response said it is “interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders” to correct the earlier misallocations. While the new programming was designed to fix future fee distribution and the courts have applied fixes retroactively to the start of the state budget year on July 1, erroneous distribution from previous years requires action by the Iowa Legislature.

The issue of those misallocated court fees has sparked a series of accusations between some of Iowa’s state agency heads and one legislative leader that started in October and continued Tuesday.

Sand, a Democrat, has defended his office’s work on the issue and accused other state leaders of playing politics in their criticism of his office.

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird — all Republicans — have accused Sand and his office of not acting sooner and not doing all his office should to address the issue.

The latest round of allegations started Tuesday when Sand held a news conference highlighting his office’s report. Sand said the report shows that while others “have been pushing politics as usual” and wasting taxpayers’ money, his office has been doing its job.

Sand called on those who have criticized his office to apologize to the accountants who work there, and said he is proud of their work.

“Sometimes you got to laugh so you don’t cry. I mean this stuff is just so ridiculous,” Sand said. “If you have to make stuff up to attack the person that’s holding you accountable, the office that’s holding you accountable, then that office must be doing a pretty good job.”

A statement from Melissa Saitz, the spokeswoman for Grassley and Iowa House Republicans, criticized Sand for not compiling a report sooner and not including more information in it.

“We’re glad that Auditor Sand took a break from his Twitter account to do the work the people of Iowa elected him to do,” Saitz said. “It’s concerning that it took scrutiny from Republicans in the Legislature and executive branch for the Auditor to release the audit reports and even briefly mention the misallocation of millions of public funds by the Judicial Branch.

“This report, however, far from answers all our questions. Iowa House Republicans just learned about this issue in September and are still working to understand the full implications. We look forward to working this session to get our questions answered and this issue rectified.”

Bird, whose office manages the Victims Compensation Fund that has been shorted \$7.2 million, pushed back on Sand’s assertion that previous criticism of his office was unwarranted because none of the programs that were shorted ever ran out of funding.

“Rob Sand blew it, and now he is lying to cover up his mess,” Bird said in a statement. “With the money State Auditor Sand’s failure cost crime victims, we would have been able to provide 3,600 domestic violence survivors and their kids apartments, for the first time in years, as a safe escape from a violent situation. No domestic violence victims should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave. And our State Auditor owes Iowa crime victims an apology.”

The Victim Compensation Fund’s monthly balance never dipped below roughly \$2.7 million during the time the fees were erroneously allocated, according to Sand’s report.

Paulsen told reporters Tuesday that he thinks Iowa taxpayers are owed an apology. He, too, said Sand's office should have acted sooner and that its report should have gone deeper.

"This clearly is something that we as state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled, and nor do I think we met their expectations," Paulsen said. "And I think in particular, as already laid out, we should have been notified sooner, and we should have been in finding out what was right and what was wrong sooner."

Sand said the Auditor's Office moved forward with its work as soon as it had sufficient information, which he said it did not have until the Judicial Branch released its information in October.

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WQAD8: Police: Referee assaulted by parent at Burlington basketball game

Alec Doxsee

BURLINGTON, Iowa — Update:

Burlington Police obtained an arrest warrant for Urban Morris of Burlington on the following charges: assault (serious misdemeanor), assault (simple misdemeanor), disorderly conduct, and two counts of first-degree harassment.

A criminal complaint filed in the case states that Morris was upset with a call made by a referee that he disagreed with.

The affidavit states the following:

Officers learned while en route the suspect had fled the area. Officers arrived on scene and were approached by witnesses stating the suspect was Urban Morris. Officers were then able to speak with both Victim 1 and Victim 2. Officers first spoke with Victim 1 and learned that he was the referee in the basketball game. At the end of the game a call was made at which point Morris disagreed with the call. Victim 1 stated that Morris approached him as well as Victim 2 and was upset about the call that was made. Victim 1 stated that Morris threatened both Victims by stating he was going to "kill" both Victims and then "find their families".

Victim 1 then traveled to the locker room area which parents/spectators are not permitted to go in. Victim 1 stated he was going into the locker room to attempt to retrieve his phone to call 911. Victim 1 then stated that he turned around and was punched in the nose by Morris who had followed him into the locker room. Victim 1 stated he was struck with a closed fist at which point he fell over a bench and Morris repeatedly struck Victim 1 approximately 7 or 8 times before Morris left the area. Victim 1 had visible swelling around his nose/eye region.

Officers then spoke with Victim 2. Victim 2 stated that he was also a referee in the game at which point the call was made and Morris became upset. Victim 2 stated that he did have his phone on his person at which point he removed his phone to call 911 at which point Morris stated "Call the Police" and "I will kill you" and stated he was going to "find his family". Victim 2 stated he was in fear that Morris was going to harm his (family) due to the comments that were made.

Morris turned himself into the Des Moines County Jail and was booked on the charges on Tuesday, Dec. 17. There is a preliminary hearing set for Dec. 27.

Lucasfilm's Special Effects: Dallas Steps Into Ironman's Footsteps -The Gadget Show #TBT
featured by
Original story:

The Burlington Police Department said charges are expected after a parent reportedly assaulted a referee following a basketball game.

According to a Facebook post, police responded to Edward Stone Middle School around 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 13 regarding the assault. Burlington Police confirmed the game was a freshman/junior varsity game that was taking place at the middle school.

Officials have identified the parent and criminal charges are expected. Further details will be released by the Burlington Police Department once an arrest has been made.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: In win for biofuels, stopgap spending bill allows year-round sales of E15 gas nationwide

Jacob Fischler

A spending bill U.S. House appropriators released Tuesday evening to keep the government open into next spring includes a provision to allow sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol nationwide throughout the year.

After years of prohibiting the blend, known as E15, from being sold at gas stations during the summer months, the Environmental Protection Agency this year allowed year-round sales in eight Midwestern states. The provision in the stopgap funding bill would allow E15 sales in all states throughout the year.

The provision is a major win for corn producers and their allies in Congress from both parties. Supporters of ethanol, which is derived from corn, say it boosts U.S. production and lowers gas prices.

Sen. Deb Fischer, a Nebraska Republican who sponsored a bill to make the blend available all year, said the move was part of the GOP agenda to “unleash American energy.”

Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, said biofuels “champions” are fighting for the provision allowing the sale of E15 year-around. “We have been working to get a year-round E15 solution for over 10 years,” he said in a statement. “It would be monumental for ethanol demand to support rural farmers and would save drivers 10 to 20 cents at the pump.”

“My bill puts an end to years of patchwork regulations and uncertainty — year-round, nationwide E15 will now be a reality,” Fischer said. “This legislation also delivers on the mandate we received in November to unleash American energy. Not only will my bill lower gas prices and give consumers more choices, but it will also create new opportunity for American producers, who are especially hurting right now from lower prices.”

House Energy and Commerce ranking Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey applauded inclusion of the

measure, saying it would help reduce gas prices and bolster U.S. energy production.

“By allowing for a higher blend of ethanol in our gasoline, Americans can rely more on homegrown biofuels that save drivers money at the pump and help insulate Americans from dramatic global price fluctuations,” Pallone said in a statement.

U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., one of a handful of farm-state House Republicans pushing for the E15 provision, said in a statement, “Year around E-15 is the most important policy we can embrace for Midwestern farmers and ranchers. I was glad to advocate for this on the Agriculture Committee and to our Speaker, and glad to see it embraced. I also know our entire Nebraska delegation was pulling for this. It is a team win.”

At a U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing last year, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Sen. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska promoted E15 availability as a way to lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower prices.

The EPA issued a waiver in May 2022 to allow the blend to be available nationwide throughout the year, as President Joe Biden’s administration sought to tame gas prices.

The stopgap measure, known as a continuing resolution, would keep the government funded at current levels through mid-March. It includes a few additional provisions, including funding to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland.

The House and Senate are expected to pass the catch-all measure before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill.

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States Newsroom: Huge spending bill unveiled in Congress provides more than \$100 billion in disaster aid
Jennifer Shutt

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders unveiled a catch-all, year-end package Tuesday that would provide more than \$100 billion in disaster aid and give lawmakers more time to wrap up overdue work on government funding, the farm bill and a handful of other issues they decided not to finish.

The disaster aid section of the package will bolster funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Small Business Administration and several other federal agencies to continue their ongoing response efforts following a slew of natural disasters during the last two years.

The 1,547-page package would give Congress until mid-March to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills that were supposed to become law by Oct. 1.

It also extends the farm bill through Sept. 30, 2025. In a victory for corn growers, the bill includes a provision to allow nationwide sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol throughout the year.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said during a press conference before the bill was publicly released he had hoped the year-end stopgap spending bill would simply extend current funding until next year, when the GOP will hold the House, Senate and White House.

“But a couple of intervening things have occurred. We had, as we describe them, acts of God. We had these massive hurricanes if you know, in the late fall — Helene and Milton and other disasters,” Johnson said. “We have to make sure that the Americans who were devastated by these hurricanes get the relief they need. So we are adding to this a disaster relief package and that’s critically important.”

“Also important is the devastation that is being faced by our farming community,” he said. “The agriculture sector is really struggling. They’ve had effectively three lost years and commodity prices are a bit of a mess. And you have input costs that have skyrocketed because of Bidenomics.”

Johnson defended his decision to attach the other provisions in the stopgap spending bill, also known as a continuing resolution. Numerous Republicans have expressed frustration with his choice to bundle all the bills together in one package, instead of moving them individually.

“We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits and that’s what the volume of the pages to this is,” Johnson said.

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said in a written statement she would support the bill when that chamber votes on it later this week.

“While I — and so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle — wish we were voting on full-year funding bills, I am pleased that this package includes important resources for American farmers, emergency defense investments, investments in the Virginia Class submarine program, and increased funding for child care,” DeLauro wrote. “It also includes outbound investment protections I have long fought for to prevent American dollars from fueling the Chinese Communist Party’s policies with our capital and capabilities.”

“However, I am concerned that we could not agree on additional funding for veterans health care, and we must be vigilant in ensuring that the incoming Administration does not ration care promised to every affected veteran,” DeLauro added. “The passage of this bill should mark the beginning of negotiations on final 2025 funding bills. The start of a new Congress does not change the reality that any funding bills will still need the support of Democrats and Republicans in the House and in the Senate in order to become law.”

Hurricanes, tornadoes, bridge collapse

President Joe Biden asked Congress to approve nearly \$100 billion in emergency aid to bolster the accounts of several agencies that are helping residents, small businesses, farmers, and local and state governments recover from dozens of natural disasters.

The emergency supplemental request came shortly after Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused widespread devastation throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The funding will also help communities recover following tornadoes throughout the Midwest; the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland; and severe storms in Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The disaster response section of the spending package would include:

\$29 billion for FEMA’s disaster relief fund

\$21 billion for disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$12 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s community development block grant program for disaster assistance

\$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$8 billion for the Department of Transportation to provide disaster relief for federal highways

\$3.25 billion for State and Tribal Assistance Grants for water infrastructure repairs.

\$2.2 billion for the Small Business Administration's disaster loan program

\$1.3 billion to replace the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland

Congress headed for finish line

The package is expected to pass the House and Senate before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill into law.

When Congress convenes again on Jan. 3 for the start of the 119th Congress, the Senate will flip from Democratic to Republican control. The House will remain red, though with a slightly smaller majority and very little, possibly no, room for GOP lawmakers to vote against partisan bills.

Republicans hope they can use unified control of Washington, which will begin after President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, to move through sweeping changes to federal spending and policy.

That is one of the reasons, Congress included a second continuing resolution in the package released this week. That stopgap spending bill will avoid a partial government shutdown until at least March 14.

That part of the bill is necessary since Congress has brushed off its responsibility to fund the government by failing to complete work on the dozen annual appropriations bills before the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1.

Lawmakers approved another stopgap spending bill in late September to keep funding levels mostly flat through Dec. 20, but did not use the extra time to negotiate a compromise between the Republican House and Democratic Senate.

GOP leaders have opted to hold over those full-year government funding measures until they control both chambers of Congress next year, in hopes they'll be able to more closely align the final versions of the 12 bills to their goals.

But Republican leaders will still need Democratic support to get the final spending bills, or another stopgap spending bill, through the Senate next year if they want to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The Senate requires at least 60 lawmakers to vote to advance major legislation toward a final, simple majority passage vote. The GOP will hold 53 seats next year, short of the requirement. Several Republican senators have also staked their reputations on consistently voting against any spending bill, making Democratic votes necessary to avoid a shutdown.

Republicans in the House will also likely need Democrats to move government funding bills through that chamber, given they too have a significant faction of members who refuse to vote for the full-year spending bills and often vote against the short-term stopgap bills as well.

Farm bill extension

The end-of-year catchall bill released Tuesday also includes another extension for the farm bill through next year, a new version of which Congress was supposed to pass more than a year ago.

Instead, lawmakers in both chambers have prioritized other interests, delaying work on the legislation that authorizes agriculture and nutrition programs.

Congress last approved a farm bill in December 2018, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said at the time would cost \$428 billion during the five years it was supposed to cover.

Funding for nutrition, crop insurance, farm commodity programs and conservation accounted for about 99% of the mandatory spending in the law, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Nutrition has become one of the higher price tag items in the farm bill during the last few decades and accounted for about \$326 billion of the mandatory spending in the 2018 farm bill. Another \$38 billion went to crop insurance, \$31 billion to commodities and \$29 billion to conservation during the five-year window that has since lapsed.

The nutrition funding goes toward several federal food programs for lower income people, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

The Republican House and Democratic Senate have been unable to work through their differences on a new five-year farm bill, despite giving themselves more than a year of extra time.

The bill lawmakers are set to approve this month will give unified Republicans in control of Washington another year to get the work done.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Immigrants and allies at U.S. Capitol urge Biden to act before Trump deportations begin

Shauneen Miranda

WASHINGTON — In the crucial last month before President Joe Biden leaves office, immigrants and allies on Tuesday urged the president to offer protections for immigrant communities before Donald Trump is inaugurated.

The president-elect has promised the largest deportation in U.S. history, stoking fear and uncertainty among undocumented immigrants and immigration advocates over a sweeping platform that marked the core of Trump's GOP presidential campaign.

Speaking near the U.S. Capitol, the "Home is Here" campaign featured immigrant youth, allies and advocates demanding Biden take executive action.

The national coalition, which fights to protect immigrant communities, also urged Congress not to boost funding for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection during the lame-duck session in a way that would aid Trump in carrying out mass deportations. Members of Congress are expected to vote this week on a stopgap spending bill that would fund the government through mid-March.

Immigrant youth, allies and advocates traveled to Washington, D.C., from across the country, including states such as Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, New York and Utah, to rally and meet with members of Congress about their demands.

Claudia Quiñonez, organizing director of United We Dream, the nation's largest immigrant youth-led network, said "before the keys to the White House are handed over to Trump, before a new Congress takes office, this lame-duck period is (a) critical window for our members in Congress and President Biden to leave it all on the field."

Quiñonez, who is also a co-chair of the Home is Here campaign, said there is "no underestimating the length Trump is willing to go to fulfill his pledges for mass deportation in raiding our schools, our workplaces, our hospitals and our churches."

U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib also voiced her concerns Tuesday over the president-elect's immigration plans.

"We cannot underestimate, as you all know, what will unfold the moment Trump takes office in January, and we need as many people as possible working to resist this hateful agenda," the Michigan Democrat said.

Tlaib noted that Biden "still has power to take immediate executive action to protect our immigrant communities."

She also said "we must continue to work incredibly hard, not only to outwork the hate, but to really promote love and justice within our communities."

Among its priorities, the Home is Here campaign aims to protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program recipients. A federal court will determine the program's legal fate.

The Obama-era program was created in 2012 and designed to protect children who were brought into the country illegally from deportation.

Trump tried ending DACA during his first term.

During an NBC News interview earlier this month, Trump did not give specifics on what he intends to do about the program but said that he "will work with the Democrats on a plan."

Immigration groups on Tuesday also expressed worry over the uncertainty of Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, which allows migrants in countries with unsafe conditions to legally reside and work in the United States.

Trump sought to end TPS for multiple countries throughout his first administration.

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North Dakota Monitor: 13 more GOP states sign on to oppose Standing Rock Sioux in new lawsuit over DAPL
Mary Steurer

A federal judge this week allowed 13 more Republican-led states to intervene as co-defendants in the

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's new lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The lawsuit, filed in October, accuses the Army Corps of unlawfully allowing the Dakota Access Pipeline to operate without an easement, a complete environmental assessment or sufficient emergency spill response plans. The tribe ultimately wants a federal judge to shut the pipeline down.

Standing Rock has opposed the pipeline for years, saying it infringes upon the tribe's sovereignty, has damaged sacred cultural sites and jeopardizes the tribe's water supply.

The Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction over a part of the pipeline that passes below the Missouri River less than a half-mile upstream from the Standing Rock Reservation.

"The Corps has failed to act and failed to protect the tribe," Standing Rock Chairwoman Janet Alkire said in an October press conference announcing the lawsuit.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe files new lawsuit over DAPL

The more than 1,000-mile pipeline, often referred to as DAPL, passes through North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois. Its pathway includes unceded land recognized as belonging to the Sioux Nation under an 1851 treaty with the U.S. government.

North Dakota joined the case on the side of the Army Corps earlier this month, arguing that closing DAPL would cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue, put thousands of jobs at risk, hamper regional supply chains and harm the environment. State attorneys also argue that a federal court order shuttering DAPL would violate North Dakota's right to regulate its own land and resources.

In a brief filed Monday, the 13 additional co-defendant states made similar arguments. The group, led by Iowa, said DAPL is integral to the health of regional energy and agriculture markets.

"DAPL plays a vital role in ensuring the nation's crops can come to market — not because DAPL itself transports agricultural products, but because every barrel of oil that DAPL transports is a barrel that does not take space in a truck or a train," the states wrote.

This also makes highways and railways safer and reduces pollution, they added.

The 13 states that joined the lawsuit this week are Iowa, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and West Virginia.

According to the states' brief, the pipeline has paid over \$100 million in property taxes to Iowa counties and over \$33 million in property taxes to South Dakota counties since it began operating in 2017.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not yet filed an answer to the tribe's lawsuit.

Energy Transfer, the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline, has not requested to intervene in the suit.

The case is before U.S. District Court Judge James Boasberg, who oversaw the tribe's 2016 lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers opposing the pipeline.

North Dakota in 2021 sought to join that lawsuit as well, but Boasberg denied the request as the case was in the process of wrapping up.

That case concluded with Boasberg instructing the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full environmental

impact study of the pipeline, which is still in the works. Boasberg also ordered the pipeline to stop operating pending the completion of the study, though that demand was ultimately overturned by an appellate court.

In a separate federal court case, North Dakota seeks \$38 million from the United States government for costs the state says it incurred responding to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests.

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WCCO: Satanists' holiday display at Minnesota Capitol sparks outrage

Riley Moser

ST. PAUL, Minnesota ([WCCO](#)) -- A Satanic holiday display at the Minnesota State Capitol has some sounding the alarm but Gov. Tim Walz says he can't take it down as it is protected by the First Amendment.

The Minnesota Satanists put up its holiday display at the Capitol building in St. Paul over the weekend.

The group says on its website that members "champion the symbol of Lucifer as one of revolt against arbitrary authority and advocacy for the pursuit of knowledge." The group says members don't directly worship Satan or believe in Satan; instead, they called the display a win for "religious plurality."

Republicans have blamed Walz for letting the display go up.

"Is there anything Tim Walz won't do to insult Minnesotans?" Republican Rep. Tom Emmer tweeted.

Republican Rep. Pete Stauber agreed with Emmer's sentiment, writing on X, "When you get a DFL trifecta, you get a Satanic display at our state Capitol. During the holidays...what a disgrace. Only in Walz's Minnesota."

The governor's office says while Walz does not agree with the display and did not approve it, the First Amendment — which guarantees the freedom of religion, among others — allows for the display.

"The First Amendment means that he does not police speech in the State Capitol. That's true whether it's a religious display, a political protest, or a Minnesotan advocating for a policy," a spokesperson for Walz said in a statement to WCCO.

Last December, the Satanic Temple put up a display inside the Iowa Capitol in Des Moines that a former U.S. Navy fighter pilot was later accused of destroying. Similar to the Minnesota Satanists, the Satanic Temple says it doesn't believe in Satan but describes itself as a "non-theistic religious organization" that advocates for secularism.

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CNN: Luigi Mangione has been indicted in New York for murder of United Healthcare's CEO, multiple sources say

Staff

(CNN) — Luigi Mangione has been indicted for the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in Manhattan earlier this month, multiple law enforcement officials tell CNN.

A New York grand jury has voted to charge Mangione with murder in the first-degree and murder in the second-degree, among other charges, the officials said.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is expected to announce the indictment at a 3:30 p.m. news conference.

The 26-year-old has been fighting extradition to New York after being accused of fatally shooting Thompson on December 4, but Bragg said Friday it is possible the suspect could soon waive his right to fight being handed over to New York authorities.

If convicted of second-degree murder in New York, Mangione would face 15 years to life in prison, while a first-degree murder charge carries a sentence of 20 years to life. He is set to appear in a Pennsylvania court for a preliminary hearing next week on state charges following his December 9 arrest at a McDonald's in Altoona.

A charge of murder in the first degree is rare because it requires special elements related to the crime to be charged.

Under New York law, murder in the first-degree only applies to a narrow list of aggravating circumstances, including when the victim is a judge, a police officer or a first responder, or when the killing involves a murder-for-hire or an intent to commit terrorism, CNN has reported.

Investigators in New York believe Mangione, a former high school valedictorian and Ivy League graduate born into a well-to-do family, appeared to be driven by anger against the health insurance industry and "corporate greed," according to an NYPD intelligence report obtained by CNN.

He's scheduled to appear at a hearing in Pennsylvania Thursday in response to his petitions for writ of habeas corpus and imposition of bail, court documents show. The habeas corpus petition is a key factor in whether Mangione can be extradited to New York.

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Axios: Congress releases bill to avert holiday government shutdown

Stephen Neukam, Andrew Solender

Congressional leaders Tuesday unveiled legislation to keep the government funded until March 14, unleashing a mad dash to pass the bill by the end of the week.

Why it matters: House Speaker Mike Johnson's (R-La.) next challenge is to find a way to ram the bill through the chamber while facing heat from his right flank over his handling of the government funding negotiations.

The bill includes around \$100 billion in disaster relief, a one-year extension of the farm bill and provisions

restricting U.S. investments in China.

It also includes a provision that would allow the NFL's Washington Commanders to return to the RFK Stadium site, as well as sweeping health care reforms, the details of which we reported earlier Tuesday. The stopgap bill sets up a government funding fight right at the end of President-elect Trump's first 100 days in office, adding to an already-full plate awaiting lawmakers next year. The big picture: The package includes wins for both Republicans and Democrats.

The mid-March end date for the short-term bill gives Republicans the opportunity to control funding levels for the second half of fiscal 2025.

The billions in disaster relief is a win for Democrats and Republicans in states affected by hurricanes this year — President Biden submitted a request for the funding last month. The package also includes \$10 billion in economic aid for farmers.

The restrictions on investments in China are a bipartisan win, and all four corners of congressional leadership wanted to see it make the funding bill. It was pulled out of the year-end defense authorization package last week.

The bottom line: Time is running short. Current funding runs through Dec. 20.

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FOX News: Border Patrol arrests South African national on terrorist watchlist who entered US illegally

Sarah Rumpf-Whitten, Bill Melugin

A South African national who illegally entered the U.S. landed a "positive match" on the terrorist watchlist leading to his "swift" arrest in New York City.

According to U.S. Border Patrol Chief Jason Owens, the unidentified South African national was initially detained in Texas for criminal trespassing, but was released.

A Texas Department of Public Safety official confirmed to Fox News that the migrant was first arrested on a ranch near Eagle Pass in September, then they turned him over to federal border patrol who released him.

His arrest, alongside 36 other illegal migrants, was documented and shared on social media by Lt. Chris Olivarez, the spokesperson for the Texas DPS. Olivarez said that among the group were special interest illegal immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan, India and Vietnam.

Illegal South African

U.S. Border Patrol announced the arrest of a South African national and suspected terrorist in Brooklyn, NY. (Chief Jason Owens via X)

Owens said that a further investigation revealed a "positive match on the terrorist watchlist."

The positive identification of the suspect being involved in terrorism led to a swift multi-agency effort to arrest the individual in Brooklyn, New York. It is unclear how or when the suspect arrived in New York City.

"Thanks to the coordination of multiple agencies, this potential threat was located, taken into custody, and is now pending removal," he said.

Fox News Digital has reached out to the Border Patrol for comment.

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FOX News: Madison, Wisconsin, school shooting suspect identified as 15-year-old girl

Stephen Sorace, Stepheny Price

A 15-year-old girl killed a teacher and teen student in a shooting on Monday at a private Christian school in Madison, Wisconsin, and wounded six others, according to authorities.

Natalie Rupnow was identified as the shooter who opened fire inside a study hall inside Abundant Life Christian School, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Responding officers found Rupnow with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. She died on the way to a hospital.

During a press conference Tuesday afternoon, Barnes said "identifying a motive is our top priority." He said the motive appears to be a combination of factors, but he did not elaborate any further.

Police were speaking with Rupnow's father and other family members, who were cooperating, and searching Rupnow's home, Barnes said. He declined to offer additional details about the shooter, partly out of respect for the family.

SCHOOL SHOOTER'S MOM JENNIFER CRUMBLY HAD 'TAINTED' TRIAL, ATTORNEYS SAY IN REQUEST TO TOSS CONVICTION

"He lost someone as well," Barnes said of Rupnow's father. "And so we're not going to rush the information. We'll take our time and make sure we do our due diligence."

Rupnow used a handgun in the shooting, according to Barnes.

"I don't know why, and I feel like if we did know why, we could stop these things from happening," he told reporters.

The teacher and student who were killed in the shooting have not yet been identified.

Barnes said that of the six wounded in the shooting, two were students and remain in critical condition. A teacher and three students were also hospitalized with less serious injuries, and two of them were later released.

FATHER OF GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING SUSPECT PLEADS NOT GUILTY

Barnes said he did not believe that the school, which serves 200 students, according to the school's website, had a resource officer. It was also revealed that the school did not have metal detectors but did have cameras and other security protocols.

He also clarified that the initial 911 call reporting the shooting was made by a second-grade teacher at the school. On Monday, he mistakenly said the call had come from a second-grade student.

James and Rebekah Smith, whose 17-year-old daughter is a student at the Abundant Life Christian School, told Fox News that they know all the victims and their families.

The Smiths said their daughter wasn't in the same class as Rupnow, the alleged shooter, or knew her well, but said that Rupnow was new to the school and had enrolled sometime during the current semester.

They added that their daughter and her group of friends said they never saw Rupnow speaking to anyone at school.

The couple also said the student who was killed was a freshman girl who they've known since she was a toddler.

"She gave great hugs. She was an amazing pianist. She loved to read. She was just an amazing young girl," Rebekah Smith said.

Alleged Abundant Life Christian school shooter identified as 15-year-old femaleVideo
Rebekah Smith said the teacher who was killed had a daughter who was in sports with the Smiths' daughter, and they talked with the mother at the games all the time.

She added that the victim had been a long-term substitute teacher at the school and just became a full-time teacher this year.

President Biden spoke with Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway after the shooting, and he issued a separate statement that called the event "shocking and unconscionable."

"We can never accept senseless violence that traumatizes children, their families, and tears entire communities apart," Biden said.

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Office of Governor Kim Reynolds

NEWS CLIPS

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

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IOWA NEWS:

Iowa News Now: 150+ groups call on Gov. Reynolds to reverse course and let Iowa join summer EBT program

Michael Howell

DES MOINES, Iowa — More than 150 groups and organizations are now calling on Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds to sign Iowa up for the Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) program for next summer.

Reynolds opted out of the program this past summer and asked the federal government to let Iowa create its own summer food program.

SUN Bucks gives \$40 per month on EBT cards to each child in a low-income family in the summer. Reynolds' office said her separate food program, which was denied a few weeks ago, would ultimately feed more kids. Her plan was to leverage bulk pricing to deliver three monthly boxes of healthy food to kids instead of sending them the money. The USDA denied the application, saying it does not meet the goal of SUN Bucks program.

Reynolds said she plans to pitch the idea once President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The new petition announced on Tuesday comes from 153 groups and organizations who signed on, calling for the governor to change her mind and send the USDA a letter of intent to participate in the SUN bucks program before the Jan. 1 deadline. They say parents and caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids.

You can read the full letter from the groups below and see what organizations have signed on to the cause.

Dear Gov. Reynolds,

We, the undersigned organizations, call on you to take action to ensure Iowa participates in the SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) program in 2025.

We are students. We are parents. We are people of faith. We are teachers. We are medical professionals. We are dietitians. We are farmers. We are social workers. We are staff and volunteers at food pantries and food rescue organizations. We are small business owners. We are advocates. We are union members. We are nonprofit leaders. We are county supervisors. We are Iowans.

Right now, hundreds of thousands of our neighbors across the state are facing food insecurity. Families are being forced to make impossible choices between putting food on the table or making rent. Rising costs are taking their toll on workers whose paychecks just aren't keeping up. Parents are skipping meals to make sure their kids are fed. Food banks, food pantries, and other emergency feeding organizations are assisting record-breaking numbers of Iowans, including staggering numbers of people turning to help for the first time.

In a country as wealthy as the United States of America, and in a state with as rich an agricultural tradition as Iowa, no child should ever go hungry. No matter who takes care of them, no matter where they live, no matter what.

SUN Bucks would provide \$29 million in nutrition benefits to a quarter of a million children across the state next summer. While a \$40 monthly benefit per eligible child may not seem like

a large amount, it would absolutely make a meaningful difference in the lives of Iowa families.

Parents and other caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids. Summer EBT is evidence-based policy, and has been shown to support healthy eating and reduce childhood food insecurity. SUN Bucks will not eradicate childhood hunger on its own, but it's one of the best tools we have. We shouldn't leave it on the table. We are in this together. All of us, as Iowans, have a shared future. And that future lies in the next generation.

We hope you will do the right thing.

The time to act is now.

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The Center Square: Op-Ed: Gov. Kim Reynolds sets the gold standard for state fiscal policy

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Gov. Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Gov. Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In FY 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in FY 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion, and \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by FY 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Gov. Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by the legislature. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Gov. Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "Blue State" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Gov. Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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Iowa News Now: Iowa presidential electors cast official vote for Trump and Vance
Skylar Tallal

Iowa's six presidential electors met Tuesday to officially cast their vote for president and vice president ahead of their inauguration next month.

Gov. Kim Reynolds presided over the meeting where Iowa's six presidential electors voted for Donald Trump and JD Vance, officially wrapping up the 2024 election here in Iowa.

"I will officially cast all six electoral votes for Donald J. Trump and JD Vance for President and Vice President of the United States of America," Gov. Reynolds (R) Iowa said. Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate says Iowa has one of the highest voter registration and turnout rates, with more than 1.6 million Iowans casting a ballot this past November, which is 74% of registered voters.

Trump got 55.73% of the vote in the state, carrying 94 of 99 Iowa counties with more than 927,000 Iowans selecting his name at the ballot box.

Iowa's News Now also heard from one of the electors about his interest in the process and why he chose to be an elector. Dallas Center-Grimes Community High School social studies teacher Jack Vanderflught said not only is it an important part to play in making the democratic process official, but he'll also be bringing that experience back to his classroom.

"You know in part because I've been a part of the process a long time, I thought it was an important role," Vanderflught said. "But I also did want to be able to share this with my students a little bit, so they have more of an insider view of what the process looks like and maybe encourage them to want to do it themselves."

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USA Today: President-elect Donald Trump sues Des Moines Register, Gannett over Iowa election poll

Bart Jansen

President-elect Donald Trump sued the Des Moines Register and its parent company, Gannett Co. Inc., over its publication of a poll before the election that he called “fraud and election interference” for saying he trailed his Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, in Iowa.

The lawsuit filed on Monday in Polk County District Court asks for unspecified damages under the state's Consumer Fraud Act. It seeks "accountability for brazen election interference committed by" the newspaper and pollster J. Ann Selzer over the poll published Nov. 2 — three days before the voting was completed — that showed Harris leading Trump by 3 percentage points in Iowa. Trump won the state by 13 percentage points.

The lawsuit also said the "egregious" polling miss in favor of Democrats came "just days before the most consequential election in memory," and that its results were apparently "leaked" because Democratic Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker mentioned the poll's findings during a meeting with Duke University alumni hours before the results were published.

"In my opinion, it was fraud and it was election interference," Trump told reporters Monday.

Lark-Marie Anton, a spokesperson for the Des Moines Register, said the company stands by its reporting and will vigorously defend the First Amendment.

"We have acknowledged that the Selzer/Des Moines Register pre-election poll did not reflect the ultimate margin of President Trump's Election Day victory in Iowa by releasing the poll's full demographics, crosstabs, weighted and unweighted data, as well as a technical explanation from pollster Ann Selzer," Anton said in a statement. "We stand by our reporting on the matter and believe this lawsuit is without merit."

Selzer told USA TODAY she had no comment on the lawsuit.

Gannett is also the parent company of USA TODAY.

Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Salem Civic Center, in Salem, Virginia, on Nov. 2, 2024. Trump has sued media companies repeatedly with complaints about coverage of him. Some legal experts say Trump's comments and legal actions risk discouraging coverage of his incoming administration.

A federal judge dismissed Trump's \$475 million lawsuit against CNN in July 2023 over the cable network referring to his description of election fraud in 2020 as a "big lie."

ABC News reached a \$15 million settlement Dec. 14 with Trump over a George Stephanopoulos question to a House member in March about a lawsuit columnist E. Jean Carroll filed against Trump.

Stephanopoulos mischaracterized Trump as having been found liable for rape in a civil trial. A jury found him liable for sexual assault. Trump is appealing the verdict.

ABC issued a statement of regret and agreed to contribute the money to Trump's future presidential library.

Still pending is a \$10 billion federal lawsuit against CBS News that Trump filed in October. The lawsuit alleged "election and voter interference" through the editing of an interview with Harris broadcast on "60 Minutes." The editing sought to "deceive, and mislead the public" to favor Harris, the lawsuit said.

CBS called the allegations "false" and said in a network statement "the interview was not doctored."

Trump: Lawsuits 'straighten out the press'

During his press conference Monday, Trump said of lawsuits against Gannett and CBS: "It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press."

Trump had previously called for an investigation of Selzer.

"She's a very good pollster," Trump said Monday. "She knows what she was doing."

Selzer wrote in a November analysis — before the lawsuit was filed — that she was uncertain what caused the poll results.

"To cut to the chase, I found nothing to illuminate the miss," she wrote.

Iowa attorney part of Trump legal team in case
Representing Trump in the case are attorneys Edward Paltzik of New York and Alan Ostergren of Des Moines.

Paltzik is listed on his LinkedIn site as litigation director for the National Constitutional Law Union, a nonprofit that described itself on its website as "the answer to the useless and radically leftist American Civil Liberties Union."

Ostergren is the former Muscatine County attorney. In private practice since 2020, he has represented a variety of Iowa conservatives and conservative organizations in litigation over constitutional and election issues.

In the run-up to the 2020 election, the Trump campaign, the Republican National Committee and other national groups hired Ostergren to intervene in a lawsuit over absentee ballot procedures, then to bring several more suits against counties he said were flouting the rules. He won both at the district and appeals court levels.

He also represented Republican Mariannette Miller-Meeks that year in her successful bid to be certified as the elected U.S. representative for Iowa's 1st Congressional District after recounts and challenges to her six-vote victory.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: McKinley, Keomah lakes among several slated for major restoration in 2025

Cami Koons

A report from the Lake Restoration Program with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources details the completion of several years-long restoration projects in 2024 and outlines major project plans in 2025.

The annual report is open to review and public comment through Dec. 18.

Michelle Balmer, who works with the program, said the lake restoration projects involve community partners, watershed studies and various forms of construction to “protect that lake for the next generation of users.”

“We see this as being not only important for environmental protection, but also it’s a service that all you Iowans get to utilize,” Balmer said. “We want to make sure they have quality places to go recreating.”

Since the program was established by the Legislature in 2006, it has removed 5 million cubic yards of excess sediment from lakes, enhanced 14,000 acres of wetlands and shallow lakes and has made use of \$167 million in funding from the state to improve 72 lakes across the state.

2024 major project completions

The report highlights four major projects the department considers completed or nearly completed from 2024. Major restorations were completed at Casey Lake in Black Hawk County, Silver Lake in Dickinson County, Three Mile Lake in Union County and a shallow lake and wetland project at West Swan Lake in Emmet County.

The four projects represent \$9.6 million in state allocated funds, federal grants and local partnerships.

According to the report, restoration at these lakes included the construction and restoration of sediment and nutrient control ponds, shoreline work, improvements to surrounding timber, sediment removal or fish habitat work, among other strategies.

Balmer said each project is different, but the Three Mile Lake project, for example, represents about seven years of work from initial watershed and community studies, to building new fish habitat and now waiting for the water to fill back up.

“We often spend a year or two learning more about the lake ... trying to understand what the issues are, why water quality is being negatively impacted,” Balmer said. “And then, what strategies can we try and employ that’ll help improve water quality, update infrastructure, improve habitat for aquatic life and provide better recreational opportunities.”

Balmer said at Three Mile Lake, the department was able to create two in-lake silt basins, which she described as berms that help to slow water down and allow the sediment to drop out before the water enters the lake.

Other practices like basins or terraces on state-owned land upstream help to keep sediment from washing into the lake.

Balmer said Three Mile lake is an important fishing destination for many Iowans and visitors to the state, and the lake also serves as a drinking water reservoir which were “important implications” for improving water quality at the lake.

Major projects slated for fiscal year 2025-2026

Balmer said like the other projects, those highlighted for the upcoming fiscal year have been in the works for several years, but are qualified as a major project this year due to large investments toward the restorations.

McKinley Lake in Union County will have an estimated \$3.58 million project to remove excess sediment, restore shoreline, add park amenities, upgrade parts of the dam and build an upstream wetland. The project is a 50-50 cost share between the Lake Restoration Program funds and the City of Creston.

Balmer said the department tries to couple restoration projects with other planned projects to make the most out of times when the campgrounds, roads or parks are closed.

Green Valley Lake and Prairie Rose Lake will undergo alum treatments in the spring to improve water quality by inactivating excess phosphorous in the water. This project is an estimated \$1.7 million.

Diamond Lake in Poweshiek County is slated to have \$455,000 in improvements to sediment control ponds and streambank erosion control.

The biggest investment will be at Lake Keomah in Mahaska County, which is scheduled to have shoreline stabilization, sediment removal, boat ramp improvements and upgraded dam and spillway components. According to the report, the project is estimated to cost \$4.3 million.

“Most of our lakes in the state are man made,” Balmer said. “That means there’s a dam that’s impounding water, essentially, and just like your house or any other major thing, there’s maintenance needed.”

Balmer said the Lake Keomah project has been in the works about 10 years. Past efforts have included improvements to surrounding timber and collaboration with homeowners along the lake. According to the report, the projects at Lake Keomah are estimated to wrap up between fiscal year 2027 and 2029.

The rest of the report details projects that are in earlier phases of planning, explains the department’s project selection process and further breaks down funding and project costs.

Balmer said Iowan can reach out to her with questions or comments on the report through Dec. 18.

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WHO13: State Auditor Rob Sand releases FY 23 audit for Iowa Judicial branch

Zach Fisher

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa state officials have been sparring over the Iowa Judicial Branch having \$26 million in misallocated funds, and an audit of the branch was released Tuesday morning.

State Auditor Rob Sand (D) released the audit for Fiscal Year 2023 for the branch. A coding error wrongly distributed the funds from unpaid debt collections over the last three fiscal years.

“Every single one of these programs had money sitting in their account this entire time,” said Auditor Sand (D).

The report shows the funds that were wrongly distributed to seven state funds, and includes a chart of the lowest monthly cash balance for each of the seven funds over the last three years. Sand used that to show the different funds still had enough money to continue providing the services as normal.

Those comments and the audit report comes after Republican lawmakers criticized Sand’s office for not warning lawmakers that there was an issue in coding. Sand at a news conference Tuesday said that it was changes made in a bill passed by Iowa Republicans in the 2020 session that started the coding issue.

“The lion’s share of it started when they passed these bills in June, making them live in July, and then in the following session they actually passed another bill making changes retroactively” said Sand. “So they were supposed to, in the judicial branch, not only change the coding but then go back and figure out, okay, how do we undo what we have been doing over the last year?”

Sand recommended that lawmakers act this session so those \$26 million can go to the correct funds in the judicial branch.

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WHO13: Iowa invests \$3.5M to give every 1st grader book packs to take home

Griffin Wright

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Iowa Department of Education spent \$3.5 million to give every 1st grader in the state book packs they can take home and keep to improve their reading skills.

The book packs contain multiple decodable books — books that have words kids can sound out and read at home to improve their literacy.

Council appoints Ankeny's first female mayor

The books in the book packs are part of the curriculum based on the science of reading which, put simply, focuses on teaching kids to sound out parts of words and then putting them together to learn to read.

First-grade teacher Kari Osborne at Des Moines' Findley Elementary School, said it's important for parents to help their kids learn to read using the decodable book packs.

“Families don't always know exactly what's going on in our day. And so we would really want them to know that this is something that they're working on. They've been working really hard on learning to read. And that's our goal, is to get them to learn to read and to enjoy reading. So we want them to do this with their families at home too,” Osborne said.

On the first page of every book in the book packs is information on the reading skill the book focuses on and a QR code parents can scan for more information on how to instruct their kids.

To learn more about the decodable book packs visit the Department of Education's website.

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WOI: Survey: Iowa farmland prices dip 3.1%, breaking five-year growth trend

Caleb Geer

DES MOINES, Iowa — The average value of Iowa farmland has fallen in 2024, according to the Iowa State Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) and the annual Iowa State Land Value Survey.

The state average decline of 3.1% breaks an upward trend in land value the state has seen over the past five years, according to CARD. Last year, state average land value was reported at a 3.7% increase over the previous year.

The average decrease in value of an acre of farmland was measured at \$369 by CARD, leading to an average value of \$11,467 an acre.

The decrease in value comes after a long growth in value and record-setting peak hit in 2023.

Land Value Survey — Overview

75 counties of Iowa's 99 reported a decrease in farmland value in the 2024 survey.

Counties

O'Brien County had highest average value per acre at \$15,921, after a reported decrease of 2.4% or \$392 from year before

Appanoose County had the lowest average value per acre at \$6,840, after a reported increase of 7.7% or \$486 from year before

Shelby County had the largest dollar amount loss in average value per acre, down \$1,170

Wayne County had the largest percentage amount loss in average value per acre, down 9.7%

Wayne County had the largest dollar amount increase in average value per acre however, up \$690

Decatur County had the largest percentage amount increase in average value per acre, up 10.5%

Osceola County had the lowest percentage and dollar value average increases, up 0.1% and \$3

Land quality

"Low quality" land across Iowa now averages \$7,450 per acre, down 2.8% or \$215

"Medium quality" land across Iowa now averages \$10,740 per acre, down 3.0% or \$335

"High quality" land across Iowa now averages \$13,930 per acre, down 2.6% or \$367

Most mentioned negative factor affecting decline in land value was lower commodity prices

Others negative factors were cited to include long-term interest rates, higher input costs and cash/credit availability

Most mentioned positive factor affecting land value was limited land supply

Others positive factors were cited to include strong yields, cash/credit availability and strong demand for land

CARD's web portal is available here, and offers visualization tools allowing for in-depth analysis and comparison.

Breaking the trend

“We saw land values rise for five straight years, including surges of 29% and 17%, which naturally leads to a reset or balancing in the market,” said Dr. Rabail Chandio, who is responsible for the annual land survey. “If we look back to the previous peak in 2013, the market 'adjusted' with relatively small declines spread over a few years.”

CARD cites the fact that "when adjusting for inflation, the 2024 average value is 2.5% lower than 2013's inflation adjusted values."

Chandio said that high interest rates of the previous two years have continued to affect farmland value, and that rate cuts are not enough yet to ease the pressure.

“It takes time—sometimes up to a decade—for interest rate changes to fully ripple through the land market," she said.

Increases in the face of statewide average decrease

The only counties to see increase or no change in average farmland value are:

Adair (0.9%)
Adams (3.8%)
Allamakee (3.8%)
Appanoose (7.7%)
Cedar (1.1%)
Clarke (5.3%)
Clinton (1.2%)
Decatur (10.5%)
Dubuque (3.7%)
Jackson (0.1%)
Jefferson (0.9%)
Jones (1.8%)
Linn (0.4%)
Lucas (5.7%)
Lyon (0.5%)
Madison (0.4%)
Monroe (0.6%)
Muscatine (0.8%)
Osceola (No change)
Ringgold (4.4%)
Taylor (5.3%)
Union (3.1%)
Van Buren (1.8%)
Wayne (10.3%)

The only crop-reporting district to report an increase in average value was the Iowa South Central District which most of the above counties are included in.

Only minimal decreases were seen in the other two southern districts, revealing a stable trend Chandio said.

CARD said the survey is based on "Reports by agricultural professionals knowledgeable of land market conditions, such as appraisers, farm managers, agricultural lenders, and actual land sales, and is intended to provide information on general land value trends, geographical land price relationships, and factors influencing the Iowa land market."

What factors are causing the decrease in value?

Survey respondents pointed to falling commodity prices and increasing input costs for farming as well. Farm income is expected to follow the decrease in land value, falling 4.1% according to CARD. However, this is a significantly smaller decrease than last year's reported fall of 17.4%.

However, livestock markets could bring some stability to collapsing farm income, Chandio said.

"While crop receipts are down, livestock receipts are up 8.4%, offering some balance," he said. "So, livestock markets, like cattle and hogs, have fared relatively better, but high input costs are still exerting enough pressure to keep margins very tight."

In the short term, survey respondents are expecting declines in the next year, with 58% figuring on continued drop in value. Most believed a fall of around 5% will occur.

In the long term however, looking at the next five years, 80% of respondents are expecting land values to increase, with 36% expecting an increase of 10-20%.

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WOI: Polk County Board of Supervisors approves new immigrant and refugee welcome center

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — A new immigrant and refugee welcome center is coming to Des Moines after receiving approval from the Polk County Board of Supervisors.

The board unanimously approved the welcome center, Global Neighbors, at its meeting Tuesday. The facility will be located at 1900 Carpenter Avenue. Officials said the location was strategically selected to be near bus routes and many other social service providers.

The goal of Global Neighbors is to provide a hub for refugees and immigrants to access services related to employment, housing and education, as well as help people transition into their new lives.

“Each person who enters Global Neighbors brings with them a unique story—a story of resilience, courage, and dreams for a better future,” said Polk County Board Chair Angela Connolly. “This unique facility will ensure our newest residents have the resources available to make the transition to their new community as smooth as possible.”

The facility will include a computer lab, classrooms and office spaces for immigrant and refugee-related nonprofits. On the exterior, the building will feature murals and landscaping.

“Vibrant colors of joy will be in the lobby, and open office spaces will provide warmth and natural light throughout the space. The designated private spaces will be acoustically sheltered to enable confidential and sensitive conversations,” said Mak Suceska, manager of operations for Global Neighbors.

Redevelopment of the property will begin in early 2025, with the hopes of opening the facility by the end of 2025.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Auditor Rob Sand says his office did not ignore court spending errors

Robin Opsahl

Iowa Auditor Rob Sand disputed claims made by Republican leaders that his office was aware of a coding error that led to a misallocation of court debt funds years before taking action on the issue.

Sand held a news conference Tuesday about his report on the Iowa Judicial Branch, which found that \$27.5 million in court debt receipts had been misallocated due to a coding error. The report had followed up on letters sent to the auditor's office by House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen that more than \$53 million of these funds had been misallocated — an amount Sand said was inaccurate.

In an October letter to Sand, Grassley wrote that the auditor's office had been alerted of a financial irregularity by the Department of Transportation in 2022, but that these issues were not mentioned in the judicial branch audits for fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

"I am writing to gain an understanding from you as to why your office has taken no action since being made aware of these drastic issues at least two years ago," Grassley wrote. "The State Auditor's office exists for this very purpose. When you are made aware of misallocated funds by a branch of government, it is your duty to Iowans to investigate, alert the public, and seek to rectify the issue. Your inaction in this case is baffling and inexcusable. If there is any other explanation why it appears that the taxpayer's watchdog was sleeping on the job, I would be very interested to hear it."

Sand said the auditor's office has been in contact with officials from the state judicial branch and DOT multiple times after being notified of the issue in October 2022, and that the office remained in contact with the judicial branch in conducting internal and independent investigations into the issue.

According to the auditor's report, there were seven state funds that were under-allocated because of the error from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 — the largest being the Road Use Tax Fund, which was under-allocated by more than \$10.4 million, and the Victim Compensation Fund by \$7.2 million. In the same time period, the state general fund received an over-allocation of \$27.5 million, in addition to the SOS Revolving Fund being over-allocated \$90,174 and the Jury Witness Fund by \$74,166.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird released a statement in October criticizing the auditor's office for failing to catch the misallocation related to the Victim Compensation Fund that goes toward services like sexual assault examinations, medical reimbursements and counseling.

"No domestic violence victim should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave," Bird said. "The State's self-proclaimed 'taxpayer watchdog' failed at the

most basic job of being an auditor: conducting an audit. Crime victims should not have to worry about whether victim services will be there when they need them.”

But Sand pushed back against Bird’s characterization of the issue, saying that the underfunded government accounts never ran out of money when they were impacted by the error.

Sand asked for an apology to his staff for the criticism of the auditor’s office over this subject, and making it a “political” issue.

“I’m asking again, the people who distort the facts around this issue for political gain to publicly apologize to our staff — I would settle for a private apology to our staff that works on these issues,” Sand said. “These accountants and the auditors in this office, they work long hours. It is a difficult profession to be in right now, ... Our employees know that their families and their friends are seeing these headlines, and they know that they’re doing their job, they know that they are doing good quality work. But because of these attacks, they have to deal with it. They shouldn’t have to, and they deserve an apology.”

Paulsen, speaking with reporters Tuesday, said although the funds impacted by the error retained money despite the misallocation, it does not mean services — and their recipients in the state — were not affected by the lack of funds.

“You don’t spend your bank account down to zero every month, and neither do state entities funded by court debt,” Paulsen said. “When the funds run low, you cut back and so do state entities. Have citizens been harmed? That’s a question the Legislature should ask.”

While Sand said his office has never had staff with the ability to review coding to check for problems like in this case, Paulsen said the fact the misallocation occurred because of a coding error should not have prevented the office from being able to identify the funding irregularities.

“Don’t get bogged down in thinking auditing has anything to do with coding or programming a computer,” Paulsen said. “... [I]f that was the case, that you had to understand some computer language to audit, then how does the auditor of state do a single audit? How do they go from agency to agency? ... There’s still a few very small communities who use paper, but otherwise, there’s no government in the state of Iowa that doesn’t have their financials in the computer system. So if that’s a limitation, how do they ... do any of their audits? And the truth is, they do, because it’s not a limitation.”

The programming errors that led to the funds misallocations were found to have likely began after changes were made to the judicial branch’s information technology system for the process for distributing judicial fees and fines to government programs in 2020 and 2021, as directed by the Iowa Legislature.

While the error has been fixed moving forward, the misallocation that occurred in previous years cannot be fixed through administrative action, although the Legislature could take action when lawmakers reconvene in January 2025.

State Court Administrator Robert Gast said in a letter Dec. 6 that the judicial branch has implemented “new programming to correct programming errors in its case management system” as of Nov. 22, 2024, including retroactive corrections to distributions dating back to July 1, 2024. It has also contracted with a third party to review programming changes made to the branch’s IT system, is working with the state auditor “to set up an engagement to review the financial findings and verify that the over and under allocation numbers and the funds impacted as calculated by JBIT are accurate” and is developing an internal process to audit future programming changes.

“The branch cannot move funds that were misallocated in prior fiscal years,” Gast wrote. “We are interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders to correct all misallocations from FY21 through FY24.”

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids School District looking into virtual snow days

Emily Schrad

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Snow days in Iowa are almost unavoidable. But those winter days off, lead to more time in the classroom in late spring.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking at incorporating virtual learning to cut down on make-up days at the end of the year.

Schools across the state can use up to five virtual learning days a year, and the Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking to take advantage of those days during winter weather.

Chief of Schools Linda Reysack said students would have a variety of activities to work on, including physical work packets to take home or school work online.

"We are looking at having some online opportunities for students who can join by Google Classroom, some office hours from our staff, but really identifying activities that all students pre-K12 can do at home without technology," said Reysack.

Reysack said they started looking into the virtual snow day option when many families expressed the desire to be done with the year by the first week of June.

But she says right now opinions of the plan are still about 50/50.

"Some families and staff are very appreciative of the option to look at virtual learning. And other families say that it will be a hindrance to them because of childcare, but childcare will also be an issue whether we have a snow day and it's not virtual learning. So it is a very mixed bag," she said.

And while most students look forward to a day off in the snow...

"We don't want to take away the opportunity for students to get outside and play on those snow days," Reysack said.

Reysack said not every snow day will be a virtual learning day.

She added it will be on a case-by-case basis.

"At the beginning of this year, we let out early on a couple of different days due to the heat. So on days when students are already in school, learning is already occurring we have the opportunity then to send information home with our students and continue learning at home," Reysack said. "If the weather is predicted to be... if the wind chill is cold, we know that students probably will not be outside playing on those days and we have enough

warning ahead of time, we would then let our students know and our families know that that might be a virtual learning day.”

Reysack said packets would be sent home in the days before bad weather is in the forecast.

The final plan will be presented to the board in January. If it passes, it will be implemented starting next school year.

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KCRG: District Court reverses termination of Dubuque teacher heard using racial slur in social media video

Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - A district court has reversed the decision to terminate the contract of a Dubuque Hempstead teacher who was fired after a video of him using a racial slur spread on social media.

Roger Poling, a Dubuque Hempstead High School staff member, was heard using a racial slur in front of a Black student in a short video in May 2023.

However, according to a ruling from the district court, the school board's decision to terminate Poling's contract ignores the context surrounding the moment Poling said the slur.

The ruling says Poling had repeated the word back to the student in an attempt to explain the student's misconduct.

The court said while repeating the word is abhorrent, the Board's choice to ignore the context from which the exchange occurred diminishes the Board's finding of just cause.

Poling testified that when he tried to get students to return to their respective classrooms, one student gave a "smart" response to him, another pretended he didn't speak English, and a third student said to Poling, "whattcha looking at n[-word]."

When Poling addressed the student, the student asked, "what did I do," or "what did I say?"

To which Poling initially responded, "you know what you said."

After more questioning from the student, Poling said, "you said, 'whattcha looking at n[-word].'"

Students are then heard yelling in response to what Poling said in the short video that went viral. However, the court said the surveillance video, which shows more of the context, also shows the student rush off, laughing or smiling.

The court in its ruling called the Dubuque Community School Board's decision "reactive, rather than initiative-taking," in terms of how it addressed the issue.

It also said the Board's decision was not based on substantial evidence, and that it was "irrational and arbitrary, weighing the entirety of the roughly five minute encounter against Poling's past performance, and by relying on improperly admitted evidence to do so."

The court said the school board also missed a teachable moment in which it could have instructed students and teachers on the mutual respect required in a school to promote a safe and inclusive environment.

With his termination reversed, Poling is reinstated.

The Dubuque Community School District responded by saying it “is obviously disappointed in the ruling of the Iowa District Court and we believe the Board acted appropriately in the matter. We are working with the district’s legal counsel to review the decision in its entirety and determine next steps, including discussing potential options for appeal of the decision.”

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KCRG: Iowa State Auditor: No programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors

Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa (KCRG) - Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand says no programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors.

On Tuesday morning, Sand's office released a report of the Iowa Judicial Branch for the fiscal year that ended in June 2023.

In a letter in October, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley wrote that the Iowa Judicial System had misallocated more than 53-million dollars since 2021 because of a computer error.

Republicans blamed Sand for not alerting them.

But Sand released a detailed timeline that both the Governor's office and Judicial system were well aware of the issue.

He says this was the result of last second changes to Iowa law, that didn't give them enough time to procedures in place, leading to the errors.

While the audit shows that problems are being fixed, Sand says Iowa lawmakers will need to make changes to reallocate the misappropriated funds.

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Iowa News Now: \$55.1 million plan to bring affordable housing community to Dubuque
Tyler Downey

DUBUQUE, Iowa — A housing development company has announced plans to build a \$55.1 million affordable housing community in Dubuque.

The Annex Group, the company behind the project, says the housing community will be geared towards households whose income level is at or below 70% of the area median income.

They're calling it "Union at the Marina" and it will be built in a currently vacant lot at 2660 Kerper Boulevard in Dubuque.

Union at the Marina will feature two four-story buildings that will have a total of 201 units and include one, two and three-bedroom options.

"We are thrilled to bring this project to Dubuque," David Wesner, VP of Development for The Annex Group, said. "The city has been a catalyst in addressing their housing need, and we are honored to be able to work with them to meet the overwhelming demand in their community. With floorplans to meet the needs of different households, as well as a dynamic amenity package including a rooftop deck with views of the river, we think this property will be a place people enjoy living."

Residents at the east end of the community will have a view of the river. Two schools, a park, pharmacy, grocery store and post office are all nearby and there will be several different amenities for residents, including a playground, community center, fitness center, picnic area, dog walking area and on-site property management.

Union at the Marina is expected to open in fall of 2026.

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The Gazette: Iowa courts implement new program to correct error that misallocated \$27.5M

Erin Murphy

DES MOINES — A coding error that caused Iowa courts to misallocate over \$27.5 million in court fees has been addressed and a new program was implemented last month, Iowa Judicial Branch officials have said.

In a report released Tuesday by the State Auditor's Office, the Iowa Judicial Branch said on Nov. 22 the courts implemented new programming to correct previous errors that led to the misallocations. The changes will ensure the future distribution of court fees works as required by state law, the Judicial Branch said in the report.

In Iowa, funds paid to the courts in the form of fines, fees and penalties in criminal cases are distributed to various sources, including state funds for victim compensation, emergency services, road infrastructure, county attorneys and the state's general fund.

Under the state's distribution system, clerks of courts enter court fees into a coding program that is supposed to channel those funds to the proper source. But the Iowa Judicial Branch in October revealed that coding errors sent more than \$27.5 million to the state's general fund instead of some of those other state funds and programs. The courts had been investigating the issue for more than two years.

According to the Judicial Branch's investigation, more than \$10.4 million should have gone to the state fund that supports infrastructure work on roads and bridges, \$7.2 million should have gone to a state program that helps victims of violent crimes with certain expenses, and \$4 million should have gone to a fund that supports juvenile detention homes.

The Iowa general fund, where most of the allocations were sent by error, currently has a \$2 billion surplus, according to the state's nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency.

According to the Iowa Judicial Branch, the programming issues arose in the 2021 state budget year after lawmakers changed the court fees distribution system during the 2020 and 2021 legislative sessions.

The new laws in consecutive years required programming changes to the distribution system. A report from the National Center for State Courts said the state law changes created confusion in implementing the new coding.

In the report Tuesday, the State Auditor Rob Sand's office recommends the Judicial Branch complete necessary programming changes to ensure the proper allocation of court debt. The report also recommends the Judicial Branch work with Iowa Department of Management and the Iowa Legislature to address the erroneous allocations.

Sand's report also recommends that future funding changes made by the Iowa Legislature not take effect "until state branches and agencies have sufficient time to accurately and carefully make all necessary changes."

A Judicial Branch spokesman said Tuesday that the courts cooperated fully with the auditor's office and does not dispute any of its findings.

The Judicial Branch also in its report response said it is "interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders" to correct the earlier misallocations. While the new programming was designed to fix future fee distribution and the courts have applied fixes retroactively to the start of the state budget year on July 1, erroneous distribution from previous years requires action by the Iowa Legislature.

The issue of those misallocated court fees has sparked a series of accusations between some of Iowa's state agency heads and one legislative leader that started in October and continued Tuesday.

Sand, a Democrat, has defended his office's work on the issue and accused other state leaders of playing politics in their criticism of his office.

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird — all Republicans — have accused Sand and his office of not acting sooner and not doing all his office should to address the issue.

The latest round of allegations started Tuesday when Sand held a news conference highlighting his office's report. Sand said the report shows that while others "have been pushing politics as usual" and wasting taxpayers' money, his office has been doing its job.

Sand called on those who have criticized his office to apologize to the accountants who work there, and said he is proud of their work.

"Sometimes you got to laugh so you don't cry. I mean this stuff is just so ridiculous," Sand said. "If you have to make stuff up to attack the person that's holding you accountable, the office that's holding you accountable, then that office must be doing a pretty good job."

A statement from Melissa Saitz, the spokeswoman for Grassley and Iowa House Republicans, criticized Sand for not compiling a report sooner and not including more information in it.

"We're glad that Auditor Sand took a break from his Twitter account to do the work the people of Iowa elected him to do," Saitz said. "It's concerning that it took scrutiny from Republicans in the Legislature and executive branch for the Auditor to release the audit reports and even briefly mention the misallocation of millions of public funds by the Judicial Branch.

"This report, however, far from answers all our questions. Iowa House Republicans just learned about this issue in September and are still working to understand the full

implications. We look forward to working this session to get our questions answered and this issue rectified.”

Bird, whose office manages the Victims Compensation Fund that has been shorted \$7.2 million, pushed back on Sand’s assertion that previous criticism of his office was unwarranted because none of the programs that were shorted ever ran out of funding.

“Rob Sand blew it, and now he is lying to cover up his mess,” Bird said in a statement. “With the money State Auditor Sand’s failure cost crime victims, we would have been able to provide 3,600 domestic violence survivors and their kids apartments, for the first time in years, as a safe escape from a violent situation. No domestic violence victims should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave. And our State Auditor owes Iowa crime victims an apology.”

The Victim Compensation Fund’s monthly balance never dipped below roughly \$2.7 million during the time the fees were erroneously allocated, according to Sand’s report.

Paulsen told reporters Tuesday that he thinks Iowa taxpayers are owed an apology. He, too, said Sand’s office should have acted sooner and that its report should have gone deeper.

“This clearly is something that we as state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled, and nor do I think we met their expectations,” Paulsen said. “And I think in particular, as already laid out, we should have been notified sooner, and we should have been in finding out what was right and what was wrong sooner.”

Sand said the Auditor’s Office moved forward with its work as soon as it had sufficient information, which he said it did not have until the Judicial Branch released its information in October.

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WQAD8: Police: Referee assaulted by parent at Burlington basketball game

Alec Doxsee

BURLINGTON, Iowa — Update:

Burlington Police obtained an arrest warrant for Urban Morris of Burlington on the following charges: assault (serious misdemeanor), assault (simple misdemeanor), disorderly conduct, and two counts of first-degree harassment.

A criminal complaint filed in the case states that Morris was upset with a call made by a referee that he disagreed with.

The affidavit states the following:

Officers learned while en route the suspect had fled the area. Officers arrived on scene and were approached by witnesses stating the suspect was Urban Morris. Officers were then able to speak with both Victim 1 and Victim 2. Officers first spoke with Victim 1 and learned that he was the referee in the basketball game. At the end of the game a call was made at which point Morris disagreed with the call. Victim 1 stated that Morris approached him as well as Victim 2 and was upset about the call that was made. Victim 1 stated that Morris threatened both Victims by stating he was going to "kill" both Victims and then "find their families".

Victim 1 then traveled to the locker room area which parents/spectators are not permitted to go in. Victim 1 stated he was going into the locker room to attempt to retrieve his phone to call 911. Victim 1 then stated that he turned around and was punched in the nose by Morris who had followed him into the locker room. Victim 1 stated he was struck with a closed fist at which point he fell over a bench and Morris repeatedly struck Victim 1 approximately 7 or 8 times before Morris left the area. Victim 1 had visible swelling around his nose/eye region.

Officers then spoke with Victim 2. Victim 2 stated that he was also a referee in the game at which point the call was made and Morris became upset. Victim 2 stated that he did have his phone on his person at which point he removed his phone to call 911 at which point Morris stated "Call the Police" and "I will kill you" and stated he was going to "find his family". Victim 2 stated he was in fear that Morris was going to harm his (family) due to the comments that were made.

Morris turned himself into the Des Moines County Jail and was booked on the charges on Tuesday, Dec. 17. There is a preliminary hearing set for Dec. 27.

Lucasfilm's Special Effects: Dallas Steps Into Ironman's Footsteps -The Gadget Show #TBT
featured by
Original story:

The Burlington Police Department said charges are expected after a parent reportedly assaulted a referee following a basketball game.

According to a Facebook post, police responded to Edward Stone Middle School around 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 13 regarding the assault. Burlington Police confirmed the game was a freshman/junior varsity game that was taking place at the middle school.

Officials have identified the parent and criminal charges are expected. Further details will be released by the Burlington Police Department once an arrest has been made.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: In win for biofuels, stopgap spending bill allows year-round sales of E15 gas nationwide

Jacob Fischler

A spending bill U.S. House appropriators released Tuesday evening to keep the government open into next spring includes a provision to allow sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol nationwide throughout the year.

After years of prohibiting the blend, known as E15, from being sold at gas stations during the summer months, the Environmental Protection Agency this year allowed year-round sales in eight Midwestern states. The provision in the stopgap funding bill would allow E15 sales in all states throughout the year.

The provision is a major win for corn producers and their allies in Congress from both parties. Supporters of ethanol, which is derived from corn, say it boosts U.S. production and lowers gas prices.

Sen. Deb Fischer, a Nebraska Republican who sponsored a bill to make the blend available all year, said the move was part of the GOP agenda to “unleash American energy.”

Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, said biofuels “champions” are fighting for the provision allowing the sale of E15 year-around. “We have been working to get a year-round E15 solution for over 10 years,” he said in a statement. “It would be monumental for ethanol demand to support rural farmers and would save drivers 10 to 20 cents at the pump.”

“My bill puts an end to years of patchwork regulations and uncertainty — year-round, nationwide E15 will now be a reality,” Fischer said. “This legislation also delivers on the mandate we received in November to unleash American energy. Not only will my bill lower gas prices and give consumers more choices, but it will also create new opportunity for American producers, who are especially hurting right now from lower prices.”

House Energy and Commerce ranking Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey applauded inclusion of the measure, saying it would help reduce gas prices and bolster U.S. energy production.

“By allowing for a higher blend of ethanol in our gasoline, Americans can rely more on homegrown biofuels that save drivers money at the pump and help insulate Americans from dramatic global price fluctuations,” Pallone said in a statement.

U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., one of a handful of farm-state House Republicans pushing for the E15 provision, said in a statement, “Year around E-15 is the most important policy we can embrace for Midwestern farmers and ranchers. I was glad to advocate for this on the Agriculture Committee and to our Speaker, and glad to see it embraced. I also know our entire Nebraska delegation was pulling for this. It is a team win.”

At a U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing last year, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Sen. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska promoted E15 availability as a way to lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower prices.

The EPA issued a waiver in May 2022 to allow the blend to be available nationwide throughout the year, as President Joe Biden's administration sought to tame gas prices.

The stopgap measure, known as a continuing resolution, would keep the government funded at current levels through mid-March. It includes a few additional provisions, including funding to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland.

The House and Senate are expected to pass the catch-all measure before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill.

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States Newsroom: Huge spending bill unveiled in Congress provides more than \$100 billion in disaster aid

Jennifer Shutt

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders unveiled a catch-all, year-end package Tuesday that would provide more than \$100 billion in disaster aid and give lawmakers more time to wrap up overdue work on government funding, the farm bill and a handful of other issues they decided not to finish.

The disaster aid section of the package will bolster funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Small Business Administration and several other federal agencies to continue their ongoing response efforts following a slew of natural disasters during the last two years.

The 1,547-page package would give Congress until mid-March to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills that were supposed to become law by Oct. 1.

It also extends the farm bill through Sept. 30, 2025. In a victory for corn growers, the bill includes a provision to allow nationwide sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol throughout the year.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said during a press conference before the bill was publicly released he had hoped the year-end stopgap spending bill would simply extend current funding until next year, when the GOP will hold the House, Senate and White House.

“But a couple of intervening things have occurred. We had, as we describe them, acts of God. We had these massive hurricanes if you know, in the late fall — Helene and Milton and other disasters,” Johnson said. “We have to make sure that the Americans who were devastated by these hurricanes get the relief they need. So we are adding to this a disaster relief package and that’s critically important.”

“Also important is the devastation that is being faced by our farming community,” he said. “The agriculture sector is really struggling. They’ve had effectively three lost years and commodity prices are a bit of a mess. And you have input costs that have skyrocketed because of Bidenomics.”

Johnson defended his decision to attach the other provisions in the stopgap spending bill, also known as a continuing resolution. Numerous Republicans have expressed frustration with his choice to bundle all the bills together in one package, instead of moving them individually.

“We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits and that’s what the volume of the pages to this is,” Johnson said.

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said in a written statement she would support the bill when that chamber votes on it later this week.

“While I — and so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle — wish we were voting on full-year funding bills, I am pleased that this package includes important resources for American farmers, emergency defense investments, investments in the Virginia Class submarine program, and increased funding for child care,” DeLauro wrote. “It also includes outbound investment protections I have long fought for to prevent American dollars from fueling the Chinese Communist Party’s policies with our capital and capabilities.”

“However, I am concerned that we could not agree on additional funding for veterans health care, and we must be vigilant in ensuring that the incoming Administration does not ration care promised to every affected veteran,” DeLauro added. “The passage of this bill should mark the beginning of negotiations on final 2025 funding bills. The start of a new Congress does not change the reality that any funding bills will still need the support of Democrats and Republicans in the House and in the Senate in order to become law.”

Hurricanes, tornadoes, bridge collapse

President Joe Biden asked Congress to approve nearly \$100 billion in emergency aid to bolster the accounts of several agencies that are helping residents, small businesses, farmers, and local and state governments recover from dozens of natural disasters.

The emergency supplemental request came shortly after Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused widespread devastation throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The funding will also help communities recover following tornadoes throughout the Midwest; the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland; and severe storms in Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The disaster response section of the spending package would include:

\$29 billion for FEMA’s disaster relief fund

\$21 billion for disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$12 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s community development block grant program for disaster assistance

\$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$8 billion for the Department of Transportation to provide disaster relief for federal highways

\$3.25 billion for State and Tribal Assistance Grants for water infrastructure repairs.

\$2.2 billion for the Small Business Administration’s disaster loan program

\$1.3 billion to replace the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland

Congress headed for finish line

The package is expected to pass the House and Senate before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill into law.

When Congress convenes again on Jan. 3 for the start of the 119th Congress, the Senate will flip from Democratic to Republican control. The House will remain red, though with a slightly smaller majority and very little, possibly no, room for GOP lawmakers to vote against partisan bills.

Republicans hope they can use unified control of Washington, which will begin after President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, to move through sweeping changes to federal spending and policy.

That is one of the reasons, Congress included a second continuing resolution in the package released this week. That stopgap spending bill will avoid a partial government shutdown until at least March 14.

That part of the bill is necessary since Congress has brushed off its responsibility to fund the government by failing to complete work on the dozen annual appropriations bills before the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1.

Lawmakers approved another stopgap spending bill in late September to keep funding levels mostly flat through Dec. 20, but did not use the extra time to negotiate a compromise between the Republican House and Democratic Senate.

GOP leaders have opted to hold over those full-year government funding measures until they control both chambers of Congress next year, in hopes they'll be able to more closely align the final versions of the 12 bills to their goals.

But Republican leaders will still need Democratic support to get the final spending bills, or another stopgap spending bill, through the Senate next year if they want to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The Senate requires at least 60 lawmakers to vote to advance major legislation toward a final, simple majority passage vote. The GOP will hold 53 seats next year, short of the requirement. Several Republican senators have also staked their reputations on consistently voting against any spending bill, making Democratic votes necessary to avoid a shutdown.

Republicans in the House will also likely need Democrats to move government funding bills through that chamber, given they too have a significant faction of members who refuse to vote for the full-year spending bills and often vote against the short-term stopgap bills as well.

Farm bill extension

The end-of-year catchall bill released Tuesday also includes another extension for the farm bill through next year, a new version of which Congress was supposed to pass more than a year ago.

Instead, lawmakers in both chambers have prioritized other interests, delaying work on the legislation that authorizes agriculture and nutrition programs.

Congress last approved a farm bill in December 2018, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said at the time would cost \$428 billion during the five years it was supposed to cover.

Funding for nutrition, crop insurance, farm commodity programs and conservation accounted for about 99% of the mandatory spending in the law, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Nutrition has become one of the higher price tag items in the farm bill during the last few decades and accounted for about \$326 billion of the mandatory spending in the 2018 farm bill. Another \$38 billion went to crop insurance, \$31 billion to commodities and \$29 billion to conservation during the five-year window that has since lapsed.

The nutrition funding goes toward several federal food programs for lower income people, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

The Republican House and Democratic Senate have been unable to work through their differences on a new five-year farm bill, despite giving themselves more than a year of extra time.

The bill lawmakers are set to approve this month will give unified Republicans in control of Washington another year to get the work done.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Immigrants and allies at U.S. Capitol urge Biden to act before Trump deportations begin

Shauneen Miranda

WASHINGTON — In the crucial last month before President Joe Biden leaves office, immigrants and allies on Tuesday urged the president to offer protections for immigrant communities before Donald Trump is inaugurated.

The president-elect has promised the largest deportation in U.S. history, stoking fear and uncertainty among undocumented immigrants and immigration advocates over a sweeping platform that marked the core of Trump's GOP presidential campaign.

Speaking near the U.S. Capitol, the "Home is Here" campaign featured immigrant youth, allies and advocates demanding Biden take executive action.

The national coalition, which fights to protect immigrant communities, also urged Congress not to boost funding for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection during the lame-duck session in a way that would aid Trump in carrying out mass deportations. Members of Congress are expected to vote this week on a stopgap spending bill that would fund the government through mid-March.

Immigrant youth, allies and advocates traveled to Washington, D.C., from across the country, including states such as Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, New York and Utah, to rally and meet with members of Congress about their demands.

Claudia Quiñonez, organizing director of United We Dream, the nation's largest immigrant youth-led network, said "before the keys to the White House are handed over to Trump, before a new Congress takes office, this lame-duck period is (a) critical window for our members in Congress and President Biden to leave it all on the field."

Quiñonez, who is also a co-chair of the Home is Here campaign, said there is "no underestimating the length Trump is willing to go to fulfill his pledges for mass deportation in raiding our schools, our workplaces, our hospitals and our churches."

U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib also voiced her concerns Tuesday over the president-elect's immigration plans.

"We cannot underestimate, as you all know, what will unfold the moment Trump takes office in January, and we need as many people as possible working to resist this hateful agenda," the Michigan Democrat said.

Tlaib noted that Biden "still has power to take immediate executive action to protect our immigrant communities."

She also said “we must continue to work incredibly hard, not only to outwork the hate, but to really promote love and justice within our communities.”

Among its priorities, the Home is Here campaign aims to protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program recipients. A federal court will determine the program’s legal fate.

The Obama-era program was created in 2012 and designed to protect children who were brought into the country illegally from deportation.

Trump tried ending DACA during his first term.

During an NBC News interview earlier this month, Trump did not give specifics on what he intends to do about the program but said that he “will work with the Democrats on a plan.”

Immigration groups on Tuesday also expressed worry over the uncertainty of Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, which allows migrants in countries with unsafe conditions to legally reside and work in the United States.

Trump sought to end TPS for multiple countries throughout his first administration.

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North Dakota Monitor: 13 more GOP states sign on to oppose Standing Rock Sioux in new lawsuit over DAPL

Mary Steurer

A federal judge this week allowed 13 more Republican-led states to intervene as co-defendants in the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's new lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The lawsuit, filed in October, accuses the Army Corps of unlawfully allowing the Dakota Access Pipeline to operate without an easement, a complete environmental assessment or sufficient emergency spill response plans. The tribe ultimately wants a federal judge to shut the pipeline down.

Standing Rock has opposed the pipeline for years, saying it infringes upon the tribe's sovereignty, has damaged sacred cultural sites and jeopardizes the tribe's water supply.

The Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction over a part of the pipeline that passes below the Missouri River less than a half-mile upstream from the Standing Rock Reservation.

"The Corps has failed to act and failed to protect the tribe," Standing Rock Chairwoman Janet Alkire said in an October press conference announcing the lawsuit.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe files new lawsuit over DAPL

The more than 1,000-mile pipeline, often referred to as DAPL, passes through North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois. Its pathway includes uncaded land recognized as belonging to the Sioux Nation under an 1851 treaty with the U.S. government.

North Dakota joined the case on the side of the Army Corps earlier this month, arguing that closing DAPL would cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue, put thousands of jobs at risk, hamper regional supply chains and harm the environment. State attorneys also argue that a federal court order shuttering DAPL would violate North Dakota's right to regulate its own land and resources.

In a brief filed Monday, the 13 additional co-defendant states made similar arguments. The group, led by Iowa, said DAPL is integral to the health of regional energy and agriculture markets.

"DAPL plays a vital role in ensuring the nation's crops can come to market — not because DAPL itself transports agricultural products, but because every barrel of oil that DAPL transports is a barrel that does not take space in a truck or a train," the states wrote.

This also makes highways and railways safer and reduces pollution, they added.

The 13 states that joined the lawsuit this week are Iowa, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and West Virginia.

According to the states' brief, the pipeline has paid over \$100 million in property taxes to Iowa counties and over \$33 million in property taxes to South Dakota counties since it began operating in 2017.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not yet filed an answer to the tribe's lawsuit.

Energy Transfer, the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline, has not requested to intervene in the suit.

The case is before U.S. District Court Judge James Boasberg, who oversaw the tribe's 2016 lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers opposing the pipeline.

North Dakota in 2021 sought to join that lawsuit as well, but Boasberg denied the request as the case was in the process of wrapping up.

That case concluded with Boasberg instructing the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full environmental impact study of the pipeline, which is still in the works. Boasberg also ordered the pipeline to stop operating pending the completion of the study, though that demand was ultimately overturned by an appellate court.

In a separate federal court case, North Dakota seeks \$38 million from the United States government for costs the state says it incurred responding to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests.

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WCCO: Satanists' holiday display at Minnesota Capitol sparks outrage

Riley Moser

ST. PAUL, Minnesota ([WCCO](#)) -- A Satanic holiday display at the Minnesota State Capitol has some sounding the alarm but Gov. Tim Walz says he can't take it down as it is protected by the First Amendment.

The Minnesota Satanists put up its holiday display at the Capitol building in St. Paul over the weekend.

The group says on its website that members "champion the symbol of Lucifer as one of revolt against arbitrary authority and advocacy for the pursuit of knowledge." The group says members don't directly worship Satan or believe in Satan; instead, they called the display a win for "religious plurality."

Republicans have blamed Walz for letting the display go up.

"Is there anything Tim Walz won't do to insult Minnesotans?" Republican Rep. Tom Emmer tweeted.

Republican Rep. Pete Stauber agreed with Emmer's sentiment, writing on X, "When you get a DFL trifecta, you get a Satanic display at our state Capitol. During the holidays...what a disgrace. Only in Walz's Minnesota."

The governor's office says while Walz does not agree with the display and did not approve it, the First Amendment—which guarantees the freedom of religion, among others—allows for the display.

"The First Amendment means that he does not police speech in the State Capitol. That's true whether it's a religious display, a political protest, or a Minnesotan advocating for a policy," a spokesperson for Walz said in a statement to WCCO.

Last December, the Satanic Temple put up a display inside the Iowa Capitol in Des Moines that a former U.S. Navy fighter pilot was later accused of destroying. Similar to the Minnesota Satanists, the Satanic Temple says it doesn't believe in Satan but describes itself as a "non-theistic religious organization" that advocates for secularism.

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CNN: Luigi Mangione has been indicted in New York for murder of United Healthcare's CEO, multiple sources say

Staff

(CNN) — Luigi Mangione has been indicted for the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in Manhattan earlier this month, multiple law enforcement officials tell CNN.

A New York grand jury has voted to charge Mangione with murder in the first-degree and murder in the second-degree, among other charges, the officials said.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is expected to announce the indictment at a 3:30 p.m. news conference.

The 26-year-old has been fighting extradition to New York after being accused of fatally shooting Thompson on December 4, but Bragg said Friday it is possible the suspect could soon waive his right to fight being handed over to New York authorities.

If convicted of second-degree murder in New York, Mangione would face 15 years to life in prison, while a first-degree murder charge carries a sentence of 20 years to life. He is set to appear in a Pennsylvania court for a preliminary hearing next week on state charges following his December 9 arrest at a McDonald's in Altoona.

A charge of murder in the first degree is rare because it requires special elements related to the crime to be charged.

Under New York law, murder in the first-degree only applies to a narrow list of aggravating circumstances, including when the victim is a judge, a police officer or a first responder, or when the killing involves a murder-for-hire or an intent to commit terrorism, CNN has reported.

Investigators in New York believe Mangione, a former high school valedictorian and Ivy League graduate born into a well-to-do family, appeared to be driven by anger against the health insurance industry and "corporate greed," according to an NYPD intelligence report obtained by CNN.

He's scheduled to appear at a hearing in Pennsylvania Thursday in response to his petitions for writ of habeas corpus and imposition of bail, court documents show. The habeas corpus petition is a key factor in whether Mangione can be extradited to New York.

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Axios: Congress releases bill to avert holiday government shutdown

Stephen Neukam, Andrew Solender

Congressional leaders Tuesday unveiled legislation to keep the government funded until March 14, unleashing a mad dash to pass the bill by the end of the week.

Why it matters: House Speaker Mike Johnson's (R-La.) next challenge is to find a way to ram the bill through the chamber while facing heat from his right flank over his handling of the government funding negotiations.

The bill includes around \$100 billion in disaster relief, a one-year extension of the farm bill and provisions restricting U.S. investments in China.

It also includes a provision that would allow the NFL's Washington Commanders to return to the RFK Stadium site, as well as sweeping health care reforms, the details of which we reported earlier Tuesday.

The stopgap bill sets up a government funding fight right at the end of President-elect Trump's first 100 days in office, adding to an already-full plate awaiting lawmakers next year.

The big picture: The package includes wins for both Republicans and Democrats.

The mid-March end date for the short-term bill gives Republicans the opportunity to control funding levels for the second half of fiscal 2025.

The billions in disaster relief is a win for Democrats and Republicans in states affected by hurricanes this year — President Biden submitted a request for the funding last month. The package also includes \$10 billion in economic aid for farmers.

The restrictions on investments in China are a bipartisan win, and all four corners of congressional leadership wanted to see it make the funding bill. It was pulled out of the year-end defense authorization package last week.

The bottom line: Time is running short. Current funding runs through Dec. 20.

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FOX News: Border Patrol arrests South African national on terrorist watchlist who entered US illegally

Sarah Rumpf-Whitten, Bill Melugin

A South African national who illegally entered the U.S. landed a "positive match" on the terrorist watchlist leading to his "swift" arrest in New York City.

According to U.S. Border Patrol Chief Jason Owens, the unidentified South African national was initially detained in Texas for criminal trespassing, but was released.

A Texas Department of Public Safety official confirmed to Fox News that the migrant was first arrested on a ranch near Eagle Pass in September, then they turned him over to federal border patrol who released him.

His arrest, alongside 36 other illegal migrants, was documented and shared on social media by Lt. Chris Olivarez, the spokesperson for the Texas DPS. Olivarez said that among the group were special interest illegal immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan, India and Vietnam.

Illegal South African

U.S. Border Patrol announced the arrest of a South African national and suspected terrorist in Brooklyn, NY. (Chief Jason Owens via X)

Owens said that a further investigation revealed a "positive match on the terrorist watchlist."

The positive identification of the suspect being involved in terrorism led to a swift multi-agency effort to arrest the individual in Brooklyn, New York. It is unclear how or when the suspect arrived in New York City.

"Thanks to the coordination of multiple agencies, this potential threat was located, taken into custody, and is now pending removal," he said.

Fox News Digital has reached out to the Border Patrol for comment.

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FOX News: Madison, Wisconsin, school shooting suspect identified as 15-year-old girl
Stephen Sorace, Stepheny Price

A 15-year-old girl killed a teacher and teen student in a shooting on Monday at a private Christian school in Madison, Wisconsin, and wounded six others, according to authorities.

Natalie Rupnow was identified as the shooter who opened fire inside a study hall inside Abundant Life Christian School, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Responding officers found Rupnow with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. She died on the way to a hospital.

During a press conference Tuesday afternoon, Barnes said "identifying a motive is our top priority." He said the motive appears to be a combination of factors, but he did not elaborate any further.

Police were speaking with Rupnow's father and other family members, who were cooperating, and searching Rupnow's home, Barnes said. He declined to offer additional details about the shooter, partly out of respect for the family.

SCHOOL SHOOTER'S MOM JENNIFER CRUMBLEY HAD 'TAINTED' TRIAL, ATTORNEYS SAY IN REQUEST TO TOSS CONVICTION

"He lost someone as well," Barnes said of Rupnow's father. "And so we're not going to rush the information. We'll take our time and make sure we do our due diligence."

Rupnow used a handgun in the shooting, according to Barnes.

"I don't know why, and I feel like if we did know why, we could stop these things from happening," he told reporters.

The teacher and student who were killed in the shooting have not yet been identified.

Barnes said that of the six wounded in the shooting, two were students and remain in critical condition. A teacher and three students were also hospitalized with less serious injuries, and two of them were later released.

FATHER OF GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING SUSPECT PLEADS NOT GUILTY

Barnes said he did not believe that the school, which serves 200 students, according to the school's website, had a resource officer. It was also revealed that the school did not have metal detectors but did have cameras and other security protocols.

He also clarified that the initial 911 call reporting the shooting was made by a second-grade teacher at the school. On Monday, he mistakenly said the call had come from a second-grade student.

James and Rebekah Smith, whose 17-year-old daughter is a student at the Abundant Life Christian School, told Fox News that they know all the victims and their families.

The Smiths said their daughter wasn't in the same class as Rupnow, the alleged shooter, or knew her well, but said that Rupnow was new to the school and had enrolled sometime during the current semester.

They added that their daughter and her group of friends said they never saw Rupnow speaking to anyone at school.

The couple also said the student who was killed was a freshman girl who they've known since she was a toddler.

"She gave great hugs. She was an amazing pianist. She loved to read. She was just an amazing young girl," Rebekah Smith said.

Alleged Abundant Life Christian school shooter identified as 15-year-old femaleVideo Rebekah Smith said the teacher who was killed had a daughter who was in sports with the Smiths' daughter, and they talked with the mother at the games all the time.

She added that the victim had been a long-term substitute teacher at the school and just became a full-time teacher this year.

President Biden spoke with Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway after the shooting, and he issued a separate statement that called the event "shocking and unconscionable."

"We can never accept senseless violence that traumatizes children, their families, and tears entire communities apart," Biden said.

[Top of the Document](#)

From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Turkey pardon media prep doc
To: Reynolds, Governor
Cc: Hayes, Annie [IGOV]
Bcc: Frideres, Taryn [IGOV]
Sent: November 25, 2024 2:33 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: 2024.11.26 Turkey Pardon Media Prep Doc.docx
Hi Gov--

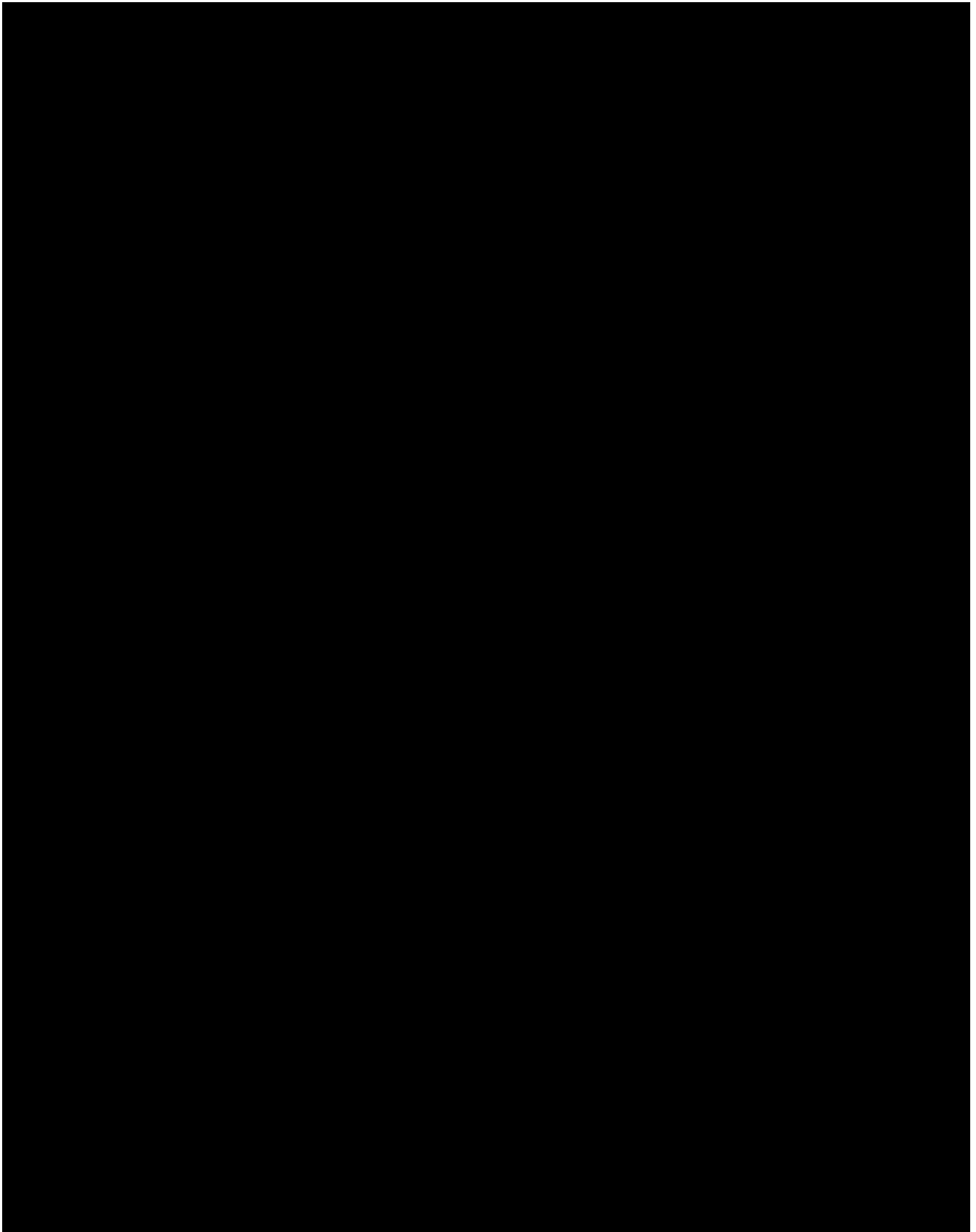
Here's an updated media prep doc for questioning after the turkey pardon, tomorrow.

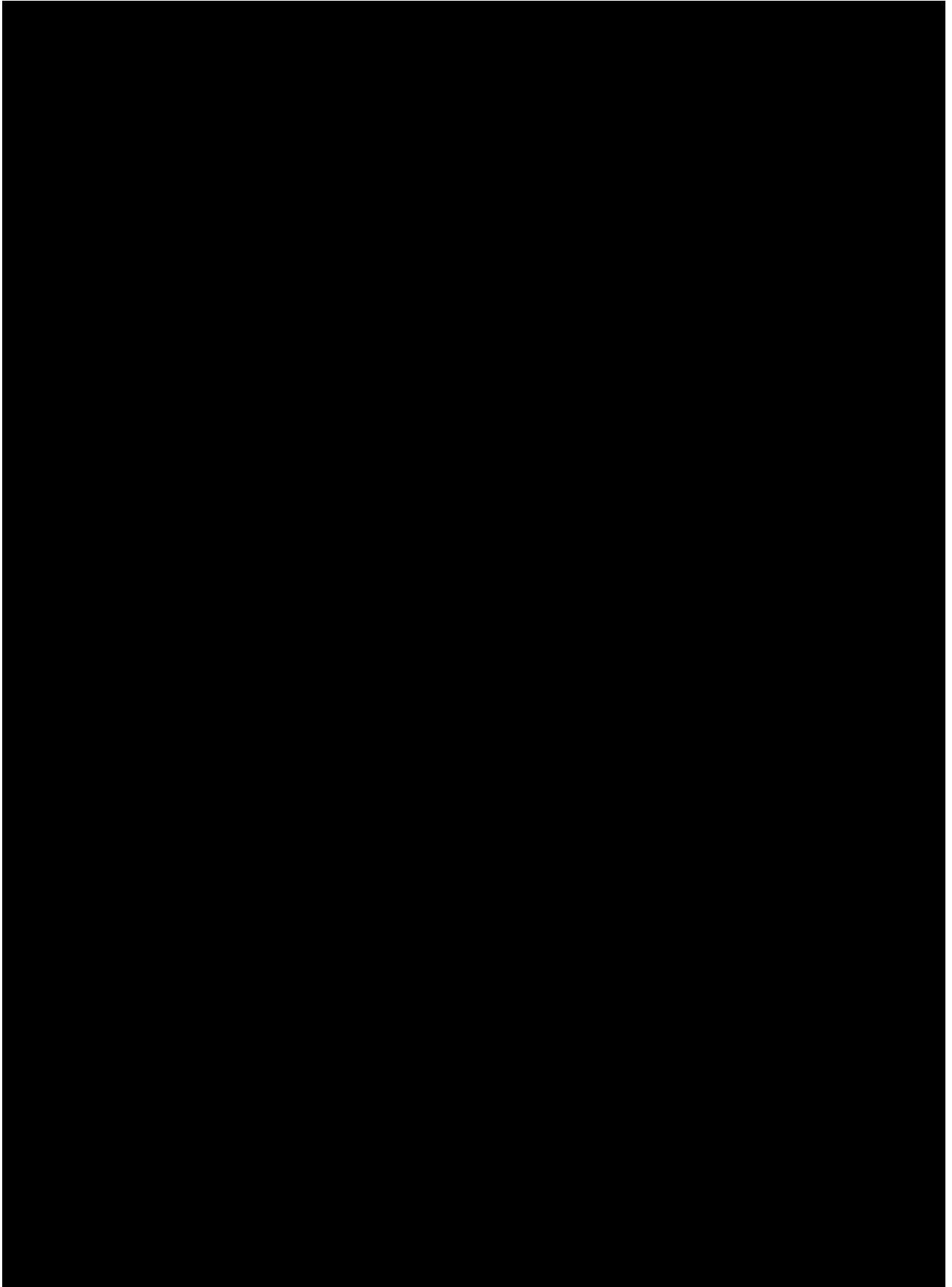
Let me know if you have any questions.

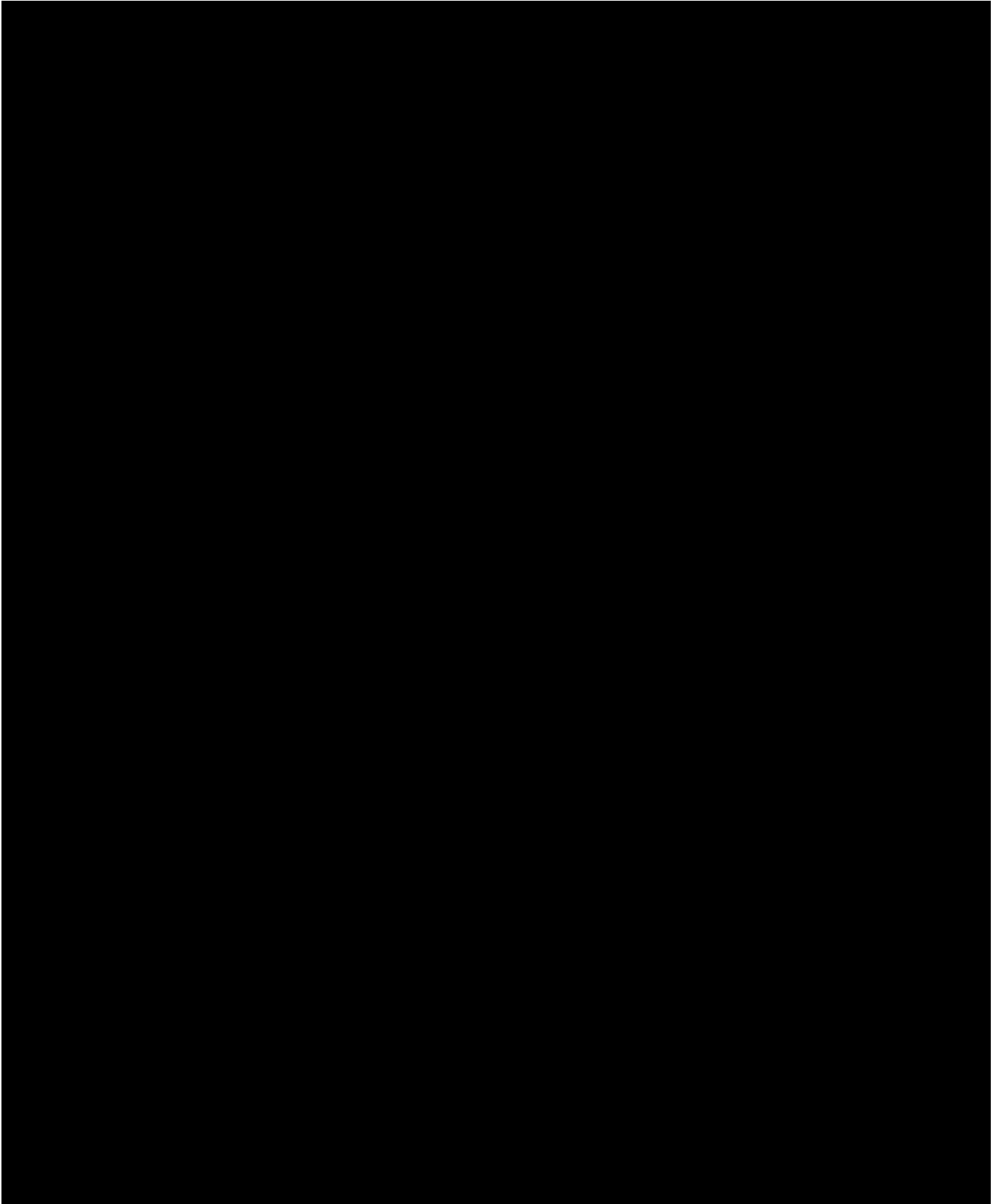
Thanks,
MM

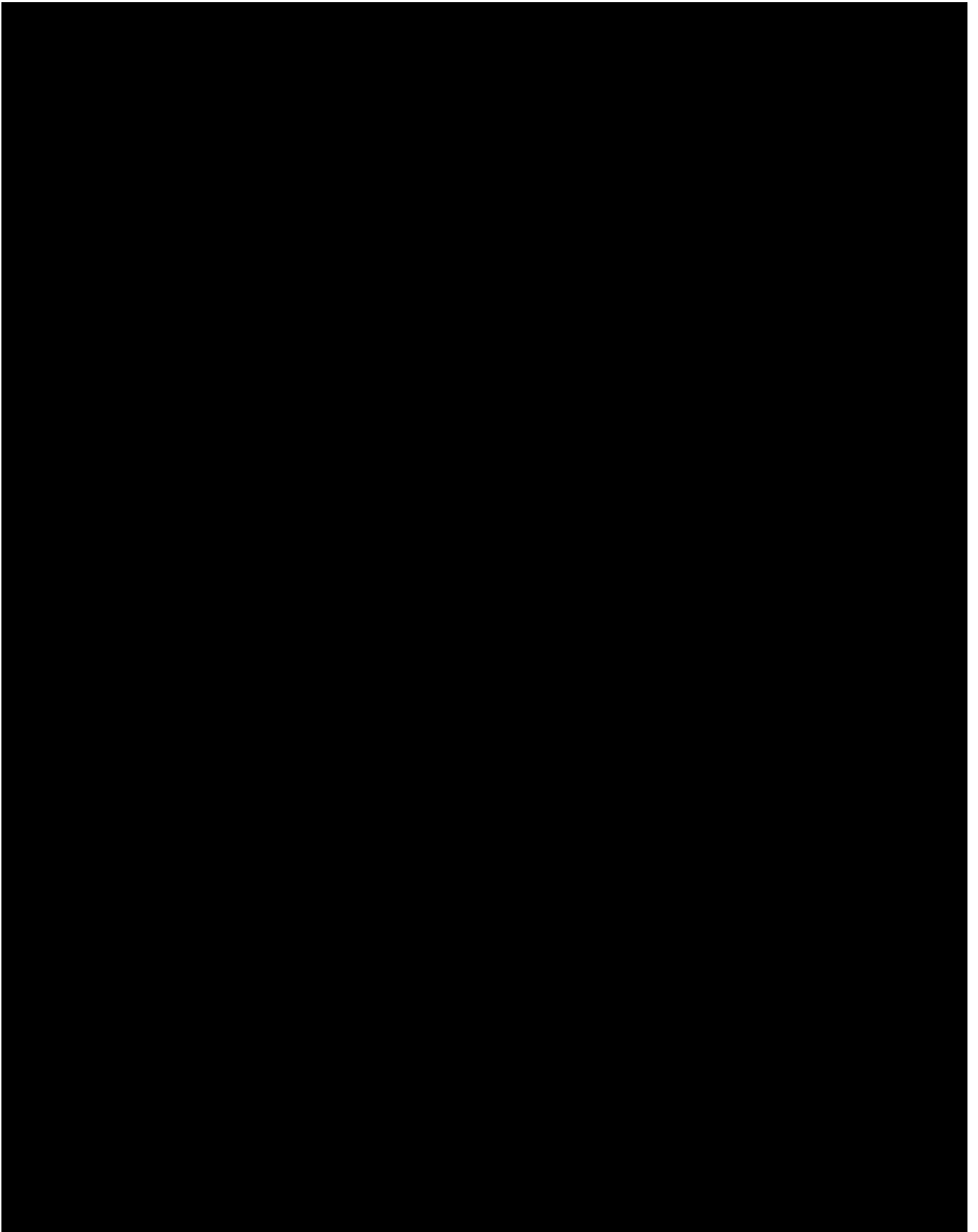
Mason Mauro
Deputy Communications Director
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov

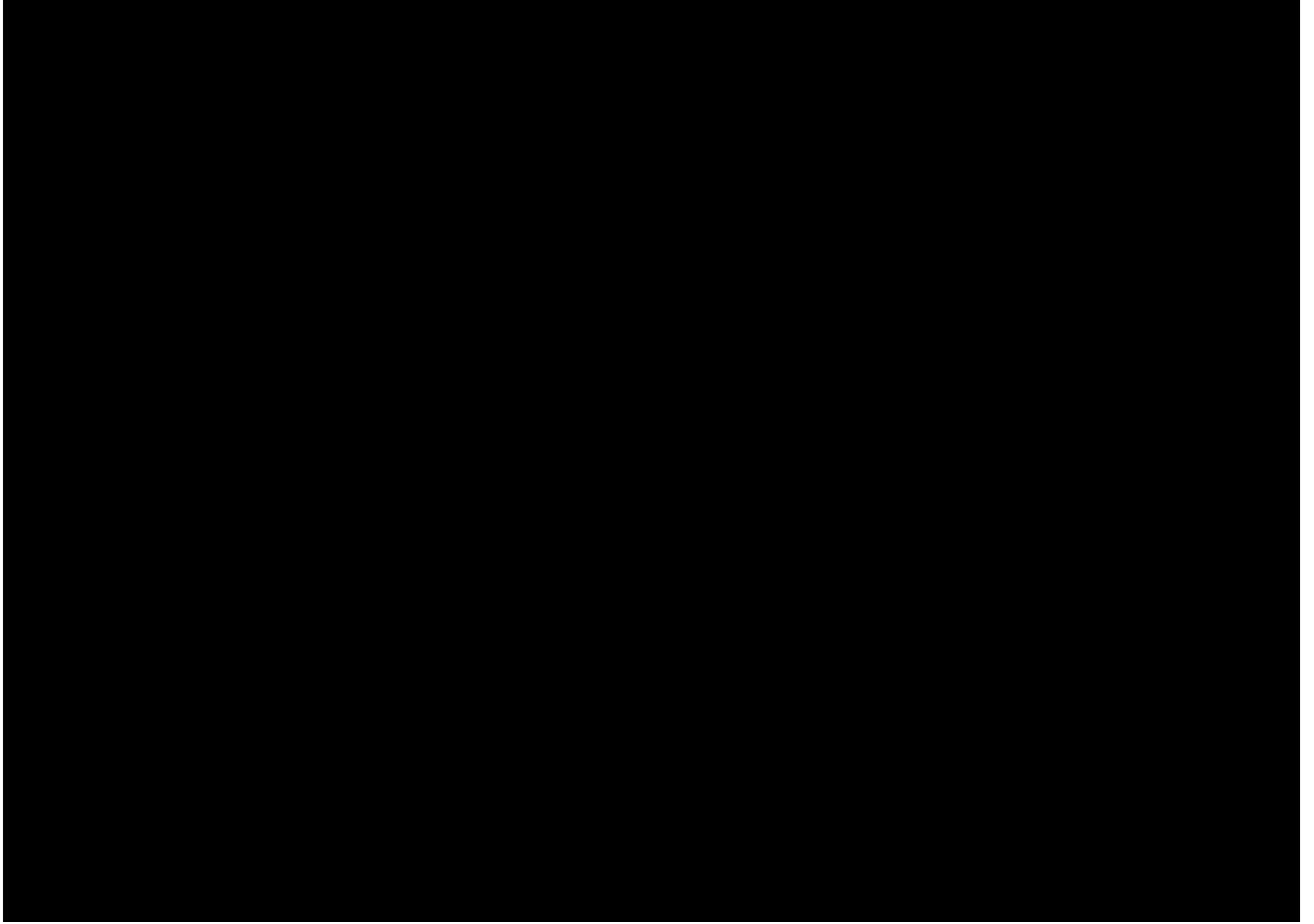












From: Trotter, Suzy
Subject: Capitol Complex Events: 12/6 - 12/22/2024
To: Green, Jen; Capps, Ryan [IGOV]; Shannon, Jeff [DAS]; Nelson, Meghan [LEGIS]; Cross, Charlee [DAS]; Bendon, Barbara [DAS]; Tansey, Nick [IGOV]; Frideres, Taryn [IGOV]; Tonyan, Brad [DAS]; Meister, Brad [DAS]; Baker, Eric [IGOV]; DAS Customer Service - GSE (Google Group); Rutan, Jaime; FirstEast, Security; Kleene, Jennifer [DAS]; Willemssen, Mark [LEGIS]; Hunt, Ashley; Mauro, Mason; Smithson, Charlie [LEGIS]; Clark, April; Wiebers, Shawna [DAS]; Pierson, Damon [DAS]; Michael Steen; Johnson, Christy [SOS]; Gustafson, Scott [DAS]; Arntzen, Brent; Severn, Molly [IGOV]; Willert, Kelsie [LEGIS]; Warmuth, Caroline [LEGIS]; Taylor, Maureen [LEGIS]; Jeff Thacker; Kurt; Heater, Gabe [DAS]; Beck, Zach; Murrell, James [DAS]; Topf, James [DAS]; Adams, Serena [LEGIS]; Evans, Jim [JB]; Evans, Taylor; Scott Tobias; Nancy Brady; Bunkers, Zachary [LEGIS]; Reed, Kari [DAS]; Tammy Schmitz; Alcorn, Doug [DAS]; Granger, Tera [DAS]; Smith, Mike [DAS]; Hall, Megan [IGOV]; Garrison, David [LEGIS]; DAS GSE Post 16 Contacts (Google Group); Byrnes, Alex [IGOV]; Davenport, Josh; Luft, Marc [DAS]; Capitol Tours; Light, Tanner [DAS]; Security.GroundWest; Winter, Mike [LEGIS]; Travis; Trower, James [DAS]; Leibach, Jennifer [DAS]; Security.GroundSouth; Paul, Cory [DAS]
Sent: December 6, 2024 1:40 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: Capitol Rotunda Events Dec 6 - Dec 22.pdf, Capitol Complex Events Dec 6 - Dec 22.pdf

Upcoming Capitol Complex events are listed on the attached documents. The schedule is subject to change, feel free to review the [Event Calendars](#).

Suzy Trotter
Capitol Complex Events Coordinator
General Services Enterprise
Iowa Department of Administrative Services
109 S.E. 13th St., Des Moines, IA 50319
515-281-7259 Office
515-631-9247 Mobile
suzy.trotter@iowa.gov
<https://das.iowa.gov>



Sat Dec 7, 2024

10:30am - 12:30pm Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

Where: WWII Memorial Plaza

Organization: Iowa Sons & Daughters of the Pearl Harbor Survivors

Event Information:

11:40 - Program begins

1:55 - 21 Gun Salute

2:00 - Program concludes

Wed Dec 11, 2024

9:30am - 11am Retirement Investors' Club (RIC) Information

Where: Grimes Building Lobby

Approved Provider: Voya

11:15am - 1pm Retirement Investors' Club (RIC) Information

Where: Hoover Building Level A Break Room

Approved Provider: Voya

Thu Dec 12, 2024

9:30am - 11am Retirement Investors' Club (RIC) Information

Where: Jessie Parker Building Break Area

Approved Provider: Voya

11:15am - 1pm Retirement Investors' Club (RIC) Information

Where: Oran Pape Building

Approved Provider: Voya

Tue Dec 17, 2024

10:30am - 1pm Retirement Investors' Club (RIC) Information

Where: 6200 Park Avenue 1st Floor Hallway

Approved Provider: Voya

Fri Dec 20, 2024

4pm - 10pm Holiday Promenade Drone Show

Where: Finkbine Drive

Organization: East Village Foundation Board

Road Closure: Finkbine Drive between E Grand Ave and E Walnut St

Sat Dec 21, 2024

4pm - 9pm Iowa Homeless Memorial

Where: West Capitol Terrace Stage

Organization: Joppa

Capitol Building 1st Floor Rotunda

Wed Dec 11, 2024

8am - 12pm Governor's Lifesaving & Sullivan Brothers Awards Ceremony

Where: Entire Rotunda

Organized by: Department of Public Safety

Sat Dec 14, 2024

8am - 4pm TST Iowa Holiday Display Day

Where: East

Organization: The Satanic Temple Iowa

Wed Dec 18, 2024

9:30am - 12pm Altoona Flute Choir Christmas Music

Where: Entire Rotunda

Organization: Altoona Flute Choir

From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Mauro, Mason shared "12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement" with you
To: Bell, Damian [IGOV]
Sent: December 10, 2024 10:04 AM (UTC-06:00)



Mauro, Mason invited you to edit a file

Here's the document that Mauro, Mason shared with you.



12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement



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12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement DRAFT

Legally Appropriate Statement:

Our state government is always going to be concerned about the wellbeing of children. The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit. Because of this, the State's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied.

From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Mauro, Mason shared "12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement" with you
To: Blankinship, Steven [IGOV]; Thompson, Stan [IGOV]
Sent: December 10, 2024 11:10 AM (UTC-06:00)



Mauro, Mason invited you to edit a file

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12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement



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12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement DRAFT

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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Re: Green, Jen shared "2024.12.6 AP Mass Deportations" with you
To: Green, Jen
Sent: December 10, 2024 1:07 PM (UTC-06:00)

Yes, lawyers approved this statement. Still waiting for them to sign off on the satanic temple statement.

MM

Mason Mauro
Deputy Communications Director
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



From: Green, Jen <Jen.Green@governor.iowa.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 10, 2024 1:05:25 PM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: Green, Jen shared "2024.12.6 AP Mass Deportations" with you



Green, Jen invited you to view a file

Have the lawyers seen and approved? I made some edits.



2024.12.6 AP Mass Deportations



This invite will only work for you and people with existing access.

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Request

From Hall, Megan [IGOV] <Megan.Hall@governor.iowa.gov>

Date Wed 12/11/2024 10:49 AM

To Wessan, Eric <Eric.Wessan@ag.iowa.gov>

 1 attachment (20 KB)

20241211111943085.pdf;

Megan Hall

Paralegal & Records Custodian

Office of the Governor of Iowa | Governor Kim Reynolds

Iowa State Capitol | 1007 East Grand Avenue Des Moines, IA 50319

515-720-4644 mobile | megan.hall@governor.iowa.gov | governor.iowa.gov



| **Office of the Governor**

From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Morning Clips 12.18.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 18, 2024 7:45 AM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: IGOV Morning Clips 12.18.2024.docx

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IOWA NEWS:

Iowa News Now: 150+ groups call on Gov. Reynolds to reverse course and let Iowa join summer EBT program
Michael Howell

DES MOINES, Iowa — More than 150 groups and organizations are now calling on Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds to sign Iowa up for the Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) program for next summer.

Reynolds opted out of the program this past summer and asked the federal government to let Iowa create its own summer food program.

SUN Bucks gives \$40 per month on EBT cards to each child in a low-income family in the summer. Reynolds' office said her separate food program, which was denied a few weeks ago, would ultimately feed more kids. Her plan was to leverage bulk pricing to deliver three monthly boxes of healthy food to kids instead of sending them the money. The USDA denied the application, saying it does not meet the goal of SUN Bucks program.

Reynolds said she plans to pitch the idea once President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The new petition announced on Tuesday comes from 153 groups and organizations who signed on, calling for the governor to change her mind and send the USDA a letter of intent to participate in the SUN bucks program before the Jan. 1 deadline. They say parents and caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids.

You can read the full letter from the groups below and see what organizations have signed on to the cause.

Dear Gov. Reynolds,

We, the undersigned organizations, call on you to take action to ensure Iowa participates in the SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) program in 2025.

We are students. We are parents. We are people of faith. We are teachers. We are medical professionals. We are dietitians. We are farmers. We are social workers. We are staff and volunteers at food pantries and food rescue organizations. We are small business owners. We are advocates. We are union members. We are nonprofit leaders. We are county supervisors. We are Iowans.

Right now, hundreds of thousands of our neighbors across the state are facing food insecurity. Families are being forced to make impossible choices between putting food on the table or making rent. Rising costs are taking their toll on workers whose paychecks just aren't keeping up. Parents are skipping meals to make sure their kids are fed.

Food banks, food pantries, and other emergency feeding organizations are assisting record-breaking numbers of Iowans, including staggering numbers of people turning to help for the first time.

In a country as wealthy as the United States of America, and in a state with as rich an agricultural tradition as Iowa, no child should ever go hungry. No matter who takes care of them, no matter where they live, no matter what.

SUN Bucks would provide \$29 million in nutrition benefits to a quarter of a million children across the state next summer. While a \$40 monthly benefit per eligible child may not seem like

a large amount, it would absolutely make a meaningful difference in the lives of Iowa families.

Parents and other caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids. Summer EBT is evidence-based policy, and has been shown to support healthy eating and reduce childhood food insecurity. SUN Bucks will not eradicate childhood hunger on its own, but it's one of the best tools we have. We shouldn't leave it on the table. We are in this together. All of us, as Iowans, have a shared future. And that future lies in the next generation.

We hope you will do the right thing.

The time to act is now.

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The Center Square: Op-Ed: Gov. Kim Reynolds sets the gold standard for state fiscal policy

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Gov. Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Gov. Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In FY 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in FY 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion, and \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by FY 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Gov. Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by the legislature. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are

reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Gov. Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "Blue State" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Gov. Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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Iowa News Now: Iowa presidential electors cast official vote for Trump and Vance

Skylar Tallal

Iowa's six presidential electors met Tuesday to officially cast their vote for president and vice president ahead of their inauguration next month.

Gov. Kim Reynolds presided over the meeting where Iowa's six presidential electors voted for Donald Trump and JD Vance, officially wrapping up the 2024 election here in Iowa.

"I will officially cast all six electoral votes for Donald J. Trump and JD Vance for President and Vice President of the United States of America," Gov. Reynolds (R) Iowa said.

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate says Iowa has one of the highest voter registration and turnout rates, with more than 1.6 million Iowans casting a ballot this past November, which is 74% of registered voters.

Trump got 55.73% of the vote in the state, carrying 94 of 99 Iowa counties with more than 927,000 Iowans selecting his name at the ballot box.

Iowa's News Now also heard from one of the electors about his interest in the process and why he chose to be an elector. Dallas Center-Grimes Community High School social studies teacher Jack Vanderflught said not only is it an important part to play in making the democratic process official, but he'll also be bringing that experience back to his classroom.

"You know in part because I've been a part of the process a long time, I thought it was an important role," Vanderflught said. "But I also did want to be able to share this with my students a little bit, so they have more of an insider view of what the process looks like and maybe encourage them to want to do it themselves."

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USA Today: President-elect Donald Trump sues Des Moines Register, Gannett over Iowa election poll

Bart Jansen

President-elect Donald Trump sued the Des Moines Register and its parent company, Gannett Co. Inc., over its publication of a poll before the election that he called "fraud and election interference" for saying he trailed his Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, in Iowa.

The lawsuit filed on Monday in Polk County District Court asks for unspecified damages under the state's Consumer Fraud Act. It seeks "accountability for brazen election interference committed by" the newspaper and pollster J. Ann Selzer over the poll published Nov. 2 — three days before the voting was completed — that showed Harris leading Trump by 3 percentage points in Iowa. Trump won the state by 13 percentage points.

The lawsuit also said the "egregious" polling miss in favor of Democrats came "just days before the most consequential election in memory," and that its results were apparently "leaked" because Democratic Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker mentioned the poll's findings during a meeting with Duke University alumni hours before the results were published.

"In my opinion, it was fraud and it was election interference," Trump told reporters Monday.

Lark-Marie Anton, a spokesperson for the Des Moines Register, said the company stands by its reporting and will vigorously defend the First Amendment.

"We have acknowledged that the Selzer/Des Moines Register pre-election poll did not reflect the ultimate margin of President Trump's Election Day victory in Iowa by releasing the poll's full demographics, crosstabs, weighted and unweighted data, as well as a technical explanation from pollster Ann Selzer," Anton said in a statement. "We stand by our reporting on the matter and believe this lawsuit is without merit."

Selzer told USA TODAY she had no comment on the lawsuit.

Gannett is also the parent company of USA TODAY.

Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Salem Civic Center, in Salem, Virginia, on Nov. 2, 2024.

Trump has sued media companies repeatedly with complaints about coverage of him. Some legal experts say Trump's comments and legal actions risk discouraging coverage of his incoming administration.

A federal judge dismissed Trump's \$475 million lawsuit against CNN in July 2023 over the cable network referring to his description of election fraud in 2020 as a "big lie."

ABC News reached a \$15 million settlement Dec. 14 with Trump over a George Stephanopoulos question to a House member in March about a lawsuit columnist E. Jean Carroll filed against Trump.

Stephanopoulos mischaracterized Trump as having been found liable for rape in a civil trial. A jury found him liable for sexual assault. Trump is appealing the verdict.

ABC issued a statement of regret and agreed to contribute the money to Trump's future presidential library.

Still pending is a \$10 billion federal lawsuit against CBS News that Trump filed in October. The lawsuit alleged "election and voter interference" through the editing of an interview with Harris broadcast on "60 Minutes." The editing sought to "deceive, and mislead the public" to favor Harris, the lawsuit said.

CBS called the allegations "false" and said in a network statement "the interview was not doctored."

Trump: Lawsuits 'straighten out the press'

During his press conference Monday, Trump said of lawsuits against Gannett and CBS: "It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press."

Trump had previously called for an investigation of Selzer.

"She's a very good pollster," Trump said Monday. "She knows what she was doing."

Selzer wrote in a November analysis — before the lawsuit was filed — that she was uncertain what caused the poll results.

"To cut to the chase, I found nothing to illuminate the miss," she wrote.

Iowa attorney part of Trump legal team in case

Representing Trump in the case are attorneys Edward Paltzik of New York and Alan Ostergren of Des Moines.

Paltzik is listed on his LinkedIn site as litigation director for the National Constitutional Law Union, a nonprofit that described itself on its website as "the answer to the useless and radically leftist American Civil Liberties Union."

Ostergren is the former Muscatine County attorney. In private practice since 2020, he has represented a variety of Iowa conservatives and conservative organizations in litigation over constitutional and election issues.

In the run-up to the 2020 election, the Trump campaign, the Republican National Committee and other national groups hired Ostergren to intervene in a lawsuit over absentee ballot procedures, then to bring several more suits against counties he said were flouting the rules. He won both at the district and appeals court levels.

He also represented Republican Mariannette Miller-Meeks that year in her successful bid to be certified as the elected U.S. representative for Iowa's 1st Congressional District after recounts and challenges to her six-vote victory.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: McKinley, Keomah lakes among several slated for major restoration in 2025

Cami Koons

A report from the Lake Restoration Program with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources details the completion of several years-long restoration projects in 2024 and outlines major project plans in 2025.

The annual report is open to review and public comment through Dec. 18.

Michelle Balmer, who works with the program, said the lake restoration projects involve community partners, watershed studies and various forms of construction to “protect that lake for the next generation of users.”

“We see this as being not only important for environmental protection, but also it’s a service that all you Iowans get to utilize,” Balmer said. “We want to make sure they have quality places to go recreating.”

Since the program was established by the Legislature in 2006, it has removed 5 million cubic yards of excess sediment from lakes, enhanced 14,000 acres of wetlands and shallow lakes and has made use of \$167 million in funding from the state to improve 72 lakes across the state.

2024 major project completions

The report highlights four major projects the department considers completed or nearly completed from 2024. Major restorations were completed at Casey Lake in Black Hawk County, Silver Lake in Dickinson County, Three Mile Lake in Union County and a shallow lake and wetland project at West Swan Lake in Emmet County.

The four projects represent \$9.6 million in state allocated funds, federal grants and local partnerships.

According to the report, restoration at these lakes included the construction and restoration of sediment and nutrient control ponds, shoreline work, improvements to surrounding timber, sediment removal or fish habitat work, among other strategies.

Balmer said each project is different, but the Three Mile Lake project, for example, represents about seven years of work from initial watershed and community studies, to building new fish habitat and now waiting for the water to fill back up.

“We often spend a year or two learning more about the lake ... trying to understand what the issues are, why water quality is being negatively impacted,” Balmer said. “And then, what strategies can we try and employ that’ll help improve water quality, update infrastructure, improve habitat for aquatic life and provide better recreational opportunities.”

Balmer said at Three Mile Lake, the department was able to create two in-lake silt basins, which she described as berms that help to slow water down and allow the sediment to drop out before the water enters the lake.

Other practices like basins or terraces on state-owned land upstream help to keep sediment from washing into the lake.

Balmer said Three Mile lake is an important fishing destination for many Iowans and visitors to the state, and the lake also serves as a drinking water reservoir which were “important implications” for improving water quality at the lake.

Major projects slated for fiscal year 2025-2026

Balmer said like the other projects, those highlighted for the upcoming fiscal year have been in the works for several years, but are qualified as a major project this year due to large investments toward the restorations.

McKinley Lake in Union County will have an estimated \$3.58 million project to remove excess sediment, restore shoreline, add park amenities, upgrade parts of the dam and build an upstream wetland. The project

is a 50-50 cost share between the Lake Restoration Program funds and the City of Creston.

Balmer said the department tries to couple restoration projects with other planned projects to make the most out of times when the campgrounds, roads or parks are closed.

Green Valley Lake and Prairie Rose Lake will undergo alum treatments in the spring to improve water quality by inactivating excess phosphorous in the water. This project is an estimated \$1.7 million.

Diamond Lake in Poweshiek County is slated to have \$455,000 in improvements to sediment control ponds and streambank erosion control.

The biggest investment will be at Lake Keomah in Mahaska County, which is scheduled to have shoreline stabilization, sediment removal, boat ramp improvements and upgraded dam and spillway components. According to the report, the project is estimated to cost \$4.3 million.

“Most of our lakes in the state are man made,” Balmer said. “That means there’s a dam that’s impounding water, essentially, and just like your house or any other major thing, there’s maintenance needed.”

Balmer said the Lake Keomah project has been in the works about 10 years. Past efforts have included improvements to surrounding timber and collaboration with homeowners along the lake. According to the report, the projects at Lake Keomah are estimated to wrap up between fiscal year 2027 and 2029.

The rest of the report details projects that are in earlier phases of planning, explains the department’s project selection process and further breaks down funding and project costs.

Balmer said Iowan can reach out to her with questions or comments on the report through Dec. 18.

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WHO13: State Auditor Rob Sand releases FY 23 audit for Iowa Judicial branch

Zach Fisher

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa state officials have been sparring over the Iowa Judicial Branch having \$26 million in misallocated funds, and an audit of the branch was released Tuesday morning.

State Auditor Rob Sand (D) released the audit for Fiscal Year 2023 for the branch. A coding error wrongly distributed the funds from unpaid debt collections over the last three fiscal years.

“Every single one of these programs had money sitting in their account this entire time,” said Auditor Sand (D).

The report shows the funds that were wrongly distributed to seven state funds, and includes a chart of the lowest monthly cash balance for each of the seven funds over the last three years. Sand used that to show the different funds still had enough money to continue providing the services as normal.

Those comments and the audit report comes after Republican lawmakers criticized Sand’s office for not warning lawmakers that there was an issue in coding. Sand at a news conference Tuesday said that it was

changes made in a bill passed by Iowa Republicans in the 2020 session that started the coding issue.

“The lion’s share of it started when they passed these bills in June, making them live in July, and then in the following session they actually passed another bill making changes retroactively” said Sand. “So they were supposed to, in the judicial branch, not only change the coding but then go back and figure out, okay, how do we undo what we have been doing over the last year?”

Sand recommended that lawmakers act this session so those \$26 million can go to the correct funds in the judicial branch.

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WHO13: Iowa invests \$3.5M to give every 1st grader book packs to take home

Griffin Wright

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Iowa Department of Education spent \$3.5 million to give every 1st grader in the state book packs they can take home and keep to improve their reading skills.

The book packs contain multiple decodable books — books that have words kids can sound out and read at home to improve their literacy.

Council appoints Ankeny’s first female mayor

The books in the book packs are part of the curriculum based on the science of reading which, put simply, focuses on teaching kids to sound out parts of words and then putting them together to learn to read.

First-grade teacher Kari Osborne at Des Moines’ Findley Elementary School, said it’s important for parents to help their kids learn to read using the decodable book packs.

“Families don’t always know exactly what’s going on in our day. And so we would really want them to know that this is something that they’re working on. They’ve been working really hard on learning to read. And that’s our goal, is to get them to learn to read and to enjoy reading. So we want them to do this with their families at home too,” Osborne said.

On the first page of every book in the book packs is information on the reading skill the book focuses on and a QR code parents can scan for more information on how to instruct their kids.

To learn more about the decodable book packs visit the Department of Education’s website.

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WOI: Survey: Iowa farmland prices dip 3.1%, breaking five-year growth trend

Caleb Geer

DES MOINES, Iowa — The average value of Iowa farmland has fallen in 2024, according to the Iowa State

Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) and the annual Iowa State Land Value Survey.

The state average decline of 3.1% breaks an upward trend in land value the state has seen over the past five years, according to CARD. Last year, state average land value was reported at a 3.7% increase over the previous year.

The average decrease in value of an acre of farmland was measured at \$369 by CARD, leading to an average value of \$11,467 an acre.

The decrease in value comes after a long growth in value and record-setting peak hit in 2023.

Land Value Survey — Overview

75 counties of Iowa's 99 reported a decrease in farmland value in the 2024 survey.

Counties

O'Brien County had highest average value per acre at \$15,921, after a reported decrease of 2.4% or \$392 from year before

Appanoose County had the lowest average value per acre at \$6,840, after a reported increase of 7.7% or \$486 from year before

Shelby County had the largest dollar amount loss in average value per acre, down \$1,170

Wayne County had the largest percentage amount loss in average value per acre, down 9.7%

Wayne County had the largest dollar amount increase in average value per acre however, up \$690

Decatur County had the largest percentage amount increase in average value per acre, up 10.5%

Osceola County had the lowest percentage and dollar value average increases, up 0.1% and \$3

Land quality

"Low quality" land across Iowa now averages \$7,450 per acre, down 2.8% or \$215

"Medium quality" land across Iowa now averages \$10,740 per acre, down 3.0% or \$335

"High quality" land across Iowa now averages \$13,930 per acre, down 2.6% or \$367

Most mentioned negative factor affecting decline in land value was lower commodity prices

Others negative factors were cited to include long-term interest rates, higher input costs and cash/credit availability

Most mentioned positive factor affecting land value was limited land supply

Others positive factors were cited to include strong yields, cash/credit availability and strong demand for land

CARD's web portal is available here, and offers visualization tools allowing for in-depth analysis and comparison.

Breaking the trend

"We saw land values rise for five straight years, including surges of 29% and 17%, which naturally leads to a reset or balancing in the market," said Dr. Rabail Chandio, who is responsible for the annual land survey. "If we look back to the previous peak in 2013, the market 'adjusted' with relatively small declines spread over a few years."

CARD cites the fact that "when adjusting for inflation, the 2024 average value is 2.5% lower than 2013's inflation adjusted values."

Chandio said that high interest rates of the previous two years have continued to affect farmland value, and that rate cuts are not enough yet to ease the pressure.

"It takes time—sometimes up to a decade—for interest rate changes to fully ripple through the land market," she said.

Increases in the face of statewide average decrease

The only counties to see increase or no change in average farmland value are:

Adair (0.9%)
Adams (3.8%)
Allamakee (3.8%)
Appanoose (7.7%)
Cedar (1.1%)
Clarke (5.3%)
Clinton (1.2%)
Decatur (10.5%)
Dubuque (3.7%)
Jackson (0.1%)
Jefferson (0.9%)
Jones (1.8%)
Linn (0.4%)
Lucas (5.7%)
Lyon (0.5%)
Madison (0.4%)
Monroe (0.6%)
Muscatine (0.8%)
Osceola (No change)
Ringgold (4.4%)
Taylor (5.3%)
Union (3.1%)
Van Buren (1.8%)
Wayne (10.3%)

The only crop-reporting district to report an increase in average value was the Iowa South Central District which most of the above counties are included in.

Only minimal decreases were seen in the other two southern districts, revealing a stable trend Chandio said.

CARD said the survey is based on "Reports by agricultural professionals knowledgeable of land market conditions, such as appraisers, farm managers, agricultural lenders, and actual land sales, and is intended to provide information on general land value trends, geographical land price relationships, and factors influencing the Iowa land market."

What factors are causing the decrease in value?

Survey respondents pointed to falling commodity prices and increasing input costs for farming as well. Farm income is expected to follow the decrease in land value, falling 4.1% according to CARD. However, this is a significantly smaller decrease than last year's reported fall of 17.4%.

However, livestock markets could bring some stability to collapsing farm income, Chandio said.

"While crop receipts are down, livestock receipts are up 8.4%, offering some balance," he said. "So, livestock markets, like cattle and hogs, have fared relatively better, but high input costs are still exerting enough pressure to keep margins very tight."

In the short term, survey respondents are expecting declines in the next year, with 58% figuring on continued drop in value. Most believed a fall of around 5% will occur.

In the long term however, looking at the next five years, 80% of respondents are expecting land values to

increase, with 36% expecting an increase of 10-20%.

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WOI: Polk County Board of Supervisors approves new immigrant and refugee welcome center

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — A new immigrant and refugee welcome center is coming to Des Moines after receiving approval from the Polk County Board of Supervisors.

The board unanimously approved the welcome center, Global Neighbors, at its meeting Tuesday. The facility will be located at 1900 Carpenter Avenue. Officials said the location was strategically selected to be near bus routes and many other social service providers.

The goal of Global Neighbors is to provide a hub for refugees and immigrants to access services related to employment, housing and education, as well as help people transition into their new lives.

"Each person who enters Global Neighbors brings with them a unique story—a story of resilience, courage, and dreams for a better future," said Polk County Board Chair Angela Connolly. "This unique facility will ensure our newest residents have the resources available to make the transition to their new community as smooth as possible."

The facility will include a computer lab, classrooms and office spaces for immigrant and refugee-related nonprofits. On the exterior, the building will feature murals and landscaping.

"Vibrant colors of joy will be in the lobby, and open office spaces will provide warmth and natural light throughout the space. The designated private spaces will be acoustically sheltered to enable confidential and sensitive conversations," said Mak Suceska, manager of operations for Global Neighbors.

Redevelopment of the property will begin in early 2025, with the hopes of opening the facility by the end of 2025.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Auditor Rob Sand says his office did not ignore court spending errors

Robin Opsahl

Iowa Auditor Rob Sand disputed claims made by Republican leaders that his office was aware of a coding error that led to a misallocation of court debt funds years before taking action on the issue.

Sand held a news conference Tuesday about his report on the Iowa Judicial Branch, which found that \$27.5 million in court debt receipts had been misallocated due to a coding error. The report had followed up on

letters sent to the auditor's office by House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen that more than \$53 million of these funds had been misallocated — an amount Sand said was inaccurate.

In an October letter to Sand, Grassley wrote that the auditor's office had been alerted of a financial irregularity by the Department of Transportation in 2022, but that these issues were not mentioned in the judicial branch audits for fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

"I am writing to gain an understanding from you as to why your office has taken no action since being made aware of these drastic issues at least two years ago," Grassley wrote. "The State Auditor's office exists for this very purpose. When you are made aware of misallocated funds by a branch of government, it is your duty to lowans to investigate, alert the public, and seek to rectify the issue. Your inaction in this case is baffling and inexcusable. If there is any other explanation why it appears that the taxpayer's watchdog was sleeping on the job, I would be very interested to hear it."

Sand said the auditor's office has been in contact with officials from the state judicial branch and DOT multiple times after being notified of the issue in October 2022, and that the office remained in contact with the judicial branch in conducting internal and independent investigations into the issue.

According to the auditor's report, there were seven state funds that were under-allocated because of the error from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 — the largest being the Road Use Tax Fund, which was under-allocated by more than \$10.4 million, and the Victim Compensation Fund by \$7.2 million. In the same time period, the state general fund received an over-allocation of \$27.5 million, in addition to the SOS Revolving Fund being over-allocated \$90,174 and the Jury Witness Fund by \$74,166.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird released a statement in October criticizing the auditor's office for failing to catch the misallocation related to the Victim Compensation Fund that goes toward services like sexual assault examinations, medical reimbursements and counseling.

"No domestic violence victim should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave," Bird said. "The State's self-proclaimed 'taxpayer watchdog' failed at the most basic job of being an auditor: conducting an audit. Crime victims should not have to worry about whether victim services will be there when they need them."

But Sand pushed back against Bird's characterization of the issue, saying that the underfunded government accounts never ran out of money when they were impacted by the error.

Sand asked for an apology to his staff for the criticism of the auditor's office over this subject, and making it a "political" issue.

"I'm asking again, the people who distort the facts around this issue for political gain to publicly apologize to our staff — I would settle for a private apology to our staff that works on these issues," Sand said. "These accountants and the auditors in this office, they work long hours. It is a difficult profession to be in right now, ... Our employees know that their families and their friends are seeing these headlines, and they know that they're doing their job, they know that they are doing good quality work. But because of these attacks, they have to deal with it. They shouldn't have to, and they deserve an apology."

Paulsen, speaking with reporters Tuesday, said although the funds impacted by the error retained money despite the misallocation, it does not mean services — and their recipients in the state — were not affected by the lack of funds.

"You don't spend your bank account down to zero every month, and neither do state entities funded by

court debt,” Paulsen said. “When the funds run low, you cut back and so do state entities. Have citizens been harmed? That’s a question the Legislature should ask.”

While Sand said his office has never had staff with the ability to review coding to check for problems like in this case, Paulsen said the fact the misallocation occurred because of a coding error should not have prevented the office from being able to identify the funding irregularities.

“Don’t get bogged down in thinking auditing has anything to do with coding or programming a computer,” Paulsen said. “... [I]f that was the case, that you had to understand some computer language to audit, then how does the auditor of state do a single audit? How do they go from agency to agency? ... There’s still a few very small communities who use paper, but otherwise, there’s no government in the state of Iowa that doesn’t have their financials in the computer system. So if that’s a limitation, how do they ... do any of their audits? And the truth is, they do, because it’s not a limitation.”

The programming errors that led to the funds misallocations were found to have likely began after changes were made to the judicial branch’s information technology system for the process for distributing judicial fees and fines to government programs in 2020 and 2021, as directed by the Iowa Legislature.

While the error has been fixed moving forward, the misallocation that occurred in previous years cannot be fixed through administrative action, although the Legislature could take action when lawmakers reconvene in January 2025.

State Court Administrator Robert Gast said in a letter Dec. 6 that the judicial branch has implemented “new programming to correct programming errors in its case management system” as of Nov. 22, 2024, including retroactive corrections to distributions dating back to July 1, 2024. It has also contracted with a third party to review programming changes made to the branch’s IT system, is working with the state auditor “to set up an engagement to review the financial findings and verify that the over and under allocation numbers and the funds impacted as calculated by JBIT are accurate” and is developing an internal process to audit future programming changes.

“The branch cannot move funds that were misallocated in prior fiscal years,” Gast wrote. “We are interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders to correct all misallocations from FY21 through FY24.”

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids School District looking into virtual snow days

Emily Schrad

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Snow days in Iowa are almost unavoidable. But those winter days off, lead to more time in the classroom in late spring.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking at incorporating virtual learning to cut down on make-up days at the end of the year.

Schools across the state can use up to five virtual learning days a year, and the Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking to take advantage of those days during winter weather.

Chief of Schools Linda Reysack said students would have a variety of activities to work on, including physical work packets to take home or school work online.

"We are looking at having some online opportunities for students who can join by Google Classroom, some office hours from our staff, but really identifying activities that all students pre-K12 can do at home without technology," said Reysack.

Reysack said they started looking into the virtual snow day option when many families expressed the desire to be done with the year by the first week of June.

But she says right now opinions of the plan are still about 50/50.

"Some families and staff are very appreciative of the option to look at virtual learning. And other families say that it will be a hindrance to them because of childcare, but childcare will also be an issue whether we have a snow day and it's not virtual learning. So it is a very mixed bag," she said.

And while most students look forward to a day off in the snow...

"We don't want to take away the opportunity for students to get outside and play on those snow days," Reysack said.

Reysack said not every snow day will be a virtual learning day.

She added it will be on a case-by-case basis.

"At the beginning of this year, we let out early on a couple of different days due to the heat. So on days when students are already in school, learning is already occurring we have the opportunity then to send information home with our students and continue learning at home," Reysack said. "If the weather is predicted to be... if the wind chill is cold, we know that students probably will not be outside playing on those days and we have enough warning ahead of time, we would then let our students know and our families know that that might be a virtual learning day."

Reysack said packets would be sent home in the days before bad weather is in the forecast.

The final plan will be presented to the board in January. If it passes, it will be implemented starting next school year.

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KCRG: District Court reverses termination of Dubuque teacher heard using racial slur in social media video
Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - A district court has reversed the decision to terminate the contract of a Dubuque Hempstead teacher who was fired after a video of him using a racial slur spread on social media.

Roger Poling, a Dubuque Hempstead High School staff member, was heard using a racial slur in front of a Black student in a short video in May 2023.

However, according to a ruling from the district court, the school board's decision to terminate Poling's contract ignores the context surrounding the moment Poling said the slur.

The ruling says Poling had repeated the word back to the student in an attempt to explain the student's misconduct.

The court said while repeating the word is abhorrent, the Board's choice to ignore the context from which the exchange occurred diminishes the Board's finding of just cause.

Poling testified that when he tried to get students to return to their respective classrooms, one student gave a "smart" response to him, another pretended he didn't speak English, and a third student said to Poling, "whattcha looking at n[-word]."

When Poling addressed the student, the student asked, "what did I do," or "what did I say?"

To which Poling initially responded, "you know what you said."

After more questioning from the student, Poling said, "you said, 'whattcha looking at n[-word].'"

Students are then heard yelling in response to what Poling said in the short video that went viral. However, the court said the surveillance video, which shows more of the context, also shows the student rush off, laughing or smiling.

The court in its ruling called the Dubuque Community School Board's decision "reactive, rather than initiative-taking," in terms of how it addressed the issue.

It also said the Board's decision was not based on substantial evidence, and that it was "irrational and arbitrary, weighing the entirety of the roughly five minute encounter against Poling's past performance, and by relying on improperly admitted evidence to do so."

The court said the school board also missed a teachable moment in which it could have instructed students and teachers on the mutual respect required in a school to promote a safe and inclusive environment.

With his termination reversed, Poling is reinstated.

The Dubuque Community School District responded by saying it "is obviously disappointed in the ruling of the Iowa District Court and we believe the Board acted appropriately in the matter. We are working with the district's legal counsel to review the decision in its entirety and determine next steps, including discussing potential options for appeal of the decision."

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KCRG: Iowa State Auditor: No programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors
Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa (KCRG) - Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand says no programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors.

On Tuesday morning, Sand's office released a report of the Iowa Judicial Branch for the fiscal year that ended in June 2023.

In a letter in October, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley wrote that the Iowa Judicial System had misallocated more than 53-million dollars since 2021 because of a computer error.

Republicans blamed Sand for not alerting them.

But Sand released a detailed timeline that both the Governor's office and Judicial system were well aware of the issue.

He says this was the result of last second changes to Iowa law, that didn't give them enough time to procedures in place, leading to the errors.

While the audit shows that problems are being fixed, Sand says Iowa lawmakers will need to make changes to reallocate the misappropriated funds.

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Iowa News Now: \$55.1 million plan to bring affordable housing community to Dubuque

Tyler Downey

DUBUQUE, Iowa — A housing development company has announced plans to build a \$55.1 million affordable housing community in Dubuque.

The Annex Group, the company behind the project, says the housing community will be geared towards households whose income level is at or below 70% of the area median income.

They're calling it "Union at the Marina" and it will be built in a currently vacant lot at 2660 Kerper Boulevard in Dubuque.

Union at the Marina will feature two four-story buildings that will have a total of 201 units and include one, two and three-bedroom options.

"We are thrilled to bring this project to Dubuque," David Wesner, VP of Development for The Annex Group, said. "The city has been a catalyst in addressing their housing need, and we are honored to be able to work with them to meet the overwhelming demand in their community. With floorplans to meet the needs of different households, as well as a dynamic amenity package including a rooftop deck with views of the river, we think this property will be a place people enjoy living."

Residents at the east end of the community will have a view of the river. Two schools, a park, pharmacy, grocery store and post office are all nearby and there will be several different amenities for residents, including a playground, community center, fitness center, picnic area, dog walking area and on-site property management.

Union at the Marina is expected to open in fall of 2026.

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The Gazette: Iowa courts implement new program to correct error that misallocated \$27.5M

Erin Murphy

DES MOINES — A coding error that caused Iowa courts to misallocate over \$27.5 million in court fees has been addressed and a new program was implemented last month, Iowa Judicial Branch officials have said.

In a report released Tuesday by the State Auditor's Office, the Iowa Judicial Branch said on Nov. 22 the courts implemented new programming to correct previous errors that led to the misallocations. The changes will ensure the future distribution of court fees works as required by state law, the Judicial Branch said in the report.

In Iowa, funds paid to the courts in the form of fines, fees and penalties in criminal cases are distributed to various sources, including state funds for victim compensation, emergency services, road infrastructure, county attorneys and the state's general fund.

Under the state's distribution system, clerks of courts enter court fees into a coding program that is supposed to channel those funds to the proper source. But the Iowa Judicial Branch in October revealed that coding errors sent more than \$27.5 million to the state's general fund instead of some of those other state funds and programs. The courts had been investigating the issue for more than two years.

According to the Judicial Branch's investigation, more than \$10.4 million should have gone to the state fund that supports infrastructure work on roads and bridges, \$7.2 million should have gone to a state program that helps victims of violent crimes with certain expenses, and \$4 million should have gone to a fund that supports juvenile detention homes.

The Iowa general fund, where most of the allocations were sent by error, currently has a \$2 billion surplus, according to the state's nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency.

According to the Iowa Judicial Branch, the programming issues arose in the 2021 state budget year after lawmakers changed the court fees distribution system during the 2020 and 2021 legislative sessions.

The new laws in consecutive years required programming changes to the distribution system. A report from the National Center for State Courts said the state law changes created confusion in implementing the new coding.

In the report Tuesday, the State Auditor Rob Sand's office recommends the Judicial Branch complete necessary programming changes to ensure the proper allocation of court debt. The report also recommends the Judicial Branch work with Iowa Department of Management and the Iowa Legislature to address the erroneous allocations.

Sand's report also recommends that future funding changes made by the Iowa Legislature not take effect "until state branches and agencies have sufficient time to accurately and carefully make all necessary changes."

A Judicial Branch spokesman said Tuesday that the courts cooperated fully with the auditor's office and does not dispute any of its findings.

The Judicial Branch also in its report response said it is "interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders" to correct the earlier misallocations. While the new programming was designed to fix future fee distribution and the courts have applied fixes retroactively to the start of the state budget year on July 1, erroneous distribution from previous years requires action by the Iowa Legislature.

The issue of those misallocated court fees has sparked a series of accusations between some of Iowa's state agency heads and one legislative leader that started in October and continued Tuesday.

Sand, a Democrat, has defended his office's work on the issue and accused other state leaders of playing politics in their criticism of his office.

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird — all Republicans — have accused Sand and his office of not acting sooner and not doing all his office should to address the issue.

The latest round of allegations started Tuesday when Sand held a news conference highlighting his office's report. Sand said the report shows that while others "have been pushing politics as usual" and wasting taxpayers' money, his office has been doing its job.

Sand called on those who have criticized his office to apologize to the accountants who work there, and said he is proud of their work.

"Sometimes you got to laugh so you don't cry. I mean this stuff is just so ridiculous," Sand said. "If you have to make stuff up to attack the person that's holding you accountable, the office that's holding you accountable, then that office must be doing a pretty good job."

A statement from Melissa Saitz, the spokeswoman for Grassley and Iowa House Republicans, criticized Sand for not compiling a report sooner and not including more information in it.

"We're glad that Auditor Sand took a break from his Twitter account to do the work the people of Iowa elected him to do," Saitz said. "It's concerning that it took scrutiny from Republicans in the Legislature and executive branch for the Auditor to release the audit reports and even briefly mention the misallocation of millions of public funds by the Judicial Branch."

"This report, however, far from answers all our questions. Iowa House Republicans just learned about this issue in September and are still working to understand the full implications. We look forward to working this session to get our questions answered and this issue rectified."

Bird, whose office manages the Victims Compensation Fund that has been shorted \$7.2 million, pushed back on Sand's assertion that previous criticism of his office was unwarranted because none of the programs that were shorted ever ran out of funding.

"Rob Sand blew it, and now he is lying to cover up his mess," Bird said in a statement. "With the money State Auditor Sand's failure cost crime victims, we would have been able to provide 3,600 domestic violence survivors and their kids apartments, for the first time in years, as a safe escape from a violent situation. No domestic violence victims should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave. And our State Auditor owes Iowa crime victims an apology."

The Victim Compensation Fund's monthly balance never dipped below roughly \$2.7 million during the time the fees were erroneously allocated, according to Sand's report.

Paulsen told reporters Tuesday that he thinks Iowa taxpayers are owed an apology. He, too, said Sand's office should have acted sooner and that its report should have gone deeper.

"This clearly is something that we as state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled, and nor do I think we met their expectations," Paulsen said. "And I think in particular, as already laid out, we should have been notified sooner, and we should have been in finding out what was right and what was wrong sooner."

Sand said the Auditor's Office moved forward with its work as soon as it had sufficient information, which he said it did not have until the Judicial Branch released its information in October.

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WQAD8: Police: Referee assaulted by parent at Burlington basketball game

Alec Doxsee

BURLINGTON, Iowa — Update:

Burlington Police obtained an arrest warrant for Urban Morris of Burlington on the following charges: assault (serious misdemeanor), assault (simple misdemeanor), disorderly conduct, and two counts of first-degree harassment.

A criminal complaint filed in the case states that Morris was upset with a call made by a referee that he disagreed with.

The affidavit states the following:

Officers learned while en route the suspect had fled the area. Officers arrived on scene and were approached by witnesses stating the suspect was Urban Morris. Officers were then able to speak with both Victim 1 and Victim 2. Officers first spoke with Victim 1 and learned that he was the referee in the basketball game. At the end of the game a call was made at which point Morris disagreed with the call. Victim 1 stated that Morris approached him as well as Victim 2 and was upset about the call that was made. Victim 1 stated that Morris threatened both Victims by stating he was going to "kill" both Victims and then "find their families".

Victim 1 then traveled to the locker room area which parents/spectators are not permitted to go in. Victim 1 stated he was going into the locker room to attempt to retrieve his phone to call 911. Victim 1 then stated that he turned around and was punched in the nose by Morris who had followed him into the locker room. Victim 1 stated he was struck with a closed fist at which point he fell over a bench and Morris repeatedly struck Victim 1 approximately 7 or 8 times before Morris left the area. Victim 1 had visible swelling around his nose/eye region.

Officers then spoke with Victim 2. Victim 2 stated that he was also a referee in the game at which point the call was made and Morris became upset. Victim 2 stated that he did have his phone on his person at which point he removed his phone to call 911 at which point Morris stated "Call the Police" and "I will kill you" and stated he was going to "find his family". Victim 2 stated he was in fear that Morris was going to harm his

(family) due to the comments that were made.

Morris turned himself into the Des Moines County Jail and was booked on the charges on Tuesday, Dec. 17. There is a preliminary hearing set for Dec. 27.

Lucasfilm's Special Effects: Dallas Steps Into Ironman's Footsteps -The Gadget Show #TBT
featured by
Original story:

The Burlington Police Department said charges are expected after a parent reportedly assaulted a referee following a basketball game.

According to a Facebook post, police responded to Edward Stone Middle School around 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 13 regarding the assault. Burlington Police confirmed the game was a freshman/junior varsity game that was taking place at the middle school.

Officials have identified the parent and criminal charges are expected. Further details will be released by the Burlington Police Department once an arrest has been made.

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DMR: Rob Sand: Iowa judicial branch has fixed computer error that caused \$27.5M misallocation

Stephen Gruber-Miller

Computer coding errors that prompted the Iowa Judicial Branch to send \$27.5 million in court fees to the wrong accounts over a five-year period have been fixed, State Auditor Rob Sand said Tuesday.

Sand on Tuesday released his annual audit of the Iowa Judicial Branch for fiscal year 2023, which began July 1, 2022, and ended June 30, 2023. The report includes an examination of millions of dollars misallocated by the Iowa Judicial Branch since 2020.

At a news conference Tuesday discussing the audit, Sand said future court debt payments will now be sent to the right accounts.

"It should be fixed going forward," Sand said.

Coding changes to resolve the problem were implemented on Nov. 22, according to Sand's report.

Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand speaks during a press conference at the Iowa State Capitol on Wednesday, Aug. 28, 2024, in Des Moines.

"On Nov. 22, 2024, the judicial branch implemented new programming to correct programming errors in its case management system," the Iowa Judicial Branch said in a response included in Sand's audit. "These changes, along with adjustments to retroactively correct distributions back to July 1, 2024, are being made to ensure that court debt revenue is distributed as required by Iowa code."

Republicans have criticized Sand, a Democrat, for not doing more to investigate the judicial branch's error sooner.

"He didn't take action provided on a tip provided in the summer of 2022, and this is the real concern here," said Kraig Paulsen, the director of the Iowa Department of Management and a Republican.

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen speaks during a hearing with the state Boards and Commissions Review Committee at the Iowa State Capitol on Wednesday, September 6, 2023 in Des Moines. Sand said his office became aware of the issue in October 2022, which falls in fiscal year 2023, and is including its findings in the FY 2023 report. He said his office has been in touch with the Iowa judicial branch since it initially informed him of the problem.

Sand said Tuesday the Iowa judicial branch only recently provided him the final totals that had been misallocated.

"We can't audit what we haven't been provided," he said. "So the final numbers from the judicial branch just came to us in either late October or early November. And so we couldn't really issue this until we had that."

How much money did the Iowa judicial branch misallocate?

In all, the Iowa judicial branch incorrectly misallocated \$27.5 million to the state's general fund, resulting in various state and local government funds being shorted by the same amount.

Of the money that went to the general fund, \$23.6 million should have been sent to other state programs, while \$3.9 million should have been sent to local government programs.

Eight state programs were underfunded as a result of the errors, including two that fall under the state's general fund.

Iowa's Criminal Laboratory received \$1,761,657 less than it should have.

The D.A.R.E. Surcharge was shorted \$139,624.

The Department of Transportation Operating Fund-84 received \$6,359 less.

The Road Use Tax Fund was shorted \$10,425,636.

The Sex Offender Registry received \$102,933 less.

The Victim Compensation Fund received \$7,226,185 less.

The the Iowa Department of Revenue Collection Fee within the state's general fund received \$53,854 less than it should have.

The Juvenile Detention Home Fund within the state's general fund received \$4,105,663 less.

Three state funds received more money than they should have.

Iowa's general fund received \$27,553,261 more than it should have.

The SOS Revolving Fund received \$90,174 more.

The Jury Witness Fund received \$74,166 more.

The coding issues span five fiscal years and date back at least to when a law was passed in 2020 that changed the way Iowa court debt and fees are distributed to various state and local agencies and programs.

Lawmakers passed another law in 2021 making more changes.

"There might be some coding changes that predated that, but the bottom line on this is that the lion's share of it started when they passed these bills," Sand said.

While the judicial branch can correct issues dating back to July 1, 2024, the start of the current fiscal year, it cannot move money that it distributed in previous fiscal years.

The Iowa Legislature will likely need to take action to correct the errors.

Sand said lawmakers should give the judicial branch and other state agencies more time to make the programming changes required when state law changes. The 2020 law was passed only weeks before the start of a new fiscal year, when it took effect, he said.

Sand's report recommends that "the Legislature should ensure that complicated funding changes not take effect until state branches and agencies have sufficient time to accurately and carefully make all necessary changes."

Paulsen said a further audit is needed to be certain the issue is resolved. Sand's office agreed this month to work with the Iowa judicial branch on a review that will look at the court debt misallocations and coding by the judicial branch's IT department, as well as the effect of the legislative changes to the court fee formula.

Rob Sand claims state programs had enough money to operate, but Republicans push back
Sand said every program that was shorted cash based on the error maintained enough money to continue operating while the misallocations were ongoing, Sand said.

"No program was ever shorted in a way that kept them from doing their job," Sand said.

Paulsen disputed Sand's claim.

"You don't spend your bank account down to zero every month, and neither do state entities funded by court debt," Paulsen said. "When the funds run low, you cut back, and so do state entities."

Attorney General Brenna Bird, a Republican, issued a statement saying "Rob Sand blew it."

"The truth is his failures cost crime victims \$7.2 million," she said. "With the money State Auditor Sand's failure cost crime victims, we would have been able to provide 3,600 domestic violence survivors and their kids apartments, for the first time in years, as a safe escape from a violent situation."

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Radio Iowa: Auditor says Iowa courts' multimillion dollar distribution error fixed

Kay Henderson

A report from the State Auditor's Office indicates faulty computer programming in the state's court system has been fixed for the current year, but court officials say they do not have the authority to reallocate funds to correct \$27.5 million worth of errors in previous years.

Some court fines and fees are to be distributed to cities, counties and a variety of state programs, like victim services and road construction. Lawmakers changed the formulas a few years ago, but programming errors meant the state courts were forwarding the wrong amounts.

State Auditor Rob Sand held a news conference yesterday about his report — and the distribution errors.

"It should be fixed going forward," Sand said.

Iowa Department of Management director Kraig Paulsen said court officials recently told him they believe the problem has been fixed.

"They're still going through testing, so it hasn't been finalized," Paulsen told reporters Tuesday afternoon. "Until we have an audit, it's hard to know for sure anyway."

Sand indicated court officials recently sent his office the data about where the funds had been misdirected.

"They are accurate. This is the actual number for how much this account has been overfunded and how much that account has been underfunded," Sand said. "Now that we know that, the legislature can make those adjustments."

Paulsen, the governor's budget director, said the auditor's office needs to dig deeper.

"Can we actually say that everything is 100% correct? I don't think so," Paulsen said, "because I'm not even sure we have looked at it going back far enough yet."

Paulsen, a former Republican legislator, and Sand, the only Democrat in statewide office, have been publicly feuding about the situation since October. Paulsen has said Sand failed to notify the executive branch once Sand's office was told there might be a problem. Sand said Paulsen's office knew DOT funding was affected before the auditor's office learned of it.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: In win for biofuels, stopgap spending bill allows year-round sales of E15 gas nationwide

Jacob Fischler

A spending bill U.S. House appropriators released Tuesday evening to keep the government open into next spring includes a provision to allow sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol nationwide throughout the year.

After years of prohibiting the blend, known as E15, from being sold at gas stations during the summer months, the Environmental Protection Agency this year allowed year-round sales in eight Midwestern states. The provision in the stopgap funding bill would allow E15 sales in all states throughout the year.

The provision is a major win for corn producers and their allies in Congress from both parties. Supporters of ethanol, which is derived from corn, say it boosts U.S. production and lowers gas prices.

Sen. Deb Fischer, a Nebraska Republican who sponsored a bill to make the blend available all year, said the move was part of the GOP agenda to "unleash American energy."

Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, said biofuels "champions" are fighting for the provision allowing the sale of E15 year-around. "We have been working to get a year-round E15 solution for over 10 years," he said in a statement. "It would be monumental for ethanol demand to support rural farmers and would save drivers 10 to 20 cents at the pump."

"My bill puts an end to years of patchwork regulations and uncertainty — year-round, nationwide E15 will now be a reality," Fischer said. "This legislation also delivers on the mandate we received in November to

unleash American energy. Not only will my bill lower gas prices and give consumers more choices, but it will also create new opportunity for American producers, who are especially hurting right now from lower prices.”

House Energy and Commerce ranking Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey applauded inclusion of the measure, saying it would help reduce gas prices and bolster U.S. energy production.

“By allowing for a higher blend of ethanol in our gasoline, Americans can rely more on homegrown biofuels that save drivers money at the pump and help insulate Americans from dramatic global price fluctuations,” Pallone said in a statement.

U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., one of a handful of farm-state House Republicans pushing for the E15 provision, said in a statement, “Year around E-15 is the most important policy we can embrace for Midwestern farmers and ranchers. I was glad to advocate for this on the Agriculture Committee and to our Speaker, and glad to see it embraced. I also know our entire Nebraska delegation was pulling for this. It is a team win.”

At a U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing last year, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Sen. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska promoted E15 availability as a way to lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower prices.

The EPA issued a waiver in May 2022 to allow the blend to be available nationwide throughout the year, as President Joe Biden’s administration sought to tame gas prices.

The stopgap measure, known as a continuing resolution, would keep the government funded at current levels through mid-March. It includes a few additional provisions, including funding to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland.

The House and Senate are expected to pass the catch-all measure before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill.

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States Newsroom: Huge spending bill unveiled in Congress provides more than \$100 billion in disaster aid
Jennifer Shutt

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders unveiled a catch-all, year-end package Tuesday that would provide more than \$100 billion in disaster aid and give lawmakers more time to wrap up overdue work on government funding, the farm bill and a handful of other issues they decided not to finish.

The disaster aid section of the package will bolster funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Small Business Administration and several other federal agencies to continue their ongoing response efforts following a slew of natural disasters during the last two years.

The 1,547-page package would give Congress until mid-March to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills that were supposed to become law by Oct. 1.

It also extends the farm bill through Sept. 30, 2025. In a victory for corn growers, the bill includes a provision

to allow nationwide sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol throughout the year.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said during a press conference before the bill was publicly released he had hoped the year-end stopgap spending bill would simply extend current funding until next year, when the GOP will hold the House, Senate and White House.

"But a couple of intervening things have occurred. We had, as we describe them, acts of God. We had these massive hurricanes if you know, in the late fall — Helene and Milton and other disasters," Johnson said. "We have to make sure that the Americans who were devastated by these hurricanes get the relief they need. So we are adding to this a disaster relief package and that's critically important."

"Also important is the devastation that is being faced by our farming community," he said. "The agriculture sector is really struggling. They've had effectively three lost years and commodity prices are a bit of a mess. And you have input costs that have skyrocketed because of Bidenomics."

Johnson defended his decision to attach the other provisions in the stopgap spending bill, also known as a continuing resolution. Numerous Republicans have expressed frustration with his choice to bundle all the bills together in one package, instead of moving them individually.

"We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits and that's what the volume of the pages to this is," Johnson said.

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said in a written statement she would support the bill when that chamber votes on it later this week.

"While I — and so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle — wish we were voting on full-year funding bills, I am pleased that this package includes important resources for American farmers, emergency defense investments, investments in the Virginia Class submarine program, and increased funding for child care," DeLauro wrote. "It also includes outbound investment protections I have long fought for to prevent American dollars from fueling the Chinese Communist Party's policies with our capital and capabilities."

"However, I am concerned that we could not agree on additional funding for veterans health care, and we must be vigilant in ensuring that the incoming Administration does not ration care promised to every affected veteran," DeLauro added. "The passage of this bill should mark the beginning of negotiations on final 2025 funding bills. The start of a new Congress does not change the reality that any funding bills will still need the support of Democrats and Republicans in the House and in the Senate in order to become law."

Hurricanes, tornadoes, bridge collapse

President Joe Biden asked Congress to approve nearly \$100 billion in emergency aid to bolster the accounts of several agencies that are helping residents, small businesses, farmers, and local and state governments recover from dozens of natural disasters.

The emergency supplemental request came shortly after Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused widespread devastation throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The funding will also help communities recover following tornadoes throughout the Midwest; the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland; and severe storms in Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The disaster response section of the spending package would include:

\$29 billion for FEMA's disaster relief fund

\$21 billion for disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$12 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's community development block grant program for disaster assistance

\$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$8 billion for the Department of Transportation to provide disaster relief for federal highways

\$3.25 billion for State and Tribal Assistance Grants for water infrastructure repairs.

\$2.2 billion for the Small Business Administration's disaster loan program

\$1.3 billion to replace the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland

Congress headed for finish line

The package is expected to pass the House and Senate before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill into law.

When Congress convenes again on Jan. 3 for the start of the 119th Congress, the Senate will flip from Democratic to Republican control. The House will remain red, though with a slightly smaller majority and very little, possibly no, room for GOP lawmakers to vote against partisan bills.

Republicans hope they can use unified control of Washington, which will begin after President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, to move through sweeping changes to federal spending and policy.

That is one of the reasons, Congress included a second continuing resolution in the package released this week. That stopgap spending bill will avoid a partial government shutdown until at least March 14.

That part of the bill is necessary since Congress has brushed off its responsibility to fund the government by failing to complete work on the dozen annual appropriations bills before the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1.

Lawmakers approved another stopgap spending bill in late September to keep funding levels mostly flat through Dec. 20, but did not use the extra time to negotiate a compromise between the Republican House and Democratic Senate.

GOP leaders have opted to hold over those full-year government funding measures until they control both chambers of Congress next year, in hopes they'll be able to more closely align the final versions of the 12 bills to their goals.

But Republican leaders will still need Democratic support to get the final spending bills, or another stopgap spending bill, through the Senate next year if they want to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The Senate requires at least 60 lawmakers to vote to advance major legislation toward a final, simple majority passage vote. The GOP will hold 53 seats next year, short of the requirement. Several Republican senators have also staked their reputations on consistently voting against any spending bill, making Democratic votes necessary to avoid a shutdown.

Republicans in the House will also likely need Democrats to move government funding bills through that chamber, given they too have a significant faction of members who refuse to vote for the full-year spending bills and often vote against the short-term stopgap bills as well.

Farm bill extension

The end-of-year catchall bill released Tuesday also includes another extension for the farm bill through next year, a new version of which Congress was supposed to pass more than a year ago.

Instead, lawmakers in both chambers have prioritized other interests, delaying work on the legislation that authorizes agriculture and nutrition programs.

Congress last approved a farm bill in December 2018, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said at the time would cost \$428 billion during the five years it was supposed to cover.

Funding for nutrition, crop insurance, farm commodity programs and conservation accounted for about 99% of the mandatory spending in the law, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Nutrition has become one of the higher price tag items in the farm bill during the last few decades and accounted for about \$326 billion of the mandatory spending in the 2018 farm bill. Another \$38 billion went to crop insurance, \$31 billion to commodities and \$29 billion to conservation during the five-year window that has since lapsed.

The nutrition funding goes toward several federal food programs for lower income people, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

The Republican House and Democratic Senate have been unable to work through their differences on a new five-year farm bill, despite giving themselves more than a year of extra time.

The bill lawmakers are set to approve this month will give unified Republicans in control of Washington another year to get the work done.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Immigrants and allies at U.S. Capitol urge Biden to act before Trump deportations begin

Shauneen Miranda

WASHINGTON — In the crucial last month before President Joe Biden leaves office, immigrants and allies on Tuesday urged the president to offer protections for immigrant communities before Donald Trump is inaugurated.

The president-elect has promised the largest deportation in U.S. history, stoking fear and uncertainty among undocumented immigrants and immigration advocates over a sweeping platform that marked the core of Trump's GOP presidential campaign.

Speaking near the U.S. Capitol, the "Home is Here" campaign featured immigrant youth, allies and advocates demanding Biden take executive action.

The national coalition, which fights to protect immigrant communities, also urged Congress not to boost

funding for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection during the lame-duck session in a way that would aid Trump in carrying out mass deportations. Members of Congress are expected to vote this week on a stopgap spending bill that would fund the government through mid-March.

Immigrant youth, allies and advocates traveled to Washington, D.C., from across the country, including states such as Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, New York and Utah, to rally and meet with members of Congress about their demands.

Claudia Quiñonez, organizing director of United We Dream, the nation's largest immigrant youth-led network, said "before the keys to the White House are handed over to Trump, before a new Congress takes office, this lame-duck period is (a) critical window for our members in Congress and President Biden to leave it all on the field."

Quiñonez, who is also a co-chair of the Home is Here campaign, said there is "no underestimating the length Trump is willing to go to fulfill his pledges for mass deportation in raiding our schools, our workplaces, our hospitals and our churches."

U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib also voiced her concerns Tuesday over the president-elect's immigration plans.

"We cannot underestimate, as you all know, what will unfold the moment Trump takes office in January, and we need as many people as possible working to resist this hateful agenda," the Michigan Democrat said.

Tlaib noted that Biden "still has power to take immediate executive action to protect our immigrant communities."

She also said "we must continue to work incredibly hard, not only to outwork the hate, but to really promote love and justice within our communities."

Among its priorities, the Home is Here campaign aims to protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program recipients. A federal court will determine the program's legal fate.

The Obama-era program was created in 2012 and designed to protect children who were brought into the country illegally from deportation.

Trump tried ending DACA during his first term.

During an NBC News interview earlier this month, Trump did not give specifics on what he intends to do about the program but said that he "will work with the Democrats on a plan."

Immigration groups on Tuesday also expressed worry over the uncertainty of Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, which allows migrants in countries with unsafe conditions to legally reside and work in the United States.

Trump sought to end TPS for multiple countries throughout his first administration.

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North Dakota Monitor: 13 more GOP states sign on to oppose Standing Rock Sioux in new lawsuit over DAPL

Mary Steurer

A federal judge this week allowed 13 more Republican-led states to intervene as co-defendants in the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's new lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The lawsuit, filed in October, accuses the Army Corps of unlawfully allowing the Dakota Access Pipeline to operate without an easement, a complete environmental assessment or sufficient emergency spill response plans. The tribe ultimately wants a federal judge to shut the pipeline down.

Standing Rock has opposed the pipeline for years, saying it infringes upon the tribe's sovereignty, has damaged sacred cultural sites and jeopardizes the tribe's water supply.

The Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction over a part of the pipeline that passes below the Missouri River less than a half-mile upstream from the Standing Rock Reservation.

"The Corps has failed to act and failed to protect the tribe," Standing Rock Chairwoman Janet Alkire said in an October press conference announcing the lawsuit.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe files new lawsuit over DAPL

The more than 1,000-mile pipeline, often referred to as DAPL, passes through North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois. Its pathway includes unceded land recognized as belonging to the Sioux Nation under an 1851 treaty with the U.S. government.

North Dakota joined the case on the side of the Army Corps earlier this month, arguing that closing DAPL would cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue, put thousands of jobs at risk, hamper regional supply chains and harm the environment. State attorneys also argue that a federal court order shuttering DAPL would violate North Dakota's right to regulate its own land and resources.

In a brief filed Monday, the 13 additional co-defendant states made similar arguments. The group, led by Iowa, said DAPL is integral to the health of regional energy and agriculture markets.

"DAPL plays a vital role in ensuring the nation's crops can come to market — not because DAPL itself transports agricultural products, but because every barrel of oil that DAPL transports is a barrel that does not take space in a truck or a train," the states wrote.

This also makes highways and railways safer and reduces pollution, they added.

The 13 states that joined the lawsuit this week are Iowa, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and West Virginia.

According to the states' brief, the pipeline has paid over \$100 million in property taxes to Iowa counties and over \$33 million in property taxes to South Dakota counties since it began operating in 2017.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not yet filed an answer to the tribe's lawsuit.

Energy Transfer, the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline, has not requested to intervene in the suit.

The case is before U.S. District Court Judge James Boasberg, who oversaw the tribe's 2016 lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers opposing the pipeline.

North Dakota in 2021 sought to join that lawsuit as well, but Boasberg denied the request as the case was in the process of wrapping up.

That case concluded with Boasberg instructing the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full environmental impact study of the pipeline, which is still in the works. Boasberg also ordered the pipeline to stop operating pending the completion of the study, though that demand was ultimately overturned by an appellate court.

In a separate federal court case, North Dakota seeks \$38 million from the United States government for costs the state says it incurred responding to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests.

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WCCO: Satanists' holiday display at Minnesota Capitol sparks outrage

Riley Moser

ST. PAUL, Minnesota ([WCCO](#)) -- A Satanic holiday display at the Minnesota State Capitol has some sounding the alarm but Gov. Tim Walz says he can't take it down as it is protected by the First Amendment.

The Minnesota Satanists put up its holiday display at the Capitol building in St. Paul over the weekend.

The group says on its website that members "champion the symbol of Lucifer as one of revolt against arbitrary authority and advocacy for the pursuit of knowledge." The group says members don't directly worship Satan or believe in Satan; instead, they called the display a win for "religious plurality."

Republicans have blamed Walz for letting the display go up.

"Is there anything Tim Walz won't do to insult Minnesotans?" Republican Rep. Tom Emmer tweeted.

Republican Rep. Pete Stauber agreed with Emmer's sentiment, writing on X, "When you get a DFL trifecta, you get a Satanic display at our state Capitol. During the holidays...what a disgrace. Only in Walz's Minnesota."

The governor's office says while Walz does not agree with the display and did not approve it, the First Amendment — which guarantees the freedom of religion, among others — allows for the display.

"The First Amendment means that he does not police speech in the State Capitol. That's true whether it's a religious display, a political protest, or a Minnesotan advocating for a policy," a spokesperson for Walz said in a statement to WCCO.

Last December, the Satanic Temple put up a display inside the Iowa Capitol in Des Moines that a former U.S. Navy fighter pilot was later accused of destroying. Similar to the Minnesota Satanists, the Satanic Temple says it doesn't believe in Satan but describes itself as a "non-theistic religious organization" that advocates for secularism.

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CNN: Luigi Mangione has been indicted in New York for murder of United Healthcare's CEO, multiple sources say

Staff

(CNN) — Luigi Mangione has been indicted for the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in Manhattan earlier this month, multiple law enforcement officials tell CNN.

A New York grand jury has voted to charge Mangione with murder in the first-degree and murder in the second-degree, among other charges, the officials said.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is expected to announce the indictment at a 3:30 p.m. news conference.

The 26-year-old has been fighting extradition to New York after being accused of fatally shooting Thompson on December 4, but Bragg said Friday it is possible the suspect could soon waive his right to fight being handed over to New York authorities.

If convicted of second-degree murder in New York, Mangione would face 15 years to life in prison, while a first-degree murder charge carries a sentence of 20 years to life. He is set to appear in a Pennsylvania court for a preliminary hearing next week on state charges following his December 9 arrest at a McDonald's in Altoona.

A charge of murder in the first degree is rare because it requires special elements related to the crime to be charged.

Under New York law, murder in the first-degree only applies to a narrow list of aggravating circumstances, including when the victim is a judge, a police officer or a first responder, or when the killing involves a murder-for-hire or an intent to commit terrorism, CNN has reported.

Investigators in New York believe Mangione, a former high school valedictorian and Ivy League graduate born into a well-to-do family, appeared to be driven by anger against the health insurance industry and "corporate greed," according to an NYPD intelligence report obtained by CNN.

He's scheduled to appear at a hearing in Pennsylvania Thursday in response to his petitions for writ of habeas corpus and imposition of bail, court documents show. The habeas corpus petition is a key factor in whether Mangione can be extradited to New York.

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Axios: Congress releases bill to avert holiday government shutdown

Stephen Neukam, Andrew Solender

Congressional leaders Tuesday unveiled legislation to keep the government funded until March 14, unleashing a mad dash to pass the bill by the end of the week.

Why it matters: House Speaker Mike Johnson's (R-La.) next challenge is to find a way to ram the bill through the chamber while facing heat from his right flank over his handling of the government funding negotiations.

The bill includes around \$100 billion in disaster relief, a one-year extension of the farm bill and provisions restricting U.S. investments in China.

It also includes a provision that would allow the NFL's Washington Commanders to return to the RFK Stadium site, as well as sweeping health care reforms, the details of which we reported earlier Tuesday. The stopgap bill sets up a government funding fight right at the end of President-elect Trump's first 100 days in office, adding to an already-full plate awaiting lawmakers next year. The big picture: The package includes wins for both Republicans and Democrats.

The mid-March end date for the short-term bill gives Republicans the opportunity to control funding levels for the second half of fiscal 2025.

The billions in disaster relief is a win for Democrats and Republicans in states affected by hurricanes this year — President Biden submitted a request for the funding last month. The package also includes \$10 billion in economic aid for farmers.

The restrictions on investments in China are a bipartisan win, and all four corners of congressional leadership wanted to see it make the funding bill. It was pulled out of the year-end defense authorization package last week.

The bottom line: Time is running short. Current funding runs through Dec. 20.

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FOX News: Border Patrol arrests South African national on terrorist watchlist who entered US illegally

Sarah Rumpf-Whitten, Bill Melugin

A South African national who illegally entered the U.S. landed a "positive match" on the terrorist watchlist leading to his "swift" arrest in New York City.

According to U.S. Border Patrol Chief Jason Owens, the unidentified South African national was initially detained in Texas for criminal trespassing, but was released.

A Texas Department of Public Safety official confirmed to Fox News that the migrant was first arrested on a ranch near Eagle Pass in September, then they turned him over to federal border patrol who released him.

His arrest, alongside 36 other illegal migrants, was documented and shared on social media by Lt. Chris Olivarez, the spokesperson for the Texas DPS. Olivarez said that among the group were special interest illegal immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan, India and Vietnam.

Illegal South African

U.S. Border Patrol announced the arrest of a South African national and suspected terrorist in Brooklyn, NY. (Chief Jason Owens via X)

Owens said that a further investigation revealed a "positive match on the terrorist watchlist."

The positive identification of the suspect being involved in terrorism led to a swift mutli-agency effort to

arrest the individual in Brooklyn, New York. It is unclear how or when the suspect arrived in New York City.

"Thanks to the coordination of multiple agencies, this potential threat was located, taken into custody, and is now pending removal," he said.

Fox News Digital has reached out to the Border Patrol for comment.

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FOX News: Madison, Wisconsin, school shooting suspect identified as 15-year-old girl

Stephen Sorace, Stepheny Price

A 15-year-old girl killed a teacher and teen student in a shooting on Monday at a private Christian school in Madison, Wisconsin, and wounded six others, according to authorities.

Natalie Rupnow was identified as the shooter who opened fire inside a study hall inside Abundant Life Christian School, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Responding officers found Rupnow with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. She died on the way to a hospital.

During a press conference Tuesday afternoon, Barnes said "identifying a motive is our top priority." He said the motive appears to be a combination of factors, but he did not elaborate any further.

Police were speaking with Rupnow's father and other family members, who were cooperating, and searching Rupnow's home, Barnes said. He declined to offer additional details about the shooter, partly out of respect for the family.

SCHOOL SHOOTER'S MOM JENNIFER CRUMBLY HAD 'TAINTED' TRIAL, ATTORNEYS SAY IN REQUEST TO TOSS CONVICTION

"He lost someone as well," Barnes said of Rupnow's father. "And so we're not going to rush the information. We'll take our time and make sure we do our due diligence."

Rupnow used a handgun in the shooting, according to Barnes.

"I don't know why, and I feel like if we did know why, we could stop these things from happening," he told reporters.

The teacher and student who were killed in the shooting have not yet been identified.

Barnes said that of the six wounded in the shooting, two were students and remain in critical condition. A teacher and three students were also hospitalized with less serious injuries, and two of them were later released.

FATHER OF GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING SUSPECT PLEADS NOT GUILTY

Barnes said he did not believe that the school, which serves 200 students, according to the school's website, had a resource officer. It was also revealed that the school did not have metal detectors but did have

cameras and other security protocols.

He also clarified that the initial 911 call reporting the shooting was made by a second-grade teacher at the school. On Monday, he mistakenly said the call had come from a second-grade student.

James and Rebekah Smith, whose 17-year-old daughter is a student at the Abundant Life Christian School, told Fox News that they know all the victims and their families.

The Smiths said their daughter wasn't in the same class as Rupnow, the alleged shooter, or knew her well, but said that Rupnow was new to the school and had enrolled sometime during the current semester.

They added that their daughter and her group of friends said they never saw Rupnow speaking to anyone at school.

The couple also said the student who was killed was a freshman girl who they've known since she was a toddler.

"She gave great hugs. She was an amazing pianist. She loved to read. She was just an amazing young girl," Rebekah Smith said.

Alleged Abundant Life Christian school shooter identified as 15-year-old femaleVideo
Rebekah Smith said the teacher who was killed had a daughter who was in sports with the Smiths' daughter, and they talked with the mother at the games all the time.

She added that the victim had been a long-term substitute teacher at the school and just became a full-time teacher this year.

President Biden spoke with Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway after the shooting, and he issued a separate statement that called the event "shocking and unconscionable."

"We can never accept senseless violence that traumatizes children, their families, and tears entire communities apart," Biden said.

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AP: Canada's prime minister faces calls to resign. Here's what could happen next

Rob Gillies

TORONTO (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau faces growing pressure to resign from his own Liberal Party after his top minister abruptly quit and criticized his handling of the budget. Trudeau has led the country for nearly a decade, but has become widely unpopular in recent years over a wide range of issues, including the high cost of living and rising inflation.

There is no mechanism for Trudeau's party to force him out in the short-term. He could resign, or his party could be forced from power by a "no confidence" vote in Parliament that would trigger an election that would very likely favor the opposing Conservative Party.

If his party were to survive a vote in Parliament — which seems increasingly unlikely — Trudeau could choose to stay on as prime minister until there is an election.

As rising numbers of Liberal lawmakers called Tuesday for Trudeau to resign, the country's minister of natural resources, Jonathan Wilkinson, said "we all need to give him a little time to reflect."

Here's a deeper look at the possible paths for Trudeau and Canada.

Trudeau could resign and allow other liberals to vie for his office

If Trudeau resigns, which political analysts consider a likely scenario, the Liberals would need to choose an interim prime minister to lead the country at least until elections are held.

It isn't clear yet who the most likely candidate would be for any interim role.

Longer term, a person likely to seek power in the Liberal Party post-Trudeau is Mark Carney, the former head of the Bank of Canada, and later the Bank of England. Carney has long been interested in entering politics and becoming prime minister.

Another possible candidate is Trudeau's new finance minister, Dominic LeBlanc. The former public safety minister, and a close friend of Trudeau, LeBlanc recently joined the prime minister at a dinner with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago.

Concerns about Trudeau's leadership were exacerbated Monday when Chrystia Freeland, the former finance minister, quit his Cabinet. Freeland was highly critical of Trudeau's handling of the economy in the face of steep tariffs threatened by Trump. Shortly before Freeland announced her decision, the country's housing minister also quit.

"My guess is that if another minister or two goes, he's toast, he will be forced to resign," said Canadian historian Robert Bothwell.

Opposition parties could vote to topple Trudeau's grip on power

With voters deeply unhappy, Parliament has the authority to try to knock Trudeau's Liberal party from power by holding a "no confidence" vote that would trigger an early election. And if a majority of Parliament votes against his government, Trudeau would then be "erased in the election," Bothwell said.

The walls are rapidly closing in on Trudeau.

Because Liberals don't hold an outright majority in the Parliament, they have for years depended on the support of the leftist New Democratic Party to pass legislation and stay in power. But that support has all but vanished — the NDP's leader has called on Trudeau to resign — and that clears the way for Parliament to vote "no confidence."

After Tuesday, Parliament will be shut for the holidays until late next month, and a "no confidence" vote could be scheduled sometime thereafter.

The Conservative Party, which has a commanding lead in the polls over the Liberals, has not publicly called for Trudeau's resignation. And because of tactics the Liberal Party can deploy to delay a "no confidence" vote, Conservatives might not be able to force one for a couple of months, said Nelson Wiseman, professor emeritus at the University of Toronto.

A vote of no confidence would trigger an immediate election.

Trudeau could try to hang on to power

The political winds are blowing heavily against Trudeau, but he could theoretically cling to power a while longer.

While a growing number want him to resign, one longtime supporter, Liberal lawmaker James Maloney, said Trudeau has the support of his base in Parliament.

“Like most families, sometimes we have fights around the holidays. But of course, like most families, we find our way through it,” Trudeau said. “I love this country. I deeply love this party. I love you guys.”

If Trudeau’s Liberal party survives no confidence votes in the coming months — an unlikely scenario — the latest the next federal election could be held is October 20.

The odds of an election much sooner than that have gone up.

“I expect an election in late spring, unless Trudeau decides to dissolve Parliament and dives into an election before then,” said Wiseman.

With Liberals’ grip on power fading, experts say the best they can hope for in the next election is to hold the Conservatives to a minority government that will be reliant on other parties to pass legislation. The latest polling from Nanos has the Conservatives leading the Liberals 43% to 23%, suggesting Conservatives could win a majority of the seats.

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Office of Governor Kim Reynolds

NEWS CLIPS

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

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IOWA NEWS:

Iowa News Now: 150+ groups call on Gov. Reynolds to reverse course and let Iowa join summer EBT program

Michael Howell

DES MOINES, Iowa — More than 150 groups and organizations are now calling on Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds to sign Iowa up for the Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) program for next summer.

Reynolds opted out of the program this past summer and asked the federal government to let Iowa create its own summer food program.

SUN Bucks gives \$40 per month on EBT cards to each child in a low-income family in the summer. Reynolds' office said her separate food program, which was denied a few weeks ago, would ultimately feed more kids. Her plan was to leverage bulk pricing to deliver three monthly boxes of healthy food to kids instead of sending them the money. The USDA denied the application, saying it does not meet the goal of SUN Bucks program.

Reynolds said she plans to pitch the idea once President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The new petition announced on Tuesday comes from 153 groups and organizations who signed on, calling for the governor to change her mind and send the USDA a letter of intent to participate in the SUN bucks program before the Jan. 1 deadline. They say parents and caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids.

You can read the full letter from the groups below and see what organizations have signed on to the cause.

Dear Gov. Reynolds,

We, the undersigned organizations, call on you to take action to ensure Iowa participates in the SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) program in 2025.

We are students. We are parents. We are people of faith. We are teachers. We are medical professionals. We are dietitians. We are farmers. We are social workers. We are staff and volunteers at food pantries and food rescue organizations. We are small business owners. We are advocates. We are union members. We are nonprofit leaders. We are county supervisors. We are Iowans.

Right now, hundreds of thousands of our neighbors across the state are facing food insecurity. Families are being forced to make impossible choices between putting food on the table or making rent. Rising costs are taking their toll on workers whose paychecks just aren't keeping up. Parents are skipping meals to make sure their kids are fed. Food banks, food pantries, and other emergency feeding organizations are assisting record-breaking numbers of Iowans, including staggering numbers of people turning to help for the first time.

In a country as wealthy as the United States of America, and in a state with as rich an agricultural tradition as Iowa, no child should ever go hungry. No matter who takes care of them, no matter where they live, no matter what.

SUN Bucks would provide \$29 million in nutrition benefits to a quarter of a million children across the state next summer. While a \$40 monthly benefit per eligible child may not seem like

a large amount, it would absolutely make a meaningful difference in the lives of Iowa families.

Parents and other caregivers should be trusted to make the best food choices for their kids. Summer EBT is evidence-based policy, and has been shown to support healthy eating and reduce childhood food insecurity. SUN Bucks will not eradicate childhood hunger on its own, but it's one of the best tools we have. We shouldn't leave it on the table. We are in this together. All of us, as Iowans, have a shared future. And that future lies in the next generation.

We hope you will do the right thing.

The time to act is now.

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The Center Square: Op-Ed: Gov. Kim Reynolds sets the gold standard for state fiscal policy

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Gov. Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Gov. Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In FY 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in FY 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion, and \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by FY 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Gov. Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by the legislature. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Gov. Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "Blue State" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Gov. Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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Iowa News Now: Iowa presidential electors cast official vote for Trump and Vance
Skylar Tallal

Iowa's six presidential electors met Tuesday to officially cast their vote for president and vice president ahead of their inauguration next month.

Gov. Kim Reynolds presided over the meeting where Iowa's six presidential electors voted for Donald Trump and JD Vance, officially wrapping up the 2024 election here in Iowa.

"I will officially cast all six electoral votes for Donald J. Trump and JD Vance for President and Vice President of the United States of America," Gov. Reynolds (R) Iowa said. Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate says Iowa has one of the highest voter registration and turnout rates, with more than 1.6 million Iowans casting a ballot this past November, which is 74% of registered voters.

Trump got 55.73% of the vote in the state, carrying 94 of 99 Iowa counties with more than 927,000 Iowans selecting his name at the ballot box.

Iowa's News Now also heard from one of the electors about his interest in the process and why he chose to be an elector. Dallas Center-Grimes Community High School social studies teacher Jack Vanderflught said not only is it an important part to play in making the democratic process official, but he'll also be bringing that experience back to his classroom.

"You know in part because I've been a part of the process a long time, I thought it was an important role," Vanderflught said. "But I also did want to be able to share this with my students a little bit, so they have more of an insider view of what the process looks like and maybe encourage them to want to do it themselves."

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USA Today: President-elect Donald Trump sues Des Moines Register, Gannett over Iowa election poll

Bart Jansen

President-elect Donald Trump sued the Des Moines Register and its parent company, Gannett Co. Inc., over its publication of a poll before the election that he called “fraud and election interference” for saying he trailed his Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, in Iowa.

The lawsuit filed on Monday in Polk County District Court asks for unspecified damages under the state's Consumer Fraud Act. It seeks "accountability for brazen election interference committed by" the newspaper and pollster J. Ann Selzer over the poll published Nov. 2 — three days before the voting was completed — that showed Harris leading Trump by 3 percentage points in Iowa. Trump won the state by 13 percentage points.

The lawsuit also said the "egregious" polling miss in favor of Democrats came "just days before the most consequential election in memory," and that its results were apparently "leaked" because Democratic Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker mentioned the poll's findings during a meeting with Duke University alumni hours before the results were published.

"In my opinion, it was fraud and it was election interference," Trump told reporters Monday.

Lark-Marie Anton, a spokesperson for the Des Moines Register, said the company stands by its reporting and will vigorously defend the First Amendment.

"We have acknowledged that the Selzer/Des Moines Register pre-election poll did not reflect the ultimate margin of President Trump's Election Day victory in Iowa by releasing the poll's full demographics, crosstabs, weighted and unweighted data, as well as a technical explanation from pollster Ann Selzer," Anton said in a statement. "We stand by our reporting on the matter and believe this lawsuit is without merit."

Selzer told USA TODAY she had no comment on the lawsuit.

Gannett is also the parent company of USA TODAY.

Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at Salem Civic Center, in Salem, Virginia, on Nov. 2, 2024. Trump has sued media companies repeatedly with complaints about coverage of him. Some legal experts say Trump's comments and legal actions risk discouraging coverage of his incoming administration.

A federal judge dismissed Trump's \$475 million lawsuit against CNN in July 2023 over the cable network referring to his description of election fraud in 2020 as a "big lie."

ABC News reached a \$15 million settlement Dec. 14 with Trump over a George Stephanopoulos question to a House member in March about a lawsuit columnist E. Jean Carroll filed against Trump.

Stephanopoulos mischaracterized Trump as having been found liable for rape in a civil trial. A jury found him liable for sexual assault. Trump is appealing the verdict.

ABC issued a statement of regret and agreed to contribute the money to Trump's future presidential library.

Still pending is a \$10 billion federal lawsuit against CBS News that Trump filed in October. The lawsuit alleged "election and voter interference" through the editing of an interview with Harris broadcast on "60 Minutes." The editing sought to "deceive, and mislead the public" to favor Harris, the lawsuit said.

CBS called the allegations "false" and said in a network statement "the interview was not doctored."

Trump: Lawsuits 'straighten out the press'

During his press conference Monday, Trump said of lawsuits against Gannett and CBS: "It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press."

Trump had previously called for an investigation of Selzer.

"She's a very good pollster," Trump said Monday. "She knows what she was doing."

Selzer wrote in a November analysis — before the lawsuit was filed — that she was uncertain what caused the poll results.

"To cut to the chase, I found nothing to illuminate the miss," she wrote.

Iowa attorney part of Trump legal team in case
Representing Trump in the case are attorneys Edward Paltzik of New York and Alan Ostergren of Des Moines.

Paltzik is listed on his LinkedIn site as litigation director for the National Constitutional Law Union, a nonprofit that described itself on its website as "the answer to the useless and radically leftist American Civil Liberties Union."

Ostergren is the former Muscatine County attorney. In private practice since 2020, he has represented a variety of Iowa conservatives and conservative organizations in litigation over constitutional and election issues.

In the run-up to the 2020 election, the Trump campaign, the Republican National Committee and other national groups hired Ostergren to intervene in a lawsuit over absentee ballot procedures, then to bring several more suits against counties he said were flouting the rules. He won both at the district and appeals court levels.

He also represented Republican Mariannette Miller-Meeks that year in her successful bid to be certified as the elected U.S. representative for Iowa's 1st Congressional District after recounts and challenges to her six-vote victory.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: McKinley, Keomah lakes among several slated for major restoration in 2025

Cami Koons

A report from the Lake Restoration Program with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources details the completion of several years-long restoration projects in 2024 and outlines major project plans in 2025.

The annual report is open to review and public comment through Dec. 18.

Michelle Balmer, who works with the program, said the lake restoration projects involve community partners, watershed studies and various forms of construction to “protect that lake for the next generation of users.”

“We see this as being not only important for environmental protection, but also it’s a service that all you Iowans get to utilize,” Balmer said. “We want to make sure they have quality places to go recreating.”

Since the program was established by the Legislature in 2006, it has removed 5 million cubic yards of excess sediment from lakes, enhanced 14,000 acres of wetlands and shallow lakes and has made use of \$167 million in funding from the state to improve 72 lakes across the state.

2024 major project completions

The report highlights four major projects the department considers completed or nearly completed from 2024. Major restorations were completed at Casey Lake in Black Hawk County, Silver Lake in Dickinson County, Three Mile Lake in Union County and a shallow lake and wetland project at West Swan Lake in Emmet County.

The four projects represent \$9.6 million in state allocated funds, federal grants and local partnerships.

According to the report, restoration at these lakes included the construction and restoration of sediment and nutrient control ponds, shoreline work, improvements to surrounding timber, sediment removal or fish habitat work, among other strategies.

Balmer said each project is different, but the Three Mile Lake project, for example, represents about seven years of work from initial watershed and community studies, to building new fish habitat and now waiting for the water to fill back up.

“We often spend a year or two learning more about the lake ... trying to understand what the issues are, why water quality is being negatively impacted,” Balmer said. “And then, what strategies can we try and employ that’ll help improve water quality, update infrastructure, improve habitat for aquatic life and provide better recreational opportunities.”

Balmer said at Three Mile Lake, the department was able to create two in-lake silt basins, which she described as berms that help to slow water down and allow the sediment to drop out before the water enters the lake.

Other practices like basins or terraces on state-owned land upstream help to keep sediment from washing into the lake.

Balmer said Three Mile lake is an important fishing destination for many Iowans and visitors to the state, and the lake also serves as a drinking water reservoir which were “important implications” for improving water quality at the lake.

Major projects slated for fiscal year 2025-2026

Balmer said like the other projects, those highlighted for the upcoming fiscal year have been in the works for several years, but are qualified as a major project this year due to large investments toward the restorations.

McKinley Lake in Union County will have an estimated \$3.58 million project to remove excess sediment, restore shoreline, add park amenities, upgrade parts of the dam and build an upstream wetland. The project is a 50-50 cost share between the Lake Restoration Program funds and the City of Creston.

Balmer said the department tries to couple restoration projects with other planned projects to make the most out of times when the campgrounds, roads or parks are closed.

Green Valley Lake and Prairie Rose Lake will undergo alum treatments in the spring to improve water quality by inactivating excess phosphorous in the water. This project is an estimated \$1.7 million.

Diamond Lake in Poweshiek County is slated to have \$455,000 in improvements to sediment control ponds and streambank erosion control.

The biggest investment will be at Lake Keomah in Mahaska County, which is scheduled to have shoreline stabilization, sediment removal, boat ramp improvements and upgraded dam and spillway components. According to the report, the project is estimated to cost \$4.3 million.

“Most of our lakes in the state are man made,” Balmer said. “That means there’s a dam that’s impounding water, essentially, and just like your house or any other major thing, there’s maintenance needed.”

Balmer said the Lake Keomah project has been in the works about 10 years. Past efforts have included improvements to surrounding timber and collaboration with homeowners along the lake. According to the report, the projects at Lake Keomah are estimated to wrap up between fiscal year 2027 and 2029.

The rest of the report details projects that are in earlier phases of planning, explains the department’s project selection process and further breaks down funding and project costs.

Balmer said Iowan can reach out to her with questions or comments on the report through Dec. 18.

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WHO13: State Auditor Rob Sand releases FY 23 audit for Iowa Judicial branch

Zach Fisher

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa state officials have been sparring over the Iowa Judicial Branch having \$26 million in misallocated funds, and an audit of the branch was released Tuesday morning.

State Auditor Rob Sand (D) released the audit for Fiscal Year 2023 for the branch. A coding error wrongly distributed the funds from unpaid debt collections over the last three fiscal years.

“Every single one of these programs had money sitting in their account this entire time,” said Auditor Sand (D).

The report shows the funds that were wrongly distributed to seven state funds, and includes a chart of the lowest monthly cash balance for each of the seven funds over the last three years. Sand used that to show the different funds still had enough money to continue providing the services as normal.

Those comments and the audit report comes after Republican lawmakers criticized Sand’s office for not warning lawmakers that there was an issue in coding. Sand at a news conference Tuesday said that it was changes made in a bill passed by Iowa Republicans in the 2020 session that started the coding issue.

“The lion’s share of it started when they passed these bills in June, making them live in July, and then in the following session they actually passed another bill making changes retroactively” said Sand. “So they were supposed to, in the judicial branch, not only change the coding but then go back and figure out, okay, how do we undo what we have been doing over the last year?”

Sand recommended that lawmakers act this session so those \$26 million can go to the correct funds in the judicial branch.

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WHO13: Iowa invests \$3.5M to give every 1st grader book packs to take home

Griffin Wright

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Iowa Department of Education spent \$3.5 million to give every 1st grader in the state book packs they can take home and keep to improve their reading skills.

The book packs contain multiple decodable books — books that have words kids can sound out and read at home to improve their literacy.

Council appoints Ankeny's first female mayor

The books in the book packs are part of the curriculum based on the science of reading which, put simply, focuses on teaching kids to sound out parts of words and then putting them together to learn to read.

First-grade teacher Kari Osborne at Des Moines' Findley Elementary School, said it's important for parents to help their kids learn to read using the decodable book packs.

“Families don't always know exactly what's going on in our day. And so we would really want them to know that this is something that they're working on. They've been working really hard on learning to read. And that's our goal, is to get them to learn to read and to enjoy reading. So we want them to do this with their families at home too,” Osborne said.

On the first page of every book in the book packs is information on the reading skill the book focuses on and a QR code parents can scan for more information on how to instruct their kids.

To learn more about the decodable book packs visit the Department of Education's website.

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WOI: Survey: Iowa farmland prices dip 3.1%, breaking five-year growth trend

Caleb Geer

DES MOINES, Iowa — The average value of Iowa farmland has fallen in 2024, according to the Iowa State Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) and the annual Iowa State Land Value Survey.

The state average decline of 3.1% breaks an upward trend in land value the state has seen over the past five years, according to CARD. Last year, state average land value was reported at a 3.7% increase over the previous year.

The average decrease in value of an acre of farmland was measured at \$369 by CARD, leading to an average value of \$11,467 an acre.

The decrease in value comes after a long growth in value and record-setting peak hit in 2023.

Land Value Survey — Overview

75 counties of Iowa's 99 reported a decrease in farmland value in the 2024 survey.

Counties

O'Brien County had highest average value per acre at \$15,921, after a reported decrease of 2.4% or \$392 from year before

Appanoose County had the lowest average value per acre at \$6,840, after a reported increase of 7.7% or \$486 from year before

Shelby County had the largest dollar amount loss in average value per acre, down \$1,170

Wayne County had the largest percentage amount loss in average value per acre, down 9.7%

Wayne County had the largest dollar amount increase in average value per acre however, up \$690

Decatur County had the largest percentage amount increase in average value per acre, up 10.5%

Osceola County had the lowest percentage and dollar value average increases, up 0.1% and \$3

Land quality

"Low quality" land across Iowa now averages \$7,450 per acre, down 2.8% or \$215

"Medium quality" land across Iowa now averages \$10,740 per acre, down 3.0% or \$335

"High quality" land across Iowa now averages \$13,930 per acre, down 2.6% or \$367

Most mentioned negative factor affecting decline in land value was lower commodity prices

Others negative factors were cited to include long-term interest rates, higher input costs and cash/credit availability

Most mentioned positive factor affecting land value was limited land supply

Others positive factors were cited to include strong yields, cash/credit availability and strong demand for land

CARD's web portal is available here, and offers visualization tools allowing for in-depth analysis and comparison.

Breaking the trend

“We saw land values rise for five straight years, including surges of 29% and 17%, which naturally leads to a reset or balancing in the market,” said Dr. Rabail Chandio, who is responsible for the annual land survey. “If we look back to the previous peak in 2013, the market 'adjusted' with relatively small declines spread over a few years.”

CARD cites the fact that "when adjusting for inflation, the 2024 average value is 2.5% lower than 2013's inflation adjusted values."

Chandio said that high interest rates of the previous two years have continued to affect farmland value, and that rate cuts are not enough yet to ease the pressure.

“It takes time—sometimes up to a decade—for interest rate changes to fully ripple through the land market," she said.

Increases in the face of statewide average decrease

The only counties to see increase or no change in average farmland value are:

Adair (0.9%)
Adams (3.8%)
Allamakee (3.8%)
Appanoose (7.7%)
Cedar (1.1%)
Clarke (5.3%)
Clinton (1.2%)
Decatur (10.5%)
Dubuque (3.7%)
Jackson (0.1%)
Jefferson (0.9%)
Jones (1.8%)
Linn (0.4%)
Lucas (5.7%)
Lyon (0.5%)
Madison (0.4%)
Monroe (0.6%)
Muscatine (0.8%)
Osceola (No change)
Ringgold (4.4%)
Taylor (5.3%)
Union (3.1%)
Van Buren (1.8%)
Wayne (10.3%)

The only crop-reporting district to report an increase in average value was the Iowa South Central District which most of the above counties are included in.

Only minimal decreases were seen in the other two southern districts, revealing a stable trend Chandio said.

CARD said the survey is based on "Reports by agricultural professionals knowledgeable of land market conditions, such as appraisers, farm managers, agricultural lenders, and actual land sales, and is intended to provide information on general land value trends, geographical land price relationships, and factors influencing the Iowa land market."

What factors are causing the decrease in value?

Survey respondents pointed to falling commodity prices and increasing input costs for farming as well. Farm income is expected to follow the decrease in land value, falling 4.1% according to CARD. However, this is a significantly smaller decrease than last year's reported fall of 17.4%.

However, livestock markets could bring some stability to collapsing farm income, Chandio said.

"While crop receipts are down, livestock receipts are up 8.4%, offering some balance," he said. "So, livestock markets, like cattle and hogs, have fared relatively better, but high input costs are still exerting enough pressure to keep margins very tight."

In the short term, survey respondents are expecting declines in the next year, with 58% figuring on continued drop in value. Most believed a fall of around 5% will occur.

In the long term however, looking at the next five years, 80% of respondents are expecting land values to increase, with 36% expecting an increase of 10-20%.

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WOI: Polk County Board of Supervisors approves new immigrant and refugee welcome center

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — A new immigrant and refugee welcome center is coming to Des Moines after receiving approval from the Polk County Board of Supervisors.

The board unanimously approved the welcome center, Global Neighbors, at its meeting Tuesday. The facility will be located at 1900 Carpenter Avenue. Officials said the location was strategically selected to be near bus routes and many other social service providers.

The goal of Global Neighbors is to provide a hub for refugees and immigrants to access services related to employment, housing and education, as well as help people transition into their new lives.

“Each person who enters Global Neighbors brings with them a unique story—a story of resilience, courage, and dreams for a better future,” said Polk County Board Chair Angela Connolly. “This unique facility will ensure our newest residents have the resources available to make the transition to their new community as smooth as possible.”

The facility will include a computer lab, classrooms and office spaces for immigrant and refugee-related nonprofits. On the exterior, the building will feature murals and landscaping.

“Vibrant colors of joy will be in the lobby, and open office spaces will provide warmth and natural light throughout the space. The designated private spaces will be acoustically sheltered to enable confidential and sensitive conversations,” said Mak Suceska, manager of operations for Global Neighbors.

Redevelopment of the property will begin in early 2025, with the hopes of opening the facility by the end of 2025.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Auditor Rob Sand says his office did not ignore court spending errors

Robin Opsahl

Iowa Auditor Rob Sand disputed claims made by Republican leaders that his office was aware of a coding error that led to a misallocation of court debt funds years before taking action on the issue.

Sand held a news conference Tuesday about his report on the Iowa Judicial Branch, which found that \$27.5 million in court debt receipts had been misallocated due to a coding error. The report had followed up on letters sent to the auditor's office by House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen that more than \$53 million of these funds had been misallocated — an amount Sand said was inaccurate.

In an October letter to Sand, Grassley wrote that the auditor's office had been alerted of a financial irregularity by the Department of Transportation in 2022, but that these issues were not mentioned in the judicial branch audits for fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

"I am writing to gain an understanding from you as to why your office has taken no action since being made aware of these drastic issues at least two years ago," Grassley wrote. "The State Auditor's office exists for this very purpose. When you are made aware of misallocated funds by a branch of government, it is your duty to Iowans to investigate, alert the public, and seek to rectify the issue. Your inaction in this case is baffling and inexcusable. If there is any other explanation why it appears that the taxpayer's watchdog was sleeping on the job, I would be very interested to hear it."

Sand said the auditor's office has been in contact with officials from the state judicial branch and DOT multiple times after being notified of the issue in October 2022, and that the office remained in contact with the judicial branch in conducting internal and independent investigations into the issue.

According to the auditor's report, there were seven state funds that were under-allocated because of the error from fiscal years 2021 through 2024 — the largest being the Road Use Tax Fund, which was under-allocated by more than \$10.4 million, and the Victim Compensation Fund by \$7.2 million. In the same time period, the state general fund received an over-allocation of \$27.5 million, in addition to the SOS Revolving Fund being over-allocated \$90,174 and the Jury Witness Fund by \$74,166.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird released a statement in October criticizing the auditor's office for failing to catch the misallocation related to the Victim Compensation Fund that goes toward services like sexual assault examinations, medical reimbursements and counseling.

"No domestic violence victim should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave," Bird said. "The State's self-proclaimed 'taxpayer watchdog' failed at the

most basic job of being an auditor: conducting an audit. Crime victims should not have to worry about whether victim services will be there when they need them.”

But Sand pushed back against Bird’s characterization of the issue, saying that the underfunded government accounts never ran out of money when they were impacted by the error.

Sand asked for an apology to his staff for the criticism of the auditor’s office over this subject, and making it a “political” issue.

“I’m asking again, the people who distort the facts around this issue for political gain to publicly apologize to our staff — I would settle for a private apology to our staff that works on these issues,” Sand said. “These accountants and the auditors in this office, they work long hours. It is a difficult profession to be in right now, ... Our employees know that their families and their friends are seeing these headlines, and they know that they’re doing their job, they know that they are doing good quality work. But because of these attacks, they have to deal with it. They shouldn’t have to, and they deserve an apology.”

Paulsen, speaking with reporters Tuesday, said although the funds impacted by the error retained money despite the misallocation, it does not mean services — and their recipients in the state — were not affected by the lack of funds.

“You don’t spend your bank account down to zero every month, and neither do state entities funded by court debt,” Paulsen said. “When the funds run low, you cut back and so do state entities. Have citizens been harmed? That’s a question the Legislature should ask.”

While Sand said his office has never had staff with the ability to review coding to check for problems like in this case, Paulsen said the fact the misallocation occurred because of a coding error should not have prevented the office from being able to identify the funding irregularities.

“Don’t get bogged down in thinking auditing has anything to do with coding or programming a computer,” Paulsen said. “... [I]f that was the case, that you had to understand some computer language to audit, then how does the auditor of state do a single audit? How do they go from agency to agency? ... There’s still a few very small communities who use paper, but otherwise, there’s no government in the state of Iowa that doesn’t have their financials in the computer system. So if that’s a limitation, how do they ... do any of their audits? And the truth is, they do, because it’s not a limitation.”

The programming errors that led to the funds misallocations were found to have likely began after changes were made to the judicial branch’s information technology system for the process for distributing judicial fees and fines to government programs in 2020 and 2021, as directed by the Iowa Legislature.

While the error has been fixed moving forward, the misallocation that occurred in previous years cannot be fixed through administrative action, although the Legislature could take action when lawmakers reconvene in January 2025.

State Court Administrator Robert Gast said in a letter Dec. 6 that the judicial branch has implemented “new programming to correct programming errors in its case management system” as of Nov. 22, 2024, including retroactive corrections to distributions dating back to July 1, 2024. It has also contracted with a third party to review programming changes made to the branch’s IT system, is working with the state auditor “to set up an engagement to review the financial findings and verify that the over and under allocation numbers and the funds impacted as calculated by JBIT are accurate” and is developing an internal process to audit future programming changes.

“The branch cannot move funds that were misallocated in prior fiscal years,” Gast wrote. “We are interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders to correct all misallocations from FY21 through FY24.”

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids School District looking into virtual snow days

Emily Schrad

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Snow days in Iowa are almost unavoidable. But those winter days off, lead to more time in the classroom in late spring.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking at incorporating virtual learning to cut down on make-up days at the end of the year.

Schools across the state can use up to five virtual learning days a year, and the Cedar Rapids Community School District is looking to take advantage of those days during winter weather.

Chief of Schools Linda Reysack said students would have a variety of activities to work on, including physical work packets to take home or school work online.

"We are looking at having some online opportunities for students who can join by Google Classroom, some office hours from our staff, but really identifying activities that all students pre-K12 can do at home without technology," said Reysack.

Reysack said they started looking into the virtual snow day option when many families expressed the desire to be done with the year by the first week of June.

But she says right now opinions of the plan are still about 50/50.

"Some families and staff are very appreciative of the option to look at virtual learning. And other families say that it will be a hindrance to them because of childcare, but childcare will also be an issue whether we have a snow day and it's not virtual learning. So it is a very mixed bag," she said.

And while most students look forward to a day off in the snow...

"We don't want to take away the opportunity for students to get outside and play on those snow days," Reysack said.

Reysack said not every snow day will be a virtual learning day.

She added it will be on a case-by-case basis.

"At the beginning of this year, we let out early on a couple of different days due to the heat. So on days when students are already in school, learning is already occurring we have the opportunity then to send information home with our students and continue learning at home," Reysack said. "If the weather is predicted to be... if the wind chill is cold, we know that students probably will not be outside playing on those days and we have enough

warning ahead of time, we would then let our students know and our families know that that might be a virtual learning day.”

Reysack said packets would be sent home in the days before bad weather is in the forecast.

The final plan will be presented to the board in January. If it passes, it will be implemented starting next school year.

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KCRG: District Court reverses termination of Dubuque teacher heard using racial slur in social media video

Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - A district court has reversed the decision to terminate the contract of a Dubuque Hempstead teacher who was fired after a video of him using a racial slur spread on social media.

Roger Poling, a Dubuque Hempstead High School staff member, was heard using a racial slur in front of a Black student in a short video in May 2023.

However, according to a ruling from the district court, the school board's decision to terminate Poling's contract ignores the context surrounding the moment Poling said the slur.

The ruling says Poling had repeated the word back to the student in an attempt to explain the student's misconduct.

The court said while repeating the word is abhorrent, the Board's choice to ignore the context from which the exchange occurred diminishes the Board's finding of just cause.

Poling testified that when he tried to get students to return to their respective classrooms, one student gave a "smart" response to him, another pretended he didn't speak English, and a third student said to Poling, "whattcha looking at n[-word]."

When Poling addressed the student, the student asked, "what did I do," or "what did I say?"

To which Poling initially responded, "you know what you said."

After more questioning from the student, Poling said, "you said, 'whattcha looking at n[-word].'"

Students are then heard yelling in response to what Poling said in the short video that went viral. However, the court said the surveillance video, which shows more of the context, also shows the student rush off, laughing or smiling.

The court in its ruling called the Dubuque Community School Board's decision "reactive, rather than initiative-taking," in terms of how it addressed the issue.

It also said the Board's decision was not based on substantial evidence, and that it was "irrational and arbitrary, weighing the entirety of the roughly five minute encounter against Poling's past performance, and by relying on improperly admitted evidence to do so."

The court said the school board also missed a teachable moment in which it could have instructed students and teachers on the mutual respect required in a school to promote a safe and inclusive environment.

With his termination reversed, Poling is reinstated.

The Dubuque Community School District responded by saying it “is obviously disappointed in the ruling of the Iowa District Court and we believe the Board acted appropriately in the matter. We are working with the district’s legal counsel to review the decision in its entirety and determine next steps, including discussing potential options for appeal of the decision.”

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KCRG: Iowa State Auditor: No programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors

Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa (KCRG) - Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand says no programs ran out of money because of computer coding errors.

On Tuesday morning, Sand's office released a report of the Iowa Judicial Branch for the fiscal year that ended in June 2023.

In a letter in October, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley wrote that the Iowa Judicial System had misallocated more than 53-million dollars since 2021 because of a computer error.

Republicans blamed Sand for not alerting them.

But Sand released a detailed timeline that both the Governor's office and Judicial system were well aware of the issue.

He says this was the result of last second changes to Iowa law, that didn't give them enough time to procedures in place, leading to the errors.

While the audit shows that problems are being fixed, Sand says Iowa lawmakers will need to make changes to reallocate the misappropriated funds.

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Iowa News Now: \$55.1 million plan to bring affordable housing community to Dubuque
Tyler Downey

DUBUQUE, Iowa — A housing development company has announced plans to build a \$55.1 million affordable housing community in Dubuque.

The Annex Group, the company behind the project, says the housing community will be geared towards households whose income level is at or below 70% of the area median income.

They're calling it "Union at the Marina" and it will be built in a currently vacant lot at 2660 Kerper Boulevard in Dubuque.

Union at the Marina will feature two four-story buildings that will have a total of 201 units and include one, two and three-bedroom options.

"We are thrilled to bring this project to Dubuque," David Wesner, VP of Development for The Annex Group, said. "The city has been a catalyst in addressing their housing need, and we are honored to be able to work with them to meet the overwhelming demand in their community. With floorplans to meet the needs of different households, as well as a dynamic amenity package including a rooftop deck with views of the river, we think this property will be a place people enjoy living."

Residents at the east end of the community will have a view of the river. Two schools, a park, pharmacy, grocery store and post office are all nearby and there will be several different amenities for residents, including a playground, community center, fitness center, picnic area, dog walking area and on-site property management.

Union at the Marina is expected to open in fall of 2026.

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The Gazette: Iowa courts implement new program to correct error that misallocated \$27.5M

Erin Murphy

DES MOINES — A coding error that caused Iowa courts to misallocate over \$27.5 million in court fees has been addressed and a new program was implemented last month, Iowa Judicial Branch officials have said.

In a report released Tuesday by the State Auditor's Office, the Iowa Judicial Branch said on Nov. 22 the courts implemented new programming to correct previous errors that led to the misallocations. The changes will ensure the future distribution of court fees works as required by state law, the Judicial Branch said in the report.

In Iowa, funds paid to the courts in the form of fines, fees and penalties in criminal cases are distributed to various sources, including state funds for victim compensation, emergency services, road infrastructure, county attorneys and the state's general fund.

Under the state's distribution system, clerks of courts enter court fees into a coding program that is supposed to channel those funds to the proper source. But the Iowa Judicial Branch in October revealed that coding errors sent more than \$27.5 million to the state's general fund instead of some of those other state funds and programs. The courts had been investigating the issue for more than two years.

According to the Judicial Branch's investigation, more than \$10.4 million should have gone to the state fund that supports infrastructure work on roads and bridges, \$7.2 million should have gone to a state program that helps victims of violent crimes with certain expenses, and \$4 million should have gone to a fund that supports juvenile detention homes.

The Iowa general fund, where most of the allocations were sent by error, currently has a \$2 billion surplus, according to the state's nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency.

According to the Iowa Judicial Branch, the programming issues arose in the 2021 state budget year after lawmakers changed the court fees distribution system during the 2020 and 2021 legislative sessions.

The new laws in consecutive years required programming changes to the distribution system. A report from the National Center for State Courts said the state law changes created confusion in implementing the new coding.

In the report Tuesday, the State Auditor Rob Sand's office recommends the Judicial Branch complete necessary programming changes to ensure the proper allocation of court debt. The report also recommends the Judicial Branch work with Iowa Department of Management and the Iowa Legislature to address the erroneous allocations.

Sand's report also recommends that future funding changes made by the Iowa Legislature not take effect "until state branches and agencies have sufficient time to accurately and carefully make all necessary changes."

A Judicial Branch spokesman said Tuesday that the courts cooperated fully with the auditor's office and does not dispute any of its findings.

The Judicial Branch also in its report response said it is "interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders" to correct the earlier misallocations. While the new programming was designed to fix future fee distribution and the courts have applied fixes retroactively to the start of the state budget year on July 1, erroneous distribution from previous years requires action by the Iowa Legislature.

The issue of those misallocated court fees has sparked a series of accusations between some of Iowa's state agency heads and one legislative leader that started in October and continued Tuesday.

Sand, a Democrat, has defended his office's work on the issue and accused other state leaders of playing politics in their criticism of his office.

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen, Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird — all Republicans — have accused Sand and his office of not acting sooner and not doing all his office should to address the issue.

The latest round of allegations started Tuesday when Sand held a news conference highlighting his office's report. Sand said the report shows that while others "have been pushing politics as usual" and wasting taxpayers' money, his office has been doing its job.

Sand called on those who have criticized his office to apologize to the accountants who work there, and said he is proud of their work.

"Sometimes you got to laugh so you don't cry. I mean this stuff is just so ridiculous," Sand said. "If you have to make stuff up to attack the person that's holding you accountable, the office that's holding you accountable, then that office must be doing a pretty good job."

A statement from Melissa Saitz, the spokeswoman for Grassley and Iowa House Republicans, criticized Sand for not compiling a report sooner and not including more information in it.

"We're glad that Auditor Sand took a break from his Twitter account to do the work the people of Iowa elected him to do," Saitz said. "It's concerning that it took scrutiny from Republicans in the Legislature and executive branch for the Auditor to release the audit reports and even briefly mention the misallocation of millions of public funds by the Judicial Branch.

"This report, however, far from answers all our questions. Iowa House Republicans just learned about this issue in September and are still working to understand the full

implications. We look forward to working this session to get our questions answered and this issue rectified.”

Bird, whose office manages the Victims Compensation Fund that has been shorted \$7.2 million, pushed back on Sand’s assertion that previous criticism of his office was unwarranted because none of the programs that were shorted ever ran out of funding.

“Rob Sand blew it, and now he is lying to cover up his mess,” Bird said in a statement. “With the money State Auditor Sand’s failure cost crime victims, we would have been able to provide 3,600 domestic violence survivors and their kids apartments, for the first time in years, as a safe escape from a violent situation. No domestic violence victims should have to stay with their abuser because they cannot afford to leave. And our State Auditor owes Iowa crime victims an apology.”

The Victim Compensation Fund’s monthly balance never dipped below roughly \$2.7 million during the time the fees were erroneously allocated, according to Sand’s report.

Paulsen told reporters Tuesday that he thinks Iowa taxpayers are owed an apology. He, too, said Sand’s office should have acted sooner and that its report should have gone deeper.

“This clearly is something that we as state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled, and nor do I think we met their expectations,” Paulsen said. “And I think in particular, as already laid out, we should have been notified sooner, and we should have been in finding out what was right and what was wrong sooner.”

Sand said the Auditor’s Office moved forward with its work as soon as it had sufficient information, which he said it did not have until the Judicial Branch released its information in October.

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WQAD8: Police: Referee assaulted by parent at Burlington basketball game

Alec Doxsee

BURLINGTON, Iowa — Update:

Burlington Police obtained an arrest warrant for Urban Morris of Burlington on the following charges: assault (serious misdemeanor), assault (simple misdemeanor), disorderly conduct, and two counts of first-degree harassment.

A criminal complaint filed in the case states that Morris was upset with a call made by a referee that he disagreed with.

The affidavit states the following:

Officers learned while en route the suspect had fled the area. Officers arrived on scene and were approached by witnesses stating the suspect was Urban Morris. Officers were then able to speak with both Victim 1 and Victim 2. Officers first spoke with Victim 1 and learned that he was the referee in the basketball game. At the end of the game a call was made at which point Morris disagreed with the call. Victim 1 stated that Morris approached him as well as Victim 2 and was upset about the call that was made. Victim 1 stated that Morris threatened both Victims by stating he was going to "kill" both Victims and then "find their families".

Victim 1 then traveled to the locker room area which parents/spectators are not permitted to go in. Victim 1 stated he was going into the locker room to attempt to retrieve his phone to call 911. Victim 1 then stated that he turned around and was punched in the nose by Morris who had followed him into the locker room. Victim 1 stated he was struck with a closed fist at which point he fell over a bench and Morris repeatedly struck Victim 1 approximately 7 or 8 times before Morris left the area. Victim 1 had visible swelling around his nose/eye region.

Officers then spoke with Victim 2. Victim 2 stated that he was also a referee in the game at which point the call was made and Morris became upset. Victim 2 stated that he did have his phone on his person at which point he removed his phone to call 911 at which point Morris stated "Call the Police" and "I will kill you" and stated he was going to "find his family". Victim 2 stated he was in fear that Morris was going to harm his (family) due to the comments that were made.

Morris turned himself into the Des Moines County Jail and was booked on the charges on Tuesday, Dec. 17. There is a preliminary hearing set for Dec. 27.

Lucasfilm's Special Effects: Dallas Steps Into Ironman's Footsteps -The Gadget Show #TBT
featured by
Original story:

The Burlington Police Department said charges are expected after a parent reportedly assaulted a referee following a basketball game.

According to a Facebook post, police responded to Edward Stone Middle School around 6:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 13 regarding the assault. Burlington Police confirmed the game was a freshman/junior varsity game that was taking place at the middle school.

Officials have identified the parent and criminal charges are expected. Further details will be released by the Burlington Police Department once an arrest has been made.

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DMR: Rob Sand: Iowa judicial branch has fixed computer error that caused \$27.5M misallocation

Stephen Gruber-Miller

Computer coding errors that prompted the Iowa Judicial Branch to send \$27.5 million in court fees to the wrong accounts over a five-year period have been fixed, State Auditor Rob Sand said Tuesday.

Sand on Tuesday released his annual audit of the Iowa Judicial Branch for fiscal year 2023, which began July 1, 2022, and ended June 30, 2023. The report includes an examination of millions of dollars misallocated by the Iowa Judicial Branch since 2020.

At a news conference Tuesday discussing the audit, Sand said future court debt payments will now be sent to the right accounts.

"It should be fixed going forward," Sand said.

Coding changes to resolve the problem were implemented on Nov. 22, according to Sand's report.

Iowa State Auditor Rob Sand speaks during a press conference at the Iowa State Capitol on Wednesday, Aug. 28, 2024, in Des Moines.

"On Nov. 22, 2024, the judicial branch implemented new programming to correct programming errors in its case management system," the Iowa Judicial Branch said in a response included in Sand's audit. "These changes, along with adjustments to retroactively correct distributions back to July 1, 2024, are being made to ensure that court debt revenue is distributed as required by Iowa code."

Republicans have criticized Sand, a Democrat, for not doing more to investigate the judicial branch's error sooner.

"He didn't take action provided on a tip provided in the summer of 2022, and this is the real concern here," said Kraig Paulsen, the director of the Iowa Department of Management and a Republican.

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen speaks during a hearing with the state Boards and Commissions Review Committee at the Iowa State Capitol on Wednesday, September 6, 2023 in Des Moines.

Sand said his office became aware of the issue in October 2022, which falls in fiscal year 2023, and is including its findings in the FY 2023 report. He said his office has been in touch with the Iowa judicial branch since it initially informed him of the problem.

Sand said Tuesday the Iowa judicial branch only recently provided him the final totals that had been misallocated.

"We can't audit what we haven't been provided," he said. "So the final numbers from the judicial branch just came to us in either late October or early November. And so we couldn't really issue this until we had that."

How much money did the Iowa judicial branch misallocate?

In all, the Iowa judicial branch incorrectly misallocated \$27.5 million to the state's general fund, resulting in various state and local government funds being shorted by the same amount.

Of the money that went to the general fund, \$23.6 million should have been sent to other state programs, while \$3.9 million should have been sent to local government programs.

Eight state programs were underfunded as a result of the errors, including two that fall under the state's general fund.

Iowa's Criminal Laboratory received \$1,761,657 less than it should have.

The D.A.R.E. Surcharge was shorted \$139,624.

The Department of Transportation Operating Fund-84 received \$6,359 less.

The Road Use Tax Fund was shorted \$10,425,636.

The Sex Offender Registry received \$102,933 less.

The Victim Compensation Fund received \$7,226,185 less.

The the Iowa Department of Revenue Collection Fee within the state's general fund received \$53,854 less than it should have.

The Juvenile Detention Home Fund within the state's general fund received \$4,105,663 less.

Three state funds received more money than they should have.

Iowa's general fund received \$27,553,261 more than it should have.

The SOS Revolving Fund received \$90,174 more.

The Jury Witness Fund received \$74,166 more.

The coding issues span five fiscal years and date back at least to when a law was passed in 2020 that changed the way Iowa court debt and fees are distributed to various state and local agencies and programs. Lawmakers passed another law in 2021 making more changes.

"There might be some coding changes that predated that, but the bottom line on this is that the lion's share of it started when they passed these bills," Sand said.

While the judicial branch can correct issues dating back to July 1, 2024, the start of the current fiscal year, it cannot move money that it distributed in previous fiscal years.

The Iowa Legislature will likely need to take action to correct the errors.

Sand said lawmakers should give the judicial branch and other state agencies more time to make the programming changes required when state law changes. The 2020 law was passed only weeks before the start of a new fiscal year, when it took effect, he said.

Sand's report recommends that "the Legislature should ensure that complicated funding changes not take effect until state branches and agencies have sufficient time to accurately and carefully make all necessary changes."

Paulsen said a further audit is needed to be certain the issue is resolved. Sand's office agreed this month to work with the Iowa judicial branch on a review that will look at the court debt misallocations and coding by the judicial branch's IT department, as well as the effect of the legislative changes to the court fee formula.

Rob Sand claims state programs had enough money to operate, but Republicans push back. Sand said every program that was shorted cash based on the error maintained enough money to continue operating while the misallocations were ongoing, Sand said.

"No program was ever shorted in a way that kept them from doing their job," Sand said.

Paulsen disputed Sand's claim.

"You don't spend your bank account down to zero every month, and neither do state entities funded by court debt," Paulsen said. "When the funds run low, you cut back, and so do state entities."

Attorney General Brenna Bird, a Republican, issued a statement saying "Rob Sand blew it."

"The truth is his failures cost crime victims \$7.2 million," she said. "With the money State Auditor Sand's failure cost crime victims, we would have been able to provide 3,600 domestic violence survivors and their kids apartments, for the first time in years, as a safe escape from a violent situation."

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Radio Iowa: Auditor says Iowa courts' multimillion dollar distribution error fixed

Kay Henderson

A report from the State Auditor's Office indicates faulty computer programming in the state's court system has been fixed for the current year, but court officials say they do not have the authority to reallocate funds to correct \$27.5 million worth of errors in previous years.

Some court fines and fees are to be distributed to cities, counties and a variety of state programs, like victim services and road construction. Lawmakers changed the formulas a few years ago, but programming errors meant the state courts were forwarding the wrong amounts.

State Auditor Rob Sand held a news conference yesterday about his report — and the distribution errors.

"It should be fixed going forward," Sand said.

Iowa Department of Management director Kraig Paulsen said court officials recently told him they believe the problem has been fixed.

"They're still going through testing, so it hasn't been finalized," Paulsen told reporters Tuesday afternoon. "Until we have an audit, it's hard to know for sure anyway."

Sand indicated court officials recently sent his office the data about where the funds had been misdirected.

"They are accurate. This is the actual number for how much this account has been overfunded and how much that account has been underfunded," Sand said. "Now that we know that, the legislature can make those adjustments."

Paulsen, the governor's budget director, said the auditor's office needs to dig deeper.

"Can we actually say that everything is 100% correct? I don't think so," Paulsen said, "because I'm not even sure we have looked at it going back far enough yet."

Paulsen, a former Republican legislator, and Sand, the only Democrat in statewide office, have been publicly feuding about the situation since October. Paulsen has said Sand failed to notify the executive branch once Sand's office was told there might be a problem. Sand said Paulsen's office knew DOT funding was affected before the auditor's office learned of it.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: In win for biofuels, stopgap spending bill allows year-round sales of E15 gas nationwide

Jacob Fischler

A spending bill U.S. House appropriators released Tuesday evening to keep the government open into next spring includes a provision to allow sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol nationwide throughout the year.

After years of prohibiting the blend, known as E15, from being sold at gas stations during the summer months, the Environmental Protection Agency this year allowed year-round sales in eight Midwestern states. The provision in the stopgap funding bill would allow E15 sales in all states throughout the year.

The provision is a major win for corn producers and their allies in Congress from both parties. Supporters of ethanol, which is derived from corn, say it boosts U.S. production and lowers gas prices.

Sen. Deb Fischer, a Nebraska Republican who sponsored a bill to make the blend available all year, said the move was part of the GOP agenda to “unleash American energy.”

Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, said biofuels “champions” are fighting for the provision allowing the sale of E15 year-around. “We have been working to get a year-round E15 solution for over 10 years,” he said in a statement. “It would be monumental for ethanol demand to support rural farmers and would save drivers 10 to 20 cents at the pump.”

“My bill puts an end to years of patchwork regulations and uncertainty — year-round, nationwide E15 will now be a reality,” Fischer said. “This legislation also delivers on the mandate we received in November to unleash American energy. Not only will my bill lower gas prices and give consumers more choices, but it will also create new opportunity for American producers, who are especially hurting right now from lower prices.”

House Energy and Commerce ranking Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey applauded inclusion of the measure, saying it would help reduce gas prices and bolster U.S. energy production.

“By allowing for a higher blend of ethanol in our gasoline, Americans can rely more on homegrown biofuels that save drivers money at the pump and help insulate Americans from dramatic global price fluctuations,” Pallone said in a statement.

U.S. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., one of a handful of farm-state House Republicans pushing for the E15 provision, said in a statement, “Year around E-15 is the most important policy we can embrace for Midwestern farmers and ranchers. I was glad to advocate for this on the Agriculture Committee and to our Speaker, and glad to see it embraced. I also know our entire Nebraska delegation was pulling for this. It is a team win.”

At a U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing last year, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Sen. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska promoted E15 availability as a way to lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower prices.

The EPA issued a waiver in May 2022 to allow the blend to be available nationwide throughout the year, as President Joe Biden's administration sought to tame gas prices.

The stopgap measure, known as a continuing resolution, would keep the government funded at current levels through mid-March. It includes a few additional provisions, including funding to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland.

The House and Senate are expected to pass the catch-all measure before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill.

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States Newsroom: Huge spending bill unveiled in Congress provides more than \$100 billion in disaster aid

Jennifer Shutt

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders unveiled a catch-all, year-end package Tuesday that would provide more than \$100 billion in disaster aid and give lawmakers more time to wrap up overdue work on government funding, the farm bill and a handful of other issues they decided not to finish.

The disaster aid section of the package will bolster funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Small Business Administration and several other federal agencies to continue their ongoing response efforts following a slew of natural disasters during the last two years.

The 1,547-page package would give Congress until mid-March to complete work on the dozen annual government funding bills that were supposed to become law by Oct. 1.

It also extends the farm bill through Sept. 30, 2025. In a victory for corn growers, the bill includes a provision to allow nationwide sales of a gasoline blend that includes up to 15% ethanol throughout the year.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said during a press conference before the bill was publicly released he had hoped the year-end stopgap spending bill would simply extend current funding until next year, when the GOP will hold the House, Senate and White House.

“But a couple of intervening things have occurred. We had, as we describe them, acts of God. We had these massive hurricanes if you know, in the late fall — Helene and Milton and other disasters,” Johnson said. “We have to make sure that the Americans who were devastated by these hurricanes get the relief they need. So we are adding to this a disaster relief package and that’s critically important.”

“Also important is the devastation that is being faced by our farming community,” he said. “The agriculture sector is really struggling. They’ve had effectively three lost years and commodity prices are a bit of a mess. And you have input costs that have skyrocketed because of Bidenomics.”

Johnson defended his decision to attach the other provisions in the stopgap spending bill, also known as a continuing resolution. Numerous Republicans have expressed frustration with his choice to bundle all the bills together in one package, instead of moving them individually.

“We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits and that’s what the volume of the pages to this is,” Johnson said.

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said in a written statement she would support the bill when that chamber votes on it later this week.

“While I — and so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle — wish we were voting on full-year funding bills, I am pleased that this package includes important resources for American farmers, emergency defense investments, investments in the Virginia Class submarine program, and increased funding for child care,” DeLauro wrote. “It also includes outbound investment protections I have long fought for to prevent American dollars from fueling the Chinese Communist Party’s policies with our capital and capabilities.”

“However, I am concerned that we could not agree on additional funding for veterans health care, and we must be vigilant in ensuring that the incoming Administration does not ration care promised to every affected veteran,” DeLauro added. “The passage of this bill should mark the beginning of negotiations on final 2025 funding bills. The start of a new Congress does not change the reality that any funding bills will still need the support of Democrats and Republicans in the House and in the Senate in order to become law.”

Hurricanes, tornadoes, bridge collapse

President Joe Biden asked Congress to approve nearly \$100 billion in emergency aid to bolster the accounts of several agencies that are helping residents, small businesses, farmers, and local and state governments recover from dozens of natural disasters.

The emergency supplemental request came shortly after Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused widespread devastation throughout Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The funding will also help communities recover following tornadoes throughout the Midwest; the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland; and severe storms in Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

The disaster response section of the spending package would include:

\$29 billion for FEMA’s disaster relief fund

\$21 billion for disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$12 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s community development block grant program for disaster assistance

\$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers and ranchers

\$8 billion for the Department of Transportation to provide disaster relief for federal highways

\$3.25 billion for State and Tribal Assistance Grants for water infrastructure repairs.

\$2.2 billion for the Small Business Administration’s disaster loan program

\$1.3 billion to replace the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland

Congress headed for finish line

The package is expected to pass the House and Senate before members depart for their holiday break on Friday. Biden is expected to sign the bill into law.

When Congress convenes again on Jan. 3 for the start of the 119th Congress, the Senate will flip from Democratic to Republican control. The House will remain red, though with a slightly smaller majority and very little, possibly no, room for GOP lawmakers to vote against partisan bills.

Republicans hope they can use unified control of Washington, which will begin after President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, to move through sweeping changes to federal spending and policy.

That is one of the reasons, Congress included a second continuing resolution in the package released this week. That stopgap spending bill will avoid a partial government shutdown until at least March 14.

That part of the bill is necessary since Congress has brushed off its responsibility to fund the government by failing to complete work on the dozen annual appropriations bills before the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1.

Lawmakers approved another stopgap spending bill in late September to keep funding levels mostly flat through Dec. 20, but did not use the extra time to negotiate a compromise between the Republican House and Democratic Senate.

GOP leaders have opted to hold over those full-year government funding measures until they control both chambers of Congress next year, in hopes they'll be able to more closely align the final versions of the 12 bills to their goals.

But Republican leaders will still need Democratic support to get the final spending bills, or another stopgap spending bill, through the Senate next year if they want to avoid a partial government shutdown.

The Senate requires at least 60 lawmakers to vote to advance major legislation toward a final, simple majority passage vote. The GOP will hold 53 seats next year, short of the requirement. Several Republican senators have also staked their reputations on consistently voting against any spending bill, making Democratic votes necessary to avoid a shutdown.

Republicans in the House will also likely need Democrats to move government funding bills through that chamber, given they too have a significant faction of members who refuse to vote for the full-year spending bills and often vote against the short-term stopgap bills as well.

Farm bill extension

The end-of-year catchall bill released Tuesday also includes another extension for the farm bill through next year, a new version of which Congress was supposed to pass more than a year ago.

Instead, lawmakers in both chambers have prioritized other interests, delaying work on the legislation that authorizes agriculture and nutrition programs.

Congress last approved a farm bill in December 2018, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said at the time would cost \$428 billion during the five years it was supposed to cover.

Funding for nutrition, crop insurance, farm commodity programs and conservation accounted for about 99% of the mandatory spending in the law, according to a report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Nutrition has become one of the higher price tag items in the farm bill during the last few decades and accounted for about \$326 billion of the mandatory spending in the 2018 farm bill. Another \$38 billion went to crop insurance, \$31 billion to commodities and \$29 billion to conservation during the five-year window that has since lapsed.

The nutrition funding goes toward several federal food programs for lower income people, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance Program.

The Republican House and Democratic Senate have been unable to work through their differences on a new five-year farm bill, despite giving themselves more than a year of extra time.

The bill lawmakers are set to approve this month will give unified Republicans in control of Washington another year to get the work done.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Immigrants and allies at U.S. Capitol urge Biden to act before Trump deportations begin

Shauneen Miranda

WASHINGTON — In the crucial last month before President Joe Biden leaves office, immigrants and allies on Tuesday urged the president to offer protections for immigrant communities before Donald Trump is inaugurated.

The president-elect has promised the largest deportation in U.S. history, stoking fear and uncertainty among undocumented immigrants and immigration advocates over a sweeping platform that marked the core of Trump's GOP presidential campaign.

Speaking near the U.S. Capitol, the "Home is Here" campaign featured immigrant youth, allies and advocates demanding Biden take executive action.

The national coalition, which fights to protect immigrant communities, also urged Congress not to boost funding for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection during the lame-duck session in a way that would aid Trump in carrying out mass deportations. Members of Congress are expected to vote this week on a stopgap spending bill that would fund the government through mid-March.

Immigrant youth, allies and advocates traveled to Washington, D.C., from across the country, including states such as Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, New York and Utah, to rally and meet with members of Congress about their demands.

Claudia Quiñonez, organizing director of United We Dream, the nation's largest immigrant youth-led network, said "before the keys to the White House are handed over to Trump, before a new Congress takes office, this lame-duck period is (a) critical window for our members in Congress and President Biden to leave it all on the field."

Quiñonez, who is also a co-chair of the Home is Here campaign, said there is "no underestimating the length Trump is willing to go to fulfill his pledges for mass deportation in raiding our schools, our workplaces, our hospitals and our churches."

U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib also voiced her concerns Tuesday over the president-elect's immigration plans.

"We cannot underestimate, as you all know, what will unfold the moment Trump takes office in January, and we need as many people as possible working to resist this hateful agenda," the Michigan Democrat said.

Tlaib noted that Biden "still has power to take immediate executive action to protect our immigrant communities."

She also said “we must continue to work incredibly hard, not only to outwork the hate, but to really promote love and justice within our communities.”

Among its priorities, the Home is Here campaign aims to protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program recipients. A federal court will determine the program’s legal fate.

The Obama-era program was created in 2012 and designed to protect children who were brought into the country illegally from deportation.

Trump tried ending DACA during his first term.

During an NBC News interview earlier this month, Trump did not give specifics on what he intends to do about the program but said that he “will work with the Democrats on a plan.”

Immigration groups on Tuesday also expressed worry over the uncertainty of Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, which allows migrants in countries with unsafe conditions to legally reside and work in the United States.

Trump sought to end TPS for multiple countries throughout his first administration.

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North Dakota Monitor: 13 more GOP states sign on to oppose Standing Rock Sioux in new lawsuit over DAPL

Mary Steurer

A federal judge this week allowed 13 more Republican-led states to intervene as co-defendants in the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's new lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The lawsuit, filed in October, accuses the Army Corps of unlawfully allowing the Dakota Access Pipeline to operate without an easement, a complete environmental assessment or sufficient emergency spill response plans. The tribe ultimately wants a federal judge to shut the pipeline down.

Standing Rock has opposed the pipeline for years, saying it infringes upon the tribe's sovereignty, has damaged sacred cultural sites and jeopardizes the tribe's water supply.

The Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction over a part of the pipeline that passes below the Missouri River less than a half-mile upstream from the Standing Rock Reservation.

"The Corps has failed to act and failed to protect the tribe," Standing Rock Chairwoman Janet Alkire said in an October press conference announcing the lawsuit.

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe files new lawsuit over DAPL

The more than 1,000-mile pipeline, often referred to as DAPL, passes through North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois. Its pathway includes unceded land recognized as belonging to the Sioux Nation under an 1851 treaty with the U.S. government.

North Dakota joined the case on the side of the Army Corps earlier this month, arguing that closing DAPL would cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue, put thousands of jobs at risk, hamper regional supply chains and harm the environment. State attorneys also argue that a federal court order shuttering DAPL would violate North Dakota's right to regulate its own land and resources.

In a brief filed Monday, the 13 additional co-defendant states made similar arguments. The group, led by Iowa, said DAPL is integral to the health of regional energy and agriculture markets.

"DAPL plays a vital role in ensuring the nation's crops can come to market — not because DAPL itself transports agricultural products, but because every barrel of oil that DAPL transports is a barrel that does not take space in a truck or a train," the states wrote.

This also makes highways and railways safer and reduces pollution, they added.

The 13 states that joined the lawsuit this week are Iowa, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and West Virginia.

According to the states' brief, the pipeline has paid over \$100 million in property taxes to Iowa counties and over \$33 million in property taxes to South Dakota counties since it began operating in 2017.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not yet filed an answer to the tribe's lawsuit.

Energy Transfer, the developer of the Dakota Access Pipeline, has not requested to intervene in the suit.

The case is before U.S. District Court Judge James Boasberg, who oversaw the tribe's 2016 lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers opposing the pipeline.

North Dakota in 2021 sought to join that lawsuit as well, but Boasberg denied the request as the case was in the process of wrapping up.

That case concluded with Boasberg instructing the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a full environmental impact study of the pipeline, which is still in the works. Boasberg also ordered the pipeline to stop operating pending the completion of the study, though that demand was ultimately overturned by an appellate court.

In a separate federal court case, North Dakota seeks \$38 million from the United States government for costs the state says it incurred responding to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests.

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WCCO: Satanists' holiday display at Minnesota Capitol sparks outrage

Riley Moser

ST. PAUL, Minnesota ([WCCO](#)) -- A Satanic holiday display at the Minnesota State Capitol has some sounding the alarm but Gov. Tim Walz says he can't take it down as it is protected by the First Amendment.

The Minnesota Satanists put up its holiday display at the Capitol building in St. Paul over the weekend.

The group says on its website that members "champion the symbol of Lucifer as one of revolt against arbitrary authority and advocacy for the pursuit of knowledge." The group says members don't directly worship Satan or believe in Satan; instead, they called the display a win for "religious plurality."

Republicans have blamed Walz for letting the display go up.

"Is there anything Tim Walz won't do to insult Minnesotans?" Republican Rep. Tom Emmer tweeted.

Republican Rep. Pete Stauber agreed with Emmer's sentiment, writing on X, "When you get a DFL trifecta, you get a Satanic display at our state Capitol. During the holidays...what a disgrace. Only in Walz's Minnesota."

The governor's office says while Walz does not agree with the display and did not approve it, the First Amendment—which guarantees the freedom of religion, among others—allows for the display.

"The First Amendment means that he does not police speech in the State Capitol. That's true whether it's a religious display, a political protest, or a Minnesotan advocating for a policy," a spokesperson for Walz said in a statement to WCCO.

Last December, the Satanic Temple put up a display inside the Iowa Capitol in Des Moines that a former U.S. Navy fighter pilot was later accused of destroying. Similar to the Minnesota Satanists, the Satanic Temple says it doesn't believe in Satan but describes itself as a "non-theistic religious organization" that advocates for secularism.

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CNN: Luigi Mangione has been indicted in New York for murder of United Healthcare's CEO, multiple sources say

Staff

(CNN) — Luigi Mangione has been indicted for the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in Manhattan earlier this month, multiple law enforcement officials tell CNN.

A New York grand jury has voted to charge Mangione with murder in the first-degree and murder in the second-degree, among other charges, the officials said.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is expected to announce the indictment at a 3:30 p.m. news conference.

The 26-year-old has been fighting extradition to New York after being accused of fatally shooting Thompson on December 4, but Bragg said Friday it is possible the suspect could soon waive his right to fight being handed over to New York authorities.

If convicted of second-degree murder in New York, Mangione would face 15 years to life in prison, while a first-degree murder charge carries a sentence of 20 years to life. He is set to appear in a Pennsylvania court for a preliminary hearing next week on state charges following his December 9 arrest at a McDonald's in Altoona.

A charge of murder in the first degree is rare because it requires special elements related to the crime to be charged.

Under New York law, murder in the first-degree only applies to a narrow list of aggravating circumstances, including when the victim is a judge, a police officer or a first responder, or when the killing involves a murder-for-hire or an intent to commit terrorism, CNN has reported.

Investigators in New York believe Mangione, a former high school valedictorian and Ivy League graduate born into a well-to-do family, appeared to be driven by anger against the health insurance industry and "corporate greed," according to an NYPD intelligence report obtained by CNN.

He's scheduled to appear at a hearing in Pennsylvania Thursday in response to his petitions for writ of habeas corpus and imposition of bail, court documents show. The habeas corpus petition is a key factor in whether Mangione can be extradited to New York.

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Axios: Congress releases bill to avert holiday government shutdown

Stephen Neukam, Andrew Solender

Congressional leaders Tuesday unveiled legislation to keep the government funded until March 14, unleashing a mad dash to pass the bill by the end of the week.

Why it matters: House Speaker Mike Johnson's (R-La.) next challenge is to find a way to ram the bill through the chamber while facing heat from his right flank over his handling of the government funding negotiations.

The bill includes around \$100 billion in disaster relief, a one-year extension of the farm bill and provisions restricting U.S. investments in China.

It also includes a provision that would allow the NFL's Washington Commanders to return to the RFK Stadium site, as well as sweeping health care reforms, the details of which we reported earlier Tuesday.

The stopgap bill sets up a government funding fight right at the end of President-elect Trump's first 100 days in office, adding to an already-full plate awaiting lawmakers next year.

The big picture: The package includes wins for both Republicans and Democrats.

The mid-March end date for the short-term bill gives Republicans the opportunity to control funding levels for the second half of fiscal 2025.

The billions in disaster relief is a win for Democrats and Republicans in states affected by hurricanes this year — President Biden submitted a request for the funding last month. The package also includes \$10 billion in economic aid for farmers.

The restrictions on investments in China are a bipartisan win, and all four corners of congressional leadership wanted to see it make the funding bill. It was pulled out of the year-end defense authorization package last week.

The bottom line: Time is running short. Current funding runs through Dec. 20.

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FOX News: Border Patrol arrests South African national on terrorist watchlist who entered US illegally

Sarah Rumpf-Whitten, Bill Melugin

A South African national who illegally entered the U.S. landed a "positive match" on the terrorist watchlist leading to his "swift" arrest in New York City.

According to U.S. Border Patrol Chief Jason Owens, the unidentified South African national was initially detained in Texas for criminal trespassing, but was released.

A Texas Department of Public Safety official confirmed to Fox News that the migrant was first arrested on a ranch near Eagle Pass in September, then they turned him over to federal border patrol who released him.

His arrest, alongside 36 other illegal migrants, was documented and shared on social media by Lt. Chris Olivarez, the spokesperson for the Texas DPS. Olivarez said that among the group were special interest illegal immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan, India and Vietnam.

Illegal South African

U.S. Border Patrol announced the arrest of a South African national and suspected terrorist in Brooklyn, NY. (Chief Jason Owens via X)

Owens said that a further investigation revealed a "positive match on the terrorist watchlist."

The positive identification of the suspect being involved in terrorism led to a swift multi-agency effort to arrest the individual in Brooklyn, New York. It is unclear how or when the suspect arrived in New York City.

"Thanks to the coordination of multiple agencies, this potential threat was located, taken into custody, and is now pending removal," he said.

Fox News Digital has reached out to the Border Patrol for comment.

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FOX News: Madison, Wisconsin, school shooting suspect identified as 15-year-old girl
Stephen Sorace, Stepheny Price

A 15-year-old girl killed a teacher and teen student in a shooting on Monday at a private Christian school in Madison, Wisconsin, and wounded six others, according to authorities.

Natalie Rupnow was identified as the shooter who opened fire inside a study hall inside Abundant Life Christian School, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. Responding officers found Rupnow with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. She died on the way to a hospital.

During a press conference Tuesday afternoon, Barnes said "identifying a motive is our top priority." He said the motive appears to be a combination of factors, but he did not elaborate any further.

Police were speaking with Rupnow's father and other family members, who were cooperating, and searching Rupnow's home, Barnes said. He declined to offer additional details about the shooter, partly out of respect for the family.

SCHOOL SHOOTER'S MOM JENNIFER CRUMBLEY HAD 'TAINTED' TRIAL, ATTORNEYS SAY IN REQUEST TO TOSS CONVICTION

"He lost someone as well," Barnes said of Rupnow's father. "And so we're not going to rush the information. We'll take our time and make sure we do our due diligence."

Rupnow used a handgun in the shooting, according to Barnes.

"I don't know why, and I feel like if we did know why, we could stop these things from happening," he told reporters.

The teacher and student who were killed in the shooting have not yet been identified.

Barnes said that of the six wounded in the shooting, two were students and remain in critical condition. A teacher and three students were also hospitalized with less serious injuries, and two of them were later released.

FATHER OF GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING SUSPECT PLEADS NOT GUILTY

Barnes said he did not believe that the school, which serves 200 students, according to the school's website, had a resource officer. It was also revealed that the school did not have metal detectors but did have cameras and other security protocols.

He also clarified that the initial 911 call reporting the shooting was made by a second-grade teacher at the school. On Monday, he mistakenly said the call had come from a second-grade student.

James and Rebekah Smith, whose 17-year-old daughter is a student at the Abundant Life Christian School, told Fox News that they know all the victims and their families.

The Smiths said their daughter wasn't in the same class as Rupnow, the alleged shooter, or knew her well, but said that Rupnow was new to the school and had enrolled sometime during the current semester.

They added that their daughter and her group of friends said they never saw Rupnow speaking to anyone at school.

The couple also said the student who was killed was a freshman girl who they've known since she was a toddler.

"She gave great hugs. She was an amazing pianist. She loved to read. She was just an amazing young girl," Rebekah Smith said.

Alleged Abundant Life Christian school shooter identified as 15-year-old femaleVideo Rebekah Smith said the teacher who was killed had a daughter who was in sports with the Smiths' daughter, and they talked with the mother at the games all the time.

She added that the victim had been a long-term substitute teacher at the school and just became a full-time teacher this year.

President Biden spoke with Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway after the shooting, and he issued a separate statement that called the event "shocking and unconscionable."

"We can never accept senseless violence that traumatizes children, their families, and tears entire communities apart," Biden said.

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AP: Canada's prime minister faces calls to resign. Here's what could happen next

Rob Gillies

TORONTO (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau faces growing pressure to resign from his own Liberal Party after his top minister abruptly quit and criticized his handling of the budget. Trudeau has led the country for nearly a decade, but has become widely unpopular in recent years over a wide range of issues, including the high cost of living and rising inflation.

There is no mechanism for Trudeau's party to force him out in the short-term. He could resign, or his party could be forced from power by a "no confidence" vote in Parliament that would trigger an election that would very likely favor the opposing Conservative Party.

If his party were to survive a vote in Parliament — which seems increasingly unlikely — Trudeau could choose to stay on as prime minister until there is an election.

As rising numbers of Liberal lawmakers called Tuesday for Trudeau to resign, the country's minister of natural resources, Jonathan Wilkinson, said "we all need to give him a little time to reflect."

Here's a deeper look at the possible paths for Trudeau and Canada.

Trudeau could resign and allow other liberals to vie for his office

If Trudeau resigns, which political analysts consider a likely scenario, the Liberals would need to choose an interim prime minister to lead the country at least until elections are held.

It isn't clear yet who the most likely candidate would be for any interim role.

Longer term, a person likely to seek power in the Liberal Party post-Trudeau is Mark Carney, the former head of the Bank of Canada, and later the Bank of England. Carney has long been interested in entering politics and becoming prime minister.

Another possible candidate is Trudeau's new finance minister, Dominic LeBlanc. The former public safety minister, and a close friend of Trudeau, LeBlanc recently joined the prime minister at a dinner with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago.

Concerns about Trudeau's leadership were exacerbated Monday when Chrystia Freeland, the former finance minister, quit his Cabinet. Freeland was highly critical of Trudeau's handling of the economy in the face of steep tariffs threatened by Trump. Shortly before Freeland announced her decision, the country's housing minister also quit.

"My guess is that if another minister or two goes, he's toast, he will be forced to resign," said Canadian historian Robert Bothwell.

Opposition parties could vote to topple Trudeau's grip on power
With voters deeply unhappy, Parliament has the authority to try to knock Trudeau's Liberal party from power by holding a "no confidence" vote that would trigger an early election. And if a majority of Parliament votes against his government, Trudeau would then be "erased in the election," Bothwell said.

The walls are rapidly closing in on Trudeau.

Because Liberals don't hold an outright majority in the Parliament, they have for years depended on the support of the leftist New Democratic Party to pass legislation and stay in power. But that support has all but vanished — the NDP's leader has called on Trudeau to resign — and that clears the way for Parliament to vote "no confidence."

After Tuesday, Parliament will be shut for the holidays until late next month, and a "no confidence" vote could be scheduled sometime thereafter.

The Conservative Party, which has a commanding lead in the polls over the Liberals, has not publicly called for Trudeau's resignation. And because of tactics the Liberal Party can deploy to delay a "no confidence" vote, Conservatives might not be able to force one for a couple of months, said Nelson Wiseman, professor emeritus at the University of Toronto.

A vote of no confidence would trigger an immediate election.

Trudeau could try to hang on to power
The political winds are blowing heavily against Trudeau, but he could theoretically cling to power a while longer.

While a growing number want him to resign, one longtime supporter, Liberal lawmaker James Maloney, said Trudeau has the support of his base in Parliament.

"Like most families, sometimes we have fights around the holidays. But of course, like most families, we find our way through it," Trudeau said. "I love this country. I deeply love this party. I love you guys."

If Trudeau's Liberal party survives no confidence votes in the coming months — an unlikely scenario — the latest the next federal election could be held is October 20.

The odds of an election much sooner than that have gone up.

"I expect an election in late spring, unless Trudeau decides to dissolve Parliament and dives into an election before then," said Wiseman.

With Liberals' grip on power fading, experts say the best they can hope for in the next election is to hold the Conservatives to a minority government that will be reliant on other parties to pass legislation. The latest polling from Nanos has the Conservatives leading the Liberals 43% to 23%, suggesting Conservatives could win a majority of the seats.

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12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement DRAFT

Legally Appropriate Statement:

Our state government is always going to be concerned about the wellbeing of children. The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit. Because of this, the State's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied.

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12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement DRAFT

Legally Appropriate Statement:

Our state government is always going to be concerned about the wellbeing of children. The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit. Because of this, the State's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied.

From: The Iowa Standard Newsdesk
Subject: Satanic Temple
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 14, 2024 9:00 AM (UTC-06:00)

Did the Governor's office have anything to do with the Satanic Temple event being canceled at Capitol? Thanks! Is there a statement I can attribute either way.

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From: Green, Jen
Subject: Green, Jen shared "12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement" with you
To: Frideres, Taryn [IGOV]
Sent: December 14, 2024 10:06 AM (UTC-06:00)



Green, Jen invited you to view a file

Here's the document that Green, Jen shared with you.



12.10.2024 Satanic Temple denial statement



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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Re: Satanic Temple
To: The Iowa Standard Newsdesk
Sent: December 14, 2024 12:08 PM (UTC-06:00)

Good morning,

You can attribute the following to the Governor:

"Our state government is always going to be concerned about the wellbeing of children. The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit. Because of this, the State's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

Thanks,
MM

Mason Mauro
Deputy Communications Director
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



From: The Iowa Standard Newsdesk <newsdesk@theiowastandard.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 14, 2024 8:59 AM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: Satanic Temple

Did the Governor's office have anything to do with the Satanic Temple event being canceled at Capitol? Thanks! Is there a statement I can attribute either way.

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From: Laura Belin
Subject: Qs about Satanic Temple event
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 14, 2024 2:33 PM (UTC-06:00)

Hello Mason,

Can you please send me the governor's statement regarding the Satanic Temple event that was canceled?

What did Governor Reynolds mean by "conduct that would be harmful to minors"? Please be as specific as possible about the allegedly harmful conduct and why Governor Reynolds believed it was going to happen at the capitol.

Did Governor Reynolds or anyone on her staff communicate with Director Steen about this matter before DAS canceled the event?

Did Governor Reynolds or anyone on her staff instruct Director Steen to cancel the event?

Thanks,

Laura

--

1705 Plaza Circle
Windsor Heights, IA 50324
(515) 276-6971

Website: <https://www.bleedingheartland.com>

Substack: <https://laurabelin.substack.com>

From: Erin Murphy
Subject: Satanic display
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 14, 2024 4:51 PM (UTC-06:00)

Mason: Can you share this statement from Gov. Reynolds with me and share the details and circumstances of this cancellation? Was the display not allowed?

Erin Murphy

Des Moines Bureau Chief

319 E 5th St Des Moines, IA 50309

erin.murphy@thegazette.com

office: 515.355.1300 • cell: 515.681.7388

From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Re: Qs about Satanic Temple event
To: Laura Belin
Sent: December 14, 2024 4:54 PM (UTC-06:00)

Hi Laura,

You can attribute the following to the Governor:

"Our state government is always going to be concerned about the wellbeing of children. The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit. Because of this, the State's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

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Governor Kim Reynolds
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



From: Laura Belin <laurarbelin@bleedingheartland.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 14, 2024 2:32:36 PM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: Qs about Satanic Temple event

Hello Mason,

Can you please send me the governor's statement regarding the Satanic Temple event that was canceled?

What did Governor Reynolds mean by "conduct that would be harmful to minors"? Please be as specific as possible about the allegedly harmful conduct and why Governor Reynolds believed it was going to happen at the capitol.

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Windsor Heights, IA 50324
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Website: <https://www.bleedingheartland.com>

Substack: <https://laurabelin.substack.com>

From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Re: Satanic display
To: Erin Murphy
Sent: December 14, 2024 4:54 PM (UTC-06:00)

Hi Erin,

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Governor Kim Reynolds
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



From: Erin Murphy <erin.murphy@thegazette.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 14, 2024 4:50:50 PM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: Satanic display

Mason: Can you share this statement from Gov. Reynolds with me and share the details and circumstances of this cancellation? Was the display not allowed?

Erin Murphy
Des Moines Bureau Chief
319 E 5th St Des Moines, IA 50309
erin.murphy@thegazette.com
office: 515.355.1300 • cell: 515.681.7388

From: Laura Belin
Subject: Re: Qs about Satanic Temple event
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 14, 2024 5:02 PM (UTC-06:00)

Thanks, but this doesn't explain what exactly about the planned event would have been harmful to minors. Presenting a positive image of Satan?

Not long ago many Christians would have said it was harmful to expose children to Judaism or Islam.

On Sat, Dec 14, 2024 at 4:53 PM Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov> wrote:
Hi Laura,

You can attribute the following to the Governor:

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Governor Kim Reynolds
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
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mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov

From: Laura Belin <laurarbelin@bleedingheartland.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 14, 2024 2:32:36 PM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: Qs about Satanic Temple event

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--

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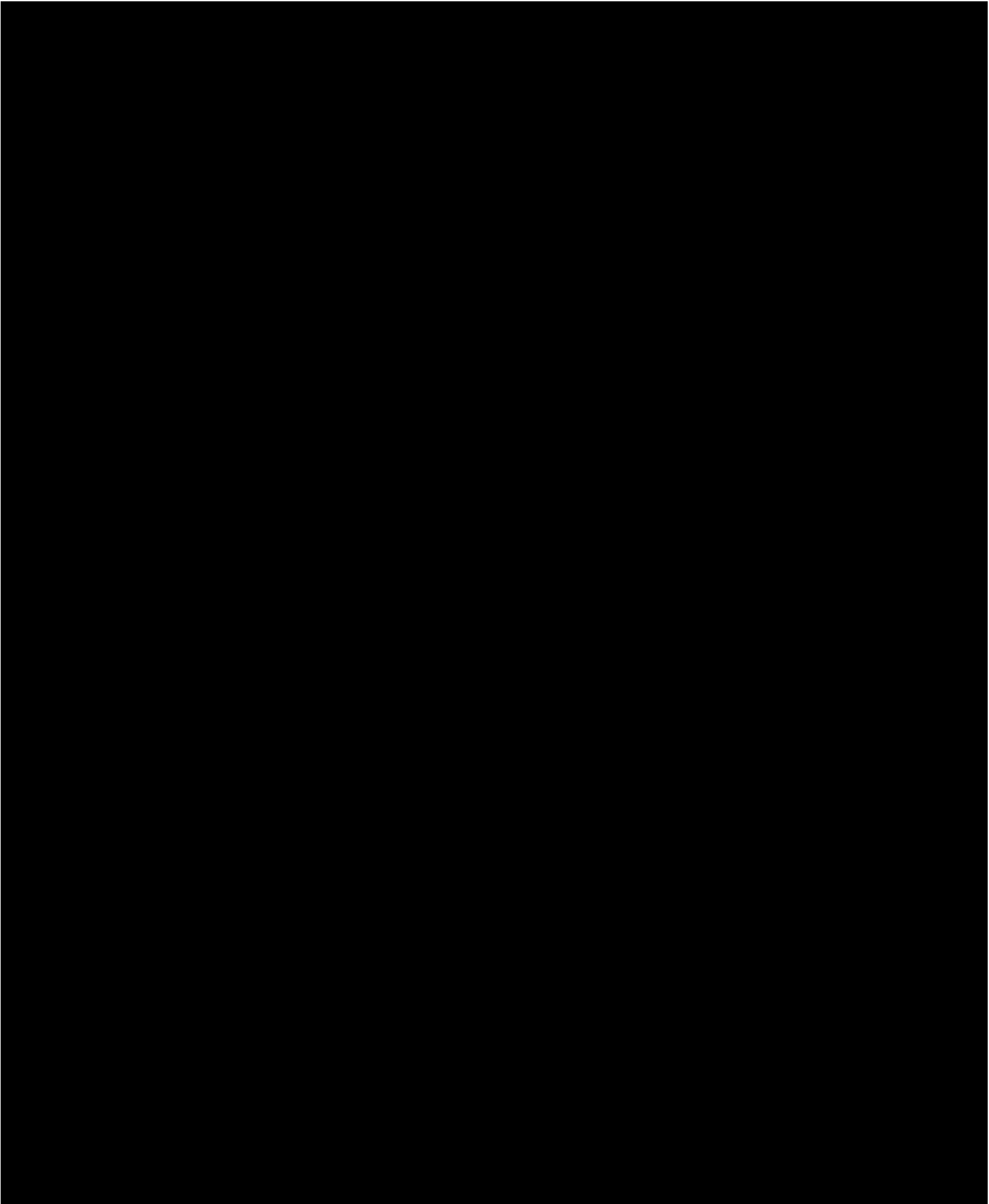
Substack: <https://laurabelin.substack.com>

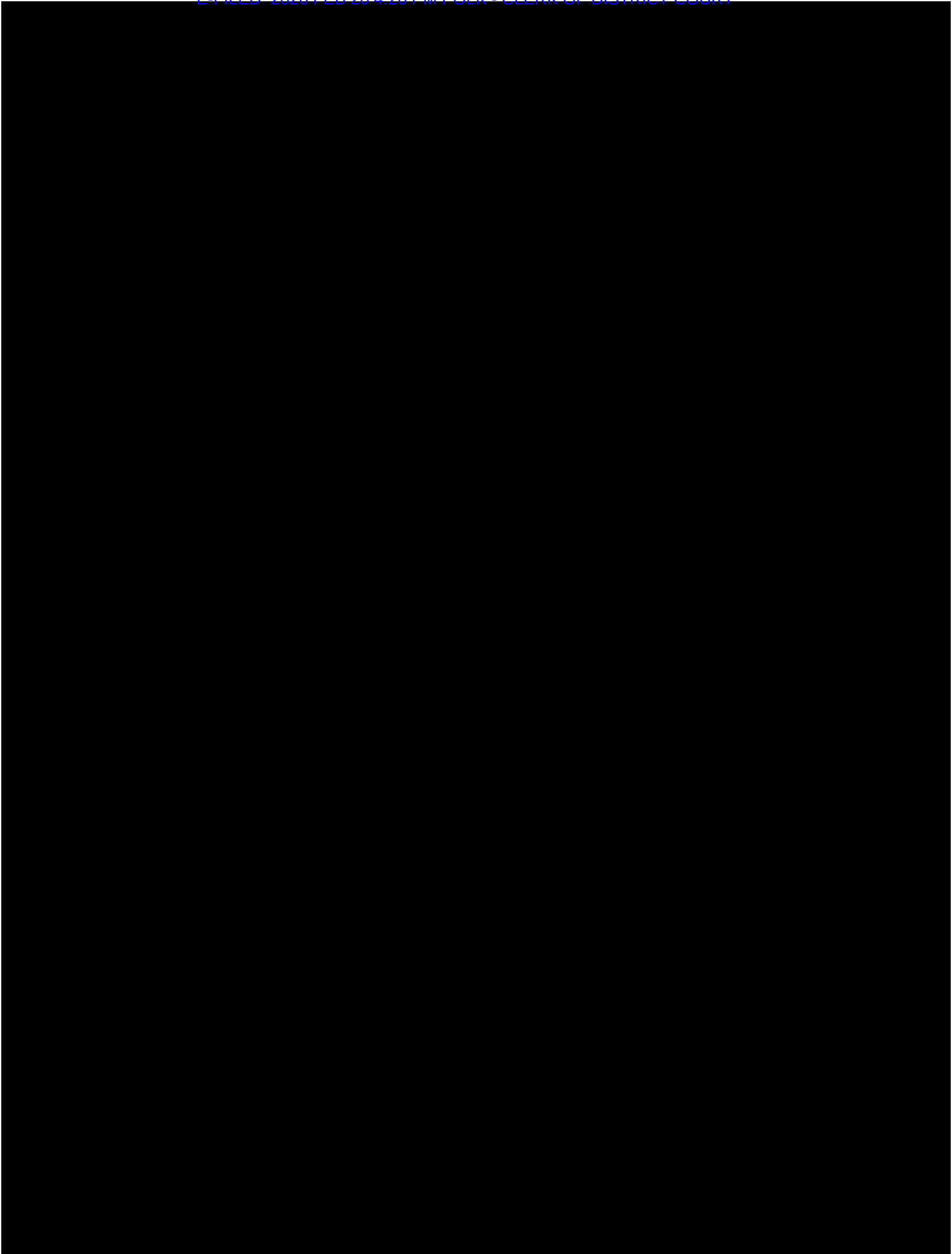
From: Hayes, Annie [IGOV]
Subject: Media Prep Doc for this week
To: Reynolds, Governor
Sent: December 15, 2024 6:30 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: 2024.12.17 Gov-LG Interviews Media Prep Doc.docx
Attached!

Annie Hayes
Executive Assistant to the Governor
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2741 mobile
annie.hayes@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



2024.12.18 Gov-LG Interviews Media Prep Doc





From: The Iowa Standard Newsdesk
Subject: Re: Satanic Temple
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 15, 2024 8:58 PM (UTC-06:00)

I appreciate this, by the way! Have a good week!

Jacob Hall
Editor
The Iowa Standard
712-449-5679 (cell)
Newsdesk@theiowastandard.com (email)

From: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Sent: Saturday, December 14, 2024 12:08 PM
To: The Iowa Standard Newsdesk <newsdesk@theiowastandard.com>
Subject: Re: Satanic Temple

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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Evening Clips 12.15.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 15, 2024 10:51 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: IGOV Evening Clips 12.15.2024.docx

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IOWA NEWS:

KCCI: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds announces disaster proclamation for O'Brien County due to bird flu
Staff

O'BRIEN COUNTY, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds is enacting a disaster proclamation for a northwest Iowa county after bird flu was found in commercial layer chickens.

The governor's office made the announcement Saturday. According to a release from the governor's office, the USDA confirmed a case of bird flu in O'Brien County.

A disaster proclamation was issued for neighboring Sioux County earlier this month. In nearby Palo Alto County, 31,000 turkeys have been affected. Palo Alto County is also under a disaster proclamation.

The proclamation in O'Brien County is set to expire Jan. 15, 2025.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds: Iowa ready to use National Guard, law enforcement for mass deportations

Sabine Martin

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds says she is ready to use "every tool at our disposal," including deploying the state's National Guard and law enforcement, to carry out President-elect Donald Trump's plans for "mass deportations" of illegal immigrants, according to a joint statement by Republican governors.

Trump has signaled he wants to see an overhaul of the country's immigration system, starting with deporting immigrants living in the country illegally who have violated the law.

"On Day 1, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history to get the criminals out," Trump said during his campaign's closing speech at Madison Square Garden.

Reynolds and 25 other Republican governors vowed in the statement to stand behind Trump's plans to seal the border to illegal immigrants, which they said President Joe Biden's administration failed to accomplish.

"Republican governors remain fully committed to supporting the Trump Administration's efforts to deport dangerous criminals, gang members, and terrorists who are in this country illegally," the governors said in their statement. "We understand the direct threat these criminal illegal immigrants pose to public safety and our national security, and we will do everything in our power to assist in removing them from our communities."

Reynolds' office did not immediately respond to a request for additional information on how the National Guard and law enforcement might be deployed in the deportation effort.

The governor signed a Texas-style immigration law, Senate File 2340, in April that allows Iowa law enforcement to arrest undocumented immigrants for "illegal reentry" into the state. The U.S. Department of Justice sued to block the law from going into effect shortly after its passage in May, arguing that immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, and a federal judge agreed.

The state is appealing.

The law was met with some pushback from local law enforcement, including from then-Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert, who said his department is "not equipped, funded or staffed" to handle immigration enforcement.

How many people in Iowa would be affected by Trump's 'mass deportations' plan?

Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration would deport more than 11 million undocumented migrants in the U.S., more than 3% of the country's population, according to Pew Research Center estimates from 2022 data.

An estimated 26% of Iowa's immigrant population is undocumented, according to the American Immigration Council. The same data shows that 2.4% of Iowa's workforce is comprised of immigrants living in the state without legal permission.

Trump said recently in an NBC "Meet the Press" interview that he wants to be able to "work something out" with Democrats to help people under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, to remain in the U.S. The program allows children of undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally to be able to live and work in the country.

Trump attempted to remove the program during his first term in the White House.

There are more than 1,300 DACA recipients living in Iowa and Omaha, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' June data.

How would Trump's plan for 'mass deportations' be carried out?

Trump said in November he will declare a national emergency and call on the military to assist in the promised deportations. His spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told USA Today his administration will use "every federal and state power necessary" to execute the mass deportation program.

Experts say Trump's plan could face several hurdles. The mass deportations could cost \$150 billion to \$350 billion for American taxpayers, Axios reported in November.

The U.S. immigration system also has a backlog of nearly 4 million cases and a shortage of immigration judges, which is slowing the process.

Five witnesses testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee on the effects that proposed mass deportations could have on Americans.

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union have stated that Trump's plan can't be accomplished "without violating the Constitution and federal laws."

"While Trump made similar promises in his first term, he was never able to carry out deportations on that scale," according to a memo from the ACLU on Trump's plan. "That is because doing so is an enormous project that would entail restrictions on basic freedoms core to American life."

Trump deported over 1.5 million people during his first term, which is less than deportations reported during former President Barack Obama's first and second terms.

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DMR: Kim Reynolds sets the standard for good governance. Cities should follow suit. | Opinion

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski, Guest columnists

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar

rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth-lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In fiscal year 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in fiscal year 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by fiscal year 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the Legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by a legislative committee. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "blue state" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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DMR: Des Moines-based organization selected to lead state's new behavioral health system

Michaela Ramm

An Iowa-based health care association has been selected by the state to manage Iowa's new behavioral health system.

Gov. Kim Reynolds signed into law earlier this year a plan to overhaul the framework for behavioral health services in the state, a move top state officials hope will improve access to services for Iowans struggling with mental or substance use disorders. The new system is set to go online July 1, 2025.

On Friday, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services announced the Iowa Primary Care Association was selected to serve as the organization to oversee the new system.

Iowa PCA is a Des Moines-based health care nonprofit overseeing Iowa's federally qualified health centers, which provide services to low-income and medically under-served residents.

As the new Administrative Service Organization for the state, Iowa PCA will be responsible for "ensuring that all Iowans have clear, consistent pathways to care and support they need," Iowa HHS officials said in a statement.

Iowa PCA will develop and lead operations for each of the new system's seven districts. State officials say they will work with local entities to craft strategies to meet the unique needs within those districts' communities and establish a statewide network of behavioral health providers.

"Iowa Primary Care Association is an established and trusted health care provider in the state and now, as the statewide ASO, they become the welcoming front door to individuals in need of behavioral health support and care," Iowa HHS Director Kelly Garcia said in a statement.

Iowa PCA CEO Aaron Todd described the behavioral health redesign as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build "a more holistic, integrated model of service delivery" to help Iowans.

"At the Iowa PCA, we are motivated and driven to work at the systems and community levels to address the very real barriers Iowans face to access behavioral health services that we have witnessed first-hand in our work with community health centers and other stakeholders across the state," Todd said in a statement.

What is Iowa's new behavioral health system?

The law signed by Reynolds in May eliminates the 13 Mental Health and Disability Service regions and 19 Integrated Provider Networks that currently manage substance use disorder and problem gambling services in the state.

Instead, the new plan merges these 32 districts into seven new districts that would oversee both mental health and substance use treatment and services. Disability services would be overseen directly by Iowa HHS.

Reynolds and other state officials have said the goal of the new system is to remove administrative barriers separating mental health and substance use programming in Iowa. Each of the behavioral health districts will be charged with coordinating prevention, early intervention and treatment and crisis services, among others.

"By bringing services together in this way, we will enable better coordination of care supporting the best

possible outcomes for each individual," Reynolds said in a statement Friday. "It's what Iowans deserve, and it's what we intend to deliver."

Many details about the new system are still forthcoming. Some behavioral health providers and other advocates have raised questions about the new system, saying they have concerns whether a large state-run system will have enough resources to address the needs of every Iowan.

Why was Iowa PCA selected by the state to lead the new system?

Garcia said in a statement that Iowa PCA is "uniquely qualified" to fulfill the state's vision for the new behavioral health system. The nonprofit already has an existing footprint statewide that includes a comprehensive IT infrastructure that can help streamline services for Iowans, she said.

Iowa HHS Behavioral Health Division Director Marissa Eyanson said Iowa PCA laid out a robust plan to ensure services continue for Iowans throughout the transition period and into the launch of the new system.

"Iowa Primary Care Association embraces innovative delivery models of care and promises to expand that approach in order to provide a standard set of core services consistently systemwide," Eyanson said in a statement.

Iowa PCA touted its experience in value-based care, health equity and quality improvement, among others. Todd said his organization will draw on this experience and seek input from local stakeholders as Iowa's behavioral health services shift into this new model.

"Just as we have led the nation in our work with community health centers, we are prepared and excited to partner with Iowa HHS, behavioral health districts, providers and stakeholders to realize Iowa's vision as the national leader in behavioral health service delivery," Todd said.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Gov. Kim Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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DMR: Ex-ISU professor can pursue more than a decade of unequal pay claims, Supreme Court rules

William Morris

A former Iowa State University professor can pursue potentially decades of claims for gender-based pay discrimination, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled Friday.

Sylvia Cianza worked as a professor in ISU's agronomy department from 1979 to 2020. In 2021, after her retirement, she filed a civil rights complaint against the university, alleging that she had been paid as much

as \$46,000 less per year than equally or less-qualified male agronomy professors — discrepancies she discovered, she said, after being assigned to chair her department's diversity committee.

Sylvia Ciano

In her lawsuit, Ciano sought damages for pay discrimination dating back to 2009, when Iowa passed its equal pay statute. Attorneys for the university, though, argued that because the law requires such complaints to be filed within 300 days, Ciano could only recover for alleged discrepancies on paychecks in the 300 days before her complaint.

The district judge disagreed with both, and ruled that Ciano's claims were limited by a two-year statute of limitations.

Friday's decision reverses that ruling and opens the door for Ciano to pursue more than a decade's worth of damages. Justice Christopher McDonald wrote for the full court, except Justice David May, who was recused.

"(The statute) means exactly what it says: the claimant can recover 'for the period of time for which the complainant has been discriminated against,'" McDonald wrote. "We thus decline the university's invitation to graft a temporal limitation into the damages statute where none exists."

The decision sends the case back to the district court for further proceedings.

Ciano's attorney, Ann Brown, said in an email that Iowa's Equal Pay Act is a "critically important" law for tackling wage discrimination.

"I am happy with the Supreme Court's decision that the statute speaks for itself and allows victims of wage discrimination to recover damages during the entire period of discrimination," she said. "This decision should end employers' efforts to limit employee recovery for wage discrimination to only 300 days, which would have allowed employers to profit from wage discrimination."

The Iowa Attorney General's Office, which represented the university, declined to comment.

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Radio Iowa: Vilsack says Farm Bill negotiations hit snag over spending transfer

Kay Henderson

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack says it appears Farm Bill negotiations have become more complex. House Speaker Mike Johnson says a majority of House Republicans oppose a Senate plan to take nearly \$10 billion in unspent funds from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act and use it on conservation programs.

"It would have actually provided additional resources for congress to increase the level of disaster assistance and emergency assistance that could have been provided to producers in Iowa and across the country," Vilsack said.

Current budget rules would allow congress to make that \$10 billion transfer, according to Vilsack. The sad reality is, by not protecting those resources, potentially congress could redirect them from farmers and ranches towards some other priority," Vilsack said.

Funding for federal conservation assistance was increased dramatically by the Inflation Reduction Act. "This is a historic opportunity for us to significantly reduce the backlog of farmers who have been waiting for a while for resources to be able to do on their land what they know needs to be done," Vilsack said, "to

protect it and to enhance it.”

Neither the House nor the Senate brought a new Farm Bill up for a vote this year. If congress fails to reauthorize the 2018 Farm Bill this month, federal farm policies revert to laws passed eight decades ago. Vilsack said that would create chaos in the markets.

“I’m sure that something is going to get done, the question is whether it will get done in a way that provides the best benefit and the most opportunity for farmers and ranchers and producers who work so hard for the rest of us,” Vilsack said.

Lawmakers from states hit by Hurricane Helene in late September are seeking federal disaster aid for farmers who lost crops, livestock and farm buildings.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: D.C. Dispatch: Iowa’s senators in the spotlight on Trump appointments

Kathie Obradovich and Brooklyn Draisey

As Congress worked to wrap up business in their lame-duck session this week, Iowa’s senators engaged with high-profile appointees who hope to serve in the new Trump administration.

Meanwhile, delegation members addressed issues ranging from communism instruction in classrooms to buoys on the Missouri River. And the death of former Iowa Congressman Jim Leach brought lawmakers and others together in offering condolences.

Grassley, Ernst in spotlight on Trump appointments

Both of Iowa’s Republican senators are playing influential roles as some of President-elect Donald Trump’s key appointments work to secure support for Senate confirmation.

Sen. Joni Ernst, a member of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, faced criticism and talk of a primary challenge from Trump-aligned Republicans after initially appearing cool to the nomination of Pete Hegseth as secretary of Defense. Hegseth, a veteran, has said women should not serve in combat roles and he has been accused of sexual assault. Ernst is a combat veteran and a sexual assault survivor.

Ernst, who is up for reelection in 2026, has already drawn one announced primary challenger.

This week, she appeared to soften on Hegseth’s nomination after meeting with him a second time but stopped short of promising to vote for him. In a statement, she said:

“I appreciate Pete Hegseth’s responsiveness and respect for the process. Following our encouraging conversations, Pete committed to completing a full audit of the Pentagon and selecting a senior official who will uphold the roles and value of our servicemen and women — based on quality and standards, not quotas — and who will prioritize and strengthen my work to prevent sexual assault within the ranks. As I support Pete through this process, I look forward to a fair hearing based on truth, not anonymous sources.”

Sen. Chuck Grassley, meanwhile, as incoming chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, pushed for the resignation of Christopher Wray, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI under Wray drew

Trump's ire for its investigation of the Jan. 6 insurrection and Trump's possession of classified documents after he left office.

Wray, who has three years left in his 10-year term, has since announced he will resign at the end of the Biden administration, leaving the position open for Trump's appointment. Grassley issued a positive statement Monday after meeting with Kash Patel, Trump's choice to lead the agency:

"Today I reminded Kash that transparency brings accountability, and it's badly needed at the FBI. As a former congressional investigator himself, Kash understands that cooperation with Congress is not optional and whistleblower protection is essential. Once formally nominated, I'd look forward to holding a hearing on Kash's nomination in the Senate Judiciary Committee."

Iowa lawmakers call for Coast Guard support on Missouri River

Ernst and Grassley, along with Reps. Randy Feenstra and Mariannette Miller-Meeks, signed a letter this week with other lawmakers calling for the U.S. Coast Guard reconsider removing 36 of its Aids to Navigation on the Missouri River north of Blencoe, Iowa.

The Coast Guard pays to maintain aids to navigation along Marine Highway 29 such as buoys, day beacons and lightships, which function as floating lighthouses, WOWT reported.

In recent years, navigation on the river up to Sioux City has increased, and planned development projects are expected to further increase traffic in years to come, according to a press release from Ernst's office.

"In Iowa, we are proud to feed, fuel, and supply consumers around the globe with products straight from the heartland. Our beautiful rivers are integral to sharing those products with the rest of the world," Ernst said in a release. "The removal of this infrastructure on the Missouri River threatens the livelihoods of Iowans in our manufacturing and agricultural communities. I urge the Coast Guard to reconsider this decision."

Feenstra votes for Crucial Communism Teaching Act

Feenstra voted last week in favor of the Crucial Communism Teaching Act, according to a news release. The legislation would have the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation formulate a high school curriculum about the history of communism, the regimes in the system and "ongoing human rights abuses by such regimes," according to the bill.

The foundation would also develop oral history resources that educators could utilize alongside the curriculum, the bill stated.

According to statistics cited in a news release from the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 18% of Gen Z "thinks communism is a fairer system than capitalism and deserves consideration in America."

Feenstra in the release emphasized this number, and said "nearly one third of America's youth hold a favorable opinion of communism."

"These alarming findings cannot be the norm for future generations of Americans if we want our country to succeed and prosper," Feenstra said in the release. "I voted for the Crucial Communism Teaching Act to push back against the spread of this dangerous ideology in our schools and educate our children about communism's ugly past."

Feenstra joins DOGE Caucus

Feenstra also announced in a news release Thursday that he has joined the Delivering Outstanding Government Efficiency, or DOGE, Caucus.

The name mimics the Department of Government Efficiency that Trump said he would create, headed by billionaire businessman Elon Musk and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy. The pair have said they'll find \$2 trillion in cuts to federal spending.

Ernst announced last month the creation of a DOGE Caucus in the Senate.

Feenstra said in the release that reckless spending and borrowing have driven up inflation and created more debt, and the federal government needs to balance its budget, eliminate wasteful spending and slow down debt growth in order to help future generations that will inherit what's left.

He said he's happy to work in the caucus to find ways to save taxpayers money and "eliminate unnecessary regulations" in order to grow the economy and make the country more fiscally responsible.

"As a strong, fiscal conservative, I came to Congress to get our debt under control, lower costs for our families, and stop wasteful government spending – and that's exactly what I'll continue to do," Feenstra said in the release.

Nunn, Ernst get provisions passed national defense package

An amendment headed by U.S. Rep. Zach Nunn was included in the National Defense Authorization Act, according to a Thursday news release, which passed out of the U.S. House of Representatives and was sent to the U.S. Senate.

All four of Iowa's representatives voted for the bill, which also eliminated gender-affirming health care coverage for children of military members.

According to the release, Nunn's proposal was to form a "strategic partnership" between the U.S. Defense Innovation Unit and the Israeli Ministry of Defense to simplify sharing of emerging technologies between the two powers.

Also included in the defense act were pay raises for certain servicemembers, increased funding to "U.S. defense initiatives" in the Indo-Pacific, and cuts to military programs and areas of the Pentagon totaling \$31 billion.

Other aspects of the legislation also touch on U.S.-Israel relations, like expanded collaborative military exercises and halting the "sale of goods at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges from any entities that have or are engaged in a boycott of Israel."

"America is the land of the free and home of the brave because of the men and women who serve in uniform," Nunn said in the release. "As a twenty-year combat veteran and current Colonel in the Air Force, I'm committed to protecting our national security. That means securing our Southern Border, stopping China in its tracks, bolstering our allies, and supporting our men and women in uniform throughout their career. This bill is a win for national security, a win for our troops, and a win for the future of our nation." A measure backed by Ernst also made it into the final bill aimed at preventing, assessing and treating conditions, including traumatic brain injuries, suffered by service members repeatedly exposed to explosion pressure waves.

Lawmakers, other respond to death of former Rep. Jim Leach

Former Congressman Jim Leach. (Photo courtesy of the Leach family)

Members of Iowa's delegation joined a host of others, including former President Barack Obama, in paying tribute to former U.S. Rep. Jim Leach of Davenport, who died Wednesday at age 82. Leach represented his

eastern Iowa district from 1977 to 2007 and later chaired the National Endowment for the Humanities, among other positions.

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids school district rejects College & Career Pathways petition

Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - The Cedar Rapids Community School District says a petition regarding the College & Career Pathways program is invalid.

A parent in the district, Brooke Oja, submitted the petition, which has more than 600 signatures.

It asks that the district slow down the implementation of the College & Career Pathways model, to give parents more time to understand the process.

In a response to the petition on Friday, district leaders said there were insufficient eligible signatures, with many of the signatures on the petition coming from outside Cedar Rapids and Iowa.

Because the district has deemed the petition invalid, district leaders won't add the matter to the next school board agenda.

However, Superintendent Dr. Tawana Grover said the district does value the feedback from the community.

"We deeply appreciate the engagement and passion families, educators, and others in the community have shown for our College & Career Pathways program," Dr. Grover said. "We are listening closely to the feedback and are committed to working together to ensure the program's success."

The first phase of the College & Career Pathways program, Freshman Academy, is set to launch in the fall of 2025. The initiative will require high schoolers to choose a "pathway" geared to a career and then take one class a year in that pathway.

The district has held some in-person meetings to try to explain the program to parents, but some parents say their concerns have not been adequately addressed.

The district is inviting parents to join the Parent Advisory Group, and it is planning to host additional community meetings in 2025.

Find more information about the College & Career Pathways program [here](#).

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KCRG: University of Dubuque 'on track' to launch new medical school in 2028

Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - The University of Dubuque is "on track" to gain accreditation to open Iowa's first new medical school in more than a century.

The university aims to open the John and Alice Butler College of Osteopathic Medicine by August 2028, funded by a \$60 million gift by John and Alice Butler. The donation will be invested into the following:

\$12.5 million in endowed scholarships for undergraduate health science students

\$12.5 million in scholarships for Dubuque County students

\$10 million to establish the College of Osteopathic Medicine

\$10 million to support lab research and update equipment

\$10 million for outreach and education efforts

\$5 million to recruit, support, and retain college leadership

"Today is a great win for health care and for education," said University of Dubuque President Travis Frampton. "It is a great win for that high school student in rural Iowa who wonders if she can be a doctor someday to help make people feel better."

According to the university, osteopathic medicine offers a holistic approach to medicine that treats the whole person - mind, body, and spirit.

The four-year medical program will accept around 200 students per class for a total enrollment of up to 800 students.

"That is 400 students on campus, enrolled, taking courses in a new medical school complex, and 400 spread across the tri-state area and beyond on clinical rotations," explained Frampton. "To say it another way, this program will attract 400 new graduate students each year to reside in Dubuque. The impact on our local economy will be profound."

UD officials were joined by Dubuque Mayor Brad Cavanagh, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, and other community and state leaders Friday for the announcement.

"A new medical school will be a catalyst for what our state needs right now. It has the potential to attract the best and brightest from across the country to study medicine right here in Iowa, build their lives and careers here, and ultimately, increase access to the quality of health care in rural areas of our state that need it most," said Reynolds.

According to a March 2024 study by the Association of American Medical Colleges, the U.S. is expected to face a physician shortage of up to 86,000 workers by 2036.

"In communities like ours, whether that's in Dubuque, in our region, in Iowa, or along the rural-urban divide in the U.S., there is a continuing shortage of physicians. This dramatically impacts access to adequate care, which significantly affects healthcare and health outcomes. In order for us to change this trajectory, we must educate, prepare, and equip more physicians. By establishing a medical school in the Tri-State, the University of Dubuque will be able to serve our community and deliver on our Mission," said Frampton.

The university has not selected a site to build a medical facility, but several locations are being considered in downtown Dubuque.

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Iowa News Now: Southeast Iowa manufacturing facility, EPA reach settlement over chemical leak

Maddie Lee

EDDYVILLE, Iowa — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is fining a southeast Iowa production plant for alleged violations of the federal Clean Air Act and Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.

The Ajinomoto Health and Nutrition Eddyville plants were inspected by the EPA after a 2021 release of hydrochloric acid led to evacuations and community shelter-in-place orders and a 2022 chlorine gas release that injured some employees.

The EPA identifies both substances as extremely hazardous.

Chlorine gas can be fatal when inhaled or lead to chronic lung conditions.

They will pay just over \$458,000 in civil penalties as a result.

According to the EPA, Ajinomoto has also agreed to install an ammonia water deluge system at one of its two facilities.

This will cost almost \$228,000.

The plant has conducted a compliance audit at its facilities to identify any outstanding noncompliance with federal law.

Ajinomoto's Eddyville plants manufacture amino acids for food and beverages and animal nutrition.

They employ about 270 local workers between Eddyville and Oskaloosa.

EPA Region 7 Enforcement and Compliance Division Director David Cozad said in a statement, "Ajinomoto's operation presented a significant risk to its workers and surrounding community."

He added that the settlement will reduce the risk to workers and residents.

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The Gazette: University of Iowa Health Care tackles growing demand for emergency care

Vanessa Miller

IOWA CITY — The number of Eastern Iowans needing or wanting emergency care has soared over the last two decades — as has the severity of the health issues patients are facing — cramping emergency rooms, crowding wait rooms and compelling hospitals to expand, renovate and build.

That includes University of Iowa Health Care, which in the spring will increase its emergency room count to three — including its main-campus ER west of the Iowa River in Iowa City; the former Mercy Hospital ER east of the river in Iowa City it acquired through a bankruptcy sale this year; and an ER attached to the new North Liberty hospital nearing completion.

“The emergency department at North Liberty will treat the same types of patients with the same spectrum of disease that we currently see at our university and downtown campus locations,” said Hans House, director of emergency medicine services at the UIHC North Liberty campus. “We will be ready for patients of all ages, including children.”

On the main UIHC campus — which has taken the brunt of the area’s ER-visit spike, given its ability to treat the sickest and highest-acuity patients — the emergency room is undergoing a \$37 million renovation and expansion, phase I of which wrapped this month.

After the full expansion and renovation anticipated by next winter, the main UIHC ER will have more than a dozen additional treatment rooms — bringing it to nearly 60 beds — a new triage area and more space for assessing and treating pediatric patients and those with mental health needs.

The project aims to improve the department’s capacity, efficiency and patient experience — which has suffered due to long wait times and other crowding issues.

“It’s just overwhelming at times,” UIHC Emergency Departmental Executive Officer Andrew Nugent told The Gazette about the university’s ER traffic. “And it really depends on the amount that is coming from outside institutions. Being the tertiary center, we take an enormous number of transfers into the hospital. ... There are days when everybody’s trying to send us patients because they’re all sick, and we’re the only place that can handle a lot of these things.”

The university’s most recent Board of Regents report on its emergency room use showed wait times rose about 40 percent from 2018 to 2022, while its emergency room-to-emergency room transfers from other hospitals to the UI climbed 33 percent during the period. The average length of stay in the UI ER increased from under 4.5 hours to over five.

While a typical wait time at the UIHC ER is between one to two hours, the wait time at the former Mercy ER — now called UI Medical Center Downtown — often is only minutes.

Adding that space to its emergency repertoire — in addition to the new North Liberty emergency room — will allow the university to better triage its patients based on severity and specific needs.

“We can kind of work synergistically to get the sickest patients here” at the main campus ER, Nugent said.

‘In the hallway quite a bit’

The first phase of the main campus ER project was focused on a south and vertical expansion — moving a relatively new “crisis stabilization unit” from the seventh floor of the John Pappajohn Pavilion to the second floor of the emergency department, where many with mental health needs first present.

“This move is designed to improve the speed and effectiveness of the care we provide patients experiencing a mental health emergency, as well as enhance efficiencies for staff,” according to a UIHC summary of the upgrade.

The upgrade also created a new adolescent-specific stabilization unit. That, according to the university, will streamline treatment for pediatric patients having a mental health crisis and allow the university to care for

them in a “much more humane way.”

“One of the side effects of boarding and overcrowding is that our patients are in the hallway quite a bit,” Nugent said. “And so hopefully this alleviates that. Our mental health patients will have rooms. And they're being specifically built so they're safe for mental health patients but can be used multi-functionally.”

Both of those new units are opening this month, when phase II of the ER expansion is beginning — creating a larger pediatric emergency space on the north side that will include two resuscitation rooms, a procedure room and a triage room.

“And we’re going to have a waiting room for the kids, which is great — so they don’t have to be next to the adults that are sick and coughing, or vice versa,” he said.

On a 60-acre plot in North Liberty, the university’s new \$525.6 million, 469,000-square-foot hospital aims to absorb some of the visits to the main UIHC ER. The university expects 55,000 visits there this year — up 140 percent from the about 23,000 visits 25 years ago.

And while the new hospital itself will house the UI Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation and lean heavily toward orthopedics care, its ER will be capable of responding to any type of emergency.

“This will be a fully functional emergency department with the same equipment, technologies and capabilities available at the downtown campus (emergency department),” according to Ali Harmon, director of emergency medicine and transport services in the UI Department of Emergency Medicine. “It will be available to anyone needing emergency treatment.”

The new North Liberty ER will have 14 emergency care rooms, including two for behavioral health patients; a designated trauma and resuscitation room; haz-mat space for patients needing to decontaminate from hazardous materials; an isolation room for patients with infectious diseases; and board-certified ER doctors and nurses.

The North Liberty emergency department will be designated a Level 4 trauma center — providing advanced trauma care and life support “in preparation for transfer to a facility that provides tertiary-level care and a broader scope of surgical, specialty, and subspecialty services.”

Patients needing that higher level of care will be transferred to the UIHC main campus ER, designated a level 1 trauma center, or to the Downtown Campus, a level 3 trauma center.

“The North Liberty ED won’t include all the specialty care teams on-site that we have on the university campus,” Harmon said. “That’s really what impacts a trauma center’s level designation. For patients who come to the North Liberty ED needing subspecialty care, we’ll transfer those patients to the university campus or downtown campus, depending on the care they need.”

‘Spreading out of the community visits’

Although UIHC doesn’t have much control over where patients decide to go for emergency care — aside from educating them on which site is most appropriate for their specific need — ER doctors now will be able to coordinate transfers where necessary using an up-and-coming internal ambulance system, Nugent said.

That system hasn’t officially been announced or come online, but Nugent said the goal is to have it up and running before the spring opening of the North Liberty hospital.

“So that we can get people effectively from here to downtown, and then we’ll just add North Liberty to the system,” he said.

Patients can help and avoid transfer by doing “some self-selection” — heading, for example, to North Liberty for a broken bone, to the downtown campus for a high fever or to the main UIHC ER for trauma or a life-threatening issue.

“But if you’re really hurting, go to the closest spot, and that’s fine,” Nugent said. “Because then we’ll get you to the right spot.”

Once the university has its ER trio online, Nugent said he expects to see some “spreading out of the community visits.”

“I would see wait times hopefully go down for everyone at every location,” he said. “I think the number of admissions still coming to the main campus is going to be the same, if maybe not higher, because we’re going to find out people are ill and getting seen faster.”

Part of the university’s ER crowding issue has to do with its inpatient bed capacity and the fact that so many of its emergency patients need to stay overnight. Where an average community hospital reports a 12 to 14 percent admission rate from its ER, the university’s ER admission rate is 33 percent, according to Nugent.

The university has 889 inpatient beds on its main campus, including 205 pediatric beds in its UI Stead Family Children’s Hospital; 234 beds at its downtown campus; and it will add up to 48 inpatient beds in North Liberty. The hospital also is planning a new 842,000-gross-square-foot inpatient tower costing more than \$1 million, including multiple floors of 48 beds each.

But completion of that tower will take years.

“So we’re still going to have some of those issues where we need to get people admitted,” Nugent said. “We don’t know the impact of moving some of our inpatient capacity out to North Liberty, and we’re getting better at sending some downtown, so hopefully that evens out a little bit.

“But I don’t want to have to wait for a new inpatient tower to make everything better,” he said. “So we’re constantly working on the efficiency of things.”

Other expansion

Although the university is planning significant upgrades to the downtown campus it acquired from Mercy Iowa City — with expectations to spend “far” more than \$25 million over time — initial plans include roofing upgrades and operating room renovations.

“I think, first of all, they’ve got to get the building in shape,” Nugent said about the prospect of expanding the downtown ER. “And then they’ll probably have some discussions about whether they need to expand or not.”

UI Health Care isn’t the only hospital system in the area addressing emergency room crowding and wait times.

Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids in 2020 opened the state’s first free-standing ER — by converting its Hiawatha MercyCare Urgent Care location into an extension of its emergency department.

That ER is open every hour of every day of the year — offering on-site radiology, lab and pharmaceutical services. And earlier this month, Mercy Cedar Rapids opened its second freestanding ER — this one in Marion — outfitted with 12 exam rooms, two trauma rooms, lab and imaging services, and a helipad.

“Like the Mercy Hiawatha ER, patients at the Marion location that require additional hospital intervention will be transferred free of charge to Mercy’s downtown location based on well-developed protocols and in partnership with local ambulance services,” according to hospital officials.

UnityPoint Health-St. Luke’s Hospital, 1026 A Ave. NE in Cedar Rapids, also opened a Marion ER in August. The 10,000-square-foot ER was built inside an existing building at 3301 Armar Dr., just off Marion Boulevard near the border of Cedar Rapids and Marion.

St. Luke’s identified Marion “as an ideal location due to its fast-growing population and community expansion projections,” Dr. Sarah Hoper, the medical director for its new Marion ER, told a correspondent for The Gazette earlier this year.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

Stateline: Trump migrant deportations could threaten states’ agricultural economies

Nada Hassanein

If President-elect Donald Trump follows through on his pledge to deport millions of immigrants, it could upend the economies of states where farming and other food-related industries are crucial — and where labor shortages abound.

Immigrants make up about two-thirds of the nation’s crop farmworkers, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, and roughly 2 in 5 of them are not legally authorized to work in the United States.

Agricultural industries such as meatpacking, dairy farms and poultry and livestock farms also rely heavily on immigrants.

“We have five to six employees that do the work that nobody else will do. We wouldn’t survive without them,” said Bruce Lampman, who owns Lampman Dairy Farm, in Bruneau, Idaho. His farm, which has been in the family three decades, has 350 cows producing some 26,000 pounds of milk a day.

“My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work,” said Lampman, adding that his workers are worried about what’s to come.

Anita Alves Pena, a Colorado State University professor of economics who studies immigration, noted that many agricultural employers already can’t find enough laborers. Without farm subsidies or other protections to make up for the loss of immigrant workers, she said, the harm to state economies could be significant.

“Farmers across the country, producers in a lot of different parts, are often talking about labor shortages — and that’s even with the current status quo of having a fairly high percentage of unauthorized individuals in the workforce,” Pena said. “A policy like this, if it was not coupled with something else, would exacerbate that.”

Employers have a hard time hiring enough farm laborers because such workers generally are paid low wages for arduous work.

In addition to hiring immigrant laborers who are in the country illegally, agricultural employers rely on the federal H-2A visa program. H-2A visas usually are for seasonal work, often for about six to 10 months.

However, they can be extended for up to three years before a worker must return to their home country.

Employers must pay H-2A workers a state-specific minimum wage and provide no-cost transportation and housing. Still, employers' applications for H-2A visas have soared in the past 18 years, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a trend reflecting the shortage of U.S.-born laborers willing to do the work. The number of H-2A positions has surged from just over 48,000 in 2005 to more than 378,000 in 2023.

But agricultural employers that operate year-round, such as poultry, dairy and livestock producers, can't use the seasonal visa to fill gaps, according to the USDA.

My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work.

– Bruce Lampman, owner of Lampman Dairy Farm in Bruneau, Idaho

Farmers also employ foreign nationals who have "temporary protected status" under a 1990 law that allows immigrants to remain if the U.S. has determined their home countries are unsafe because of violence or other reasons. There are about 1.2 million people in the U.S. under the program or eligible for it, from countries including El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Lebanon and Ukraine. Many have been here for decades, and Trump has threatened to end the program.

Support for the program

Immigration advocates want a pathway for H-2A workers to gain permanent legal status, and agricultural trade organizations are pushing for an expansion of the H-2A program to include year-round operations.

The National Milk Producers Federation says it's too early to say how it would cope with mass deportations under the Trump administration. But the group states it "strongly supports efforts to pass agriculture labor reform that provides permanent legal status to current workers and their families and gives dairy farmers access to a workable guestworker program."

Immigrants make up 51% of labor at dairy farms across states, and farms that employ immigrants produce nearly 80% of the nation's milk supply, according to the organization.

"Foreign workers are important to the success of U.S. dairy, and we will work closely with members of Congress and federal officials to show the importance of foreign workers to the dairy industry and farm communities," Jaime Castaneda, the group's executive vice president for policy development and strategy, wrote in an email.

Adam Croissant, the former vice president of research and development at yogurt company Chobani, which has manufacturing plants in Idaho and New York, said he's seen a lot of misinformation around immigrants' workforce contributions.

"The dairy industry as a whole understands that without immigrant labor, the dairy industry doesn't exist. It's as simple as that," Croissant said.

Tom Super, a spokesperson for the National Chicken Council, lambasted U.S. immigration policy and said the poultry industry "wants a stable, legal, and permanent workforce."

"The chicken industry is heavily affected by our nation's immigration policy or, more pointedly, lack thereof. ... The system is broken, and Washington has done nothing to fix it," Super wrote in an email.

Changes ahead?

But major changes to the H-2A visa program are unlikely to happen before deportations begin. In an interview with NBC News' "Meet the Press" over the weekend, Trump repeated his promise to start deporting some immigrants almost immediately.

He said he plans to begin with convicted criminals, but would then move to other immigrants. "We're starting with the criminals, and we've got to do it. And then we're starting with the others, and we're going to see how it goes."

Some farmers still hope that Trump's actions won't match his rhetoric. But "hoping isn't a great business plan," said Rick Naerebout, CEO of the Idaho Dairyman's Association. "Our ability to feed ourselves as a country is completely jeopardized if you do see the mass deportations."

If the deportations do happen, agricultural workers will disappear faster than they can be replaced, experts say.

"The H-2A program will not expand instantly to fill the gap. So, that's going to be a problem," said Jeffrey Dorfman, a professor of agricultural economics at North Carolina State University who was Georgia's state economist from 2019 to 2023.

In Georgia, agriculture is an \$83.6 billion industry that supports more than 323,000 jobs. It is one of the five states most reliant on the federal H-2A visa program, depending on those workers to fill about 60% of agricultural jobs.

Dorfman argued that even the fear of deportation will have an impact on the workforce.

"When farmworkers hear about ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] raids on a nearby farm, lots of them disappear. Even the legal ones often disappear for a few days. So, if everybody just gets scared and self-deports, just goes back home, I think that would be the worst disruption," said Dorfman, adding that even more jobs would need to be filled if the administration revokes temporary protected status.

Antonio De Loera-Brust, communications director for the farmworker labor union United Farm Workers, said the nation's focus should be on protecting workers, no matter their legal status.

"They deserve a lot better than just not getting deported," he said. "They deserve better wages, they deserve labor rights, they deserve citizenship."

And though economists and the agriculture industry have said that mass deportations could raise grocery store prices, De Loera-Brust called that particular argument a sign of "moral weakness."

"As if the worst thing about hundreds of thousands of people getting separated from their families was going to be that consumers would have to pay more for a bag of strawberries or a bag of baby carrots," De Loera-Brust said. "There's a moral gap there."

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North Dakota Monitor: North Dakota landowners, 2 counties appealing Summit pipeline permit

Jeff Beach

A group of landowners and two counties are appealing a North Dakota's agency's approval of a large carbon dioxide pipeline.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission on Nov. 15 approved a route permit for 333 miles of the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline in North Dakota. North Dakota is the planned endpoint of a 2,500 mile pipeline network to carry CO2 from ethanol plants in five states to an underground storage area west of Bismarck.

Attorney Brian Jorde of Domina Law, which represents landowners across the pipeline area, said Friday in an email that there are several problems with the PSC's findings.

He said the PSC received plume modeling and dispersion risk analysis as prepared by Summit that would show how CO2 might spread if there was a rupture of the hazardous liquid pipeline.

The PSC did not allow the other parties to the case access to the plume information.

"This 'confidential' information was also shared with other members of the public, yet potentially directly affected citizens engaged in the routing application process were kept in the dark," Jorde wrote. He said that constituted a violation of due process rights.

If CO2 leaks from a pipeline, it can sicken or kill people in the immediate area.

"The public of North Dakota deserve transparency before hazardous pipelines are forced upon them," Jorde said.

Jorde said the landowner appeal will be filed in Burleigh County District Court.

The two counties that are appealing are Burleigh and Emmons, both on the main trunk of the pipeline in central North Dakota.

The counties are appealing the PSC's February ruling that state rules supersede county ordinances on issues including how close a residence can be to a carbon pipeline.

Emmons County filed an appeal on the ruling in March, but the matter was set aside until the commission voted on the permit application.

Burleigh County filed its appeal this week.

In South Dakota, the Public Utilities Commission ruled that county ordinances preempt state carbon pipeline rules, a main reason Summit was denied a permit there. Summit has since filed a new application.

Summit has a permit in Iowa and for a short segment of its route in Minnesota. Nebraska has no state agency that issues carbon pipeline permits.

The North Dakota Industrial Commission on Thursday approved Summit's plan for underground storage of the carbon dioxide.

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Axios: Schumer requests "special drone-detection tech" for N.Y. and N.J.

Rebecca Falconer

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Sunday that he's "working to pass a bill" to give local law enforcement "more tools for drone detection" following a spate of mysterious sightings in Northeastern U.S. states.

The big picture: Schumer in online statements urged Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to send "special drone-detection tech" to New York and New Jersey to tackle the unidentified flying objects problem that saw N.Y. Stewart International Airport shut down Friday.

The Senate majority leader told reporters Sunday he's requesting Robin Radar Systems because they have "360-degree technology."

He added: "If the technology exists for a drone to make it up into the sky, there certainly is technology that can track the craft with precision and determine what the heck is going on, and that's what the Robin does." State of play: New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) in an online statement Sunday said "our federal partners" were "deploying a state-of-the-art drone detection system" to N.Y., which she said would support state and federal law enforcement in their investigations into the matter, but she said further assistance was needed.

A screenshot of N.Y. Gov. Kathy Hochul's tweet, saying: "In response to my calls for additional resources, our federal partners are sending a drone detection system to New York. I am grateful for the support, but ... Congress must pass a law that will give us the power to deal directly with drones"

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy (D), who reposted Schumer's X post Sunday, has also requested that President Biden direct more resources to investigate the origins of the mystery of the drones.

Murphy said on X he had met with N.J. State Police officials and radar technicians Sunday night who are "surveying the area" for unmanned aircraft systems."

"The public deserves clear answers — we will keep pushing the federal government for more information and resources," he said, adding in a later post following a meeting with an FBI official on the matter: "We are ready to assist the federal government in getting to the bottom of this."

What they're saying: Mayorkas indicated on X that the Biden administration had sent some tech to N.J., saying that many of the "reported sightings have turned out to be piloted aircraft" as the "technology we have deployed to New Jersey has confirmed this."

Representatives for the Department of Homeland Security, Schumer and Murphy did not immediately respond to Axios' requests for comment in the evening.

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AP: One week into a new Syria, rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again

Sarah El Deeb

DAMASCUS (AP) — At Damascus' international airport, the new head of security — one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital — arrived with his team. The few maintenance workers who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager to learn what will happen next.

They quickly unloaded all the complaints they had been too afraid to express during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told the bearded fighter they were denied promotions and perks in favor of pro-Assad favorites, and that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned of hardcore Assad supporters among airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

As Al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, announced: "This is the first time we talk."

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Palestinian refugees return to Yarmouk amid questions about their place in the new Syria
Advertisement

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

Idlib comes to Damascus

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems" he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000.

Right now, the fighters and the public are learning about each other.

The fighters drive large SUVs and newer models of vehicles that are out of reach for most residents in Damascus, where they cost 10 times as much because of custom duties and bribes. The fighters carry Turkish lira, long forbidden in government-held areas, rather than the plunging Syrian pound.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

But many Syrians remain suspicious. Some fighters sport ribbons with Islamist slogans on their uniforms and not all of them belong to HTS, the most organized group.

"The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident from the southern city of Daraa, where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began. He was concerned by reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings.

"We should be fearful," he said, adding that he worries some insurgents feel superior to other Syrians because of their years of fighting. "With all due respect to those who sacrificed, we all sacrificed."

People gather to celebrate days after the fall of Bashar Assad's government at Umayyad Square in Damascus, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2024. (AP Photo/Leo Correa, File)

Still, fear is not prevalent in Damascus, where many insist they will no longer let themselves be oppressed.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure

On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. People ransacked the airport's duty free, smashing all the bottles of liquor. The rebels blamed some of this on fleeing government loyalists.

The public stayed indoors, peeking out at the newcomers. Shops shut down.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order, ordering a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

For tens of thousands, their first destination was Assad's prisons, particularly Saydnaya on the capital's outskirts, to search for loved ones who disappeared years ago. Few have found any traces.

It was wrenching but also unifying. Rebels, some of them also searching, mingled with relatives of the missing in the dark halls of prisons that all had feared for years.

An armed opposition fighter walks among costumers at the Al-Hamidiyeh market inside the old walled city of Damascus, Syria, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla, File)

During celebrations in the street, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles. Insurgents posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. Suddenly shops and walls everywhere are plastered with revolutionary flags and posters of activists killed by Assad's state.

TV stations didn't miss a beat, flipping from praising Assad to playing revolutionary songs. State media aired the flurry of declarations issued by the new insurgent-led transitional government.

The new administration called on people to go back to work and urged Syrian refugees around the world to return to help rebuild. It announced plans to rehabilitate and vet the security forces to prevent the return of "those with blood on their hands." Fighters reassured airport staffers — many of them government loyalists — that their homes won't be attacked, one employee said.

But Syria's woes are far from being resolved.

While produce prices plunged after Assad's fall, because merchants no longer needed to pay hefty customs fees and bribes, fuel distribution was badly disrupted, jacking up transportation costs and causing widespread and lengthy blackouts.

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise.

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said.

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Office of Governor Kim Reynolds

NEWS CLIPS

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IOWA NEWS:

KCCI: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds announces disaster proclamation for O'Brien County due to bird flu

Staff

O'BRIEN COUNTY, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds is enacting a disaster proclamation for a northwest Iowa county after bird flu was found in commercial layer chickens.

The governor's office made the announcement Saturday. According to a release from the governor's office, the USDA confirmed a case of bird flu in O'Brien County.

A disaster proclamation was issued for neighboring Sioux County earlier this month. In nearby Palo Alto County, 31,000 turkeys have been affected. Palo Alto County is also under a disaster proclamation.

The proclamation in O'Brien County is set to expire Jan. 15, 2025.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds: Iowa ready to use National Guard, law enforcement for mass deportations

Sabine Martin

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds says she is ready to use "every tool at our disposal," including deploying the state's National Guard and law enforcement, to carry out President-elect Donald Trump's plans for "mass deportations" of illegal immigrants, according to a joint statement by Republican governors.

Trump has signaled he wants to see an overhaul of the country's immigration system, starting with deporting immigrants living in the country illegally who have violated the law.

"On Day 1, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history to get the criminals out," Trump said during his campaign's closing speech at Madison Square Garden.

Reynolds and 25 other Republican governors vowed in the statement to stand behind Trump's plans to seal the border to illegal immigrants, which they said President Joe Biden's administration failed to accomplish.

"Republican governors remain fully committed to supporting the Trump Administration's efforts to deport dangerous criminals, gang members, and terrorists who are in this country illegally," the governors said in their statement. "We understand the direct threat these criminal illegal immigrants pose to public safety and our national security, and we will do everything in our power to assist in removing them from our communities."

Reynolds' office did not immediately respond to a request for additional information on how the National Guard and law enforcement might be deployed in the deportation effort.

The governor signed a Texas-style immigration law, Senate File 2340, in April that allows Iowa law enforcement to arrest undocumented immigrants for "illegal reentry" into the state. The U.S. Department of Justice sued to block the law from going into effect shortly after its passage in May, arguing that immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, and a federal judge agreed.

The state is appealing.

The law was met with some pushback from local law enforcement, including from then-Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert, who said his department is "not equipped, funded or staffed" to handle immigration enforcement.

How many people in Iowa would be affected by Trump's 'mass deportations' plan? Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration would deport more than 11 million undocumented migrants in the U.S., more than 3% of the country's population, according to Pew Research Center estimates from 2022 data.

An estimated 26% of Iowa's immigrant population is undocumented, according to the American Immigration Council. The same data shows that 2.4% of Iowa's workforce is comprised of immigrants living in the state without legal permission.

Trump said recently in an NBC "Meet the Press" interview that he wants to be able to "work something out" with Democrats to help people under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, to remain in the U.S. The program allows children of undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally to be able to live and work in the country.

Trump attempted to remove the program during his first term in the White House.

There are more than 1,300 DACA recipients living in Iowa and Omaha, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' June data.

How would Trump's plan for 'mass deportations' be carried out?

Trump said in November he will declare a national emergency and call on the military to assist in the promised deportations. His spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told USA Today his administration will use "every federal and state power necessary" to execute the mass deportation program.

Experts say Trump's plan could face several hurdles. The mass deportations could cost \$150 billion to \$350 billion for American taxpayers, Axios reported in November.

The U.S. immigration system also has a backlog of nearly 4 million cases and a shortage of immigration judges, which is slowing the process.

Five witnesses testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee on the effects that proposed mass deportations could have on Americans.

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union have stated that Trump's plan can't be accomplished "without violating the Constitution and federal laws."

"While Trump made similar promises in his first term, he was never able to carry out deportations on that scale," according to a memo from the ACLU on Trump's plan. "That is because doing so is an enormous project that would entail restrictions on basic freedoms core to American life."

Trump deported over 1.5 million people during his first term, which is less than deportations reported during former President Barack Obama's first and second terms.

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DMR: Kim Reynolds sets the standard for good governance. Cities should follow suit. | Opinion

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski, Guest columnists

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth-lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In fiscal year 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in fiscal year 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by fiscal year 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the Legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by a legislative committee. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "blue state" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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DMR: Des Moines-based organization selected to lead state's new behavioral health system

Michaela Ramm

An Iowa-based health care association has been selected by the state to manage Iowa's new behavioral health system.

Gov. Kim Reynolds signed into law earlier this year a plan to overhaul the framework for behavioral health services in the state, a move top state officials hope will improve access to services for Iowans struggling with mental or substance use disorders. The new system is set to go online July 1, 2025.

On Friday, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services announced the Iowa Primary Care Association was selected to serve as the organization to oversee the new system.

Iowa PCA is a Des Moines-based health care nonprofit overseeing Iowa's federally qualified health centers, which provide services to low-income and medically under-served residents.

As the new Administrative Service Organization for the state, Iowa PCA will be responsible for "ensuring that all Iowans have clear, consistent pathways to care and support they need," Iowa HHS officials said in a statement.

Iowa PCA will develop and lead operations for each of the new system's seven districts. State officials say they will work with local entities to craft strategies to meet the unique needs within those districts' communities and establish a statewide network of behavioral health providers.

"Iowa Primary Care Association is an established and trusted health care provider in the state and now, as the statewide ASO, they become the welcoming front door to individuals in need of behavioral health support and care," Iowa HHS Director Kelly Garcia said in a statement.

Iowa PCA CEO Aaron Todd described the behavioral health redesign as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build "a more holistic, integrated model of service delivery" to help Iowans.

"At the Iowa PCA, we are motivated and driven to work at the systems and community levels to address the very real barriers Iowans face to access behavioral health services that we have witnessed first-hand in our work with community health centers and other stakeholders across the state," Todd said in a statement.

What is Iowa's new behavioral health system?

The law signed by Reynolds in May eliminates the 13 Mental Health and Disability Service regions and 19 Integrated Provider Networks that currently manage substance use disorder and problem gambling services in the state.

Instead, the new plan merges these 32 districts into seven new districts that would oversee both mental health and substance use treatment and services. Disability services would be overseen directly by Iowa HHS.

Reynolds and other state officials have said the goal of the new system is to remove administrative barriers separating mental health and substance use programming in Iowa. Each of the behavioral health districts will be charged with coordinating prevention, early intervention and treatment and crisis services, among others.

“By bringing services together in this way, we will enable better coordination of care supporting the best possible outcomes for each individual,” Reynolds said in a statement Friday. “It’s what Iowans deserve, and it’s what we intend to deliver.”

Many details about the new system are still forthcoming. Some behavioral health providers and other advocates have raised questions about the new system, saying they have concerns whether a large state-run system will have enough resources to address the needs of every Iowan.

Why was Iowa PCA selected by the state to lead the new system?

Garcia said in a statement that Iowa PCA is “uniquely qualified” to fulfill the state’s vision for the new behavioral health system. The nonprofit already has an existing footprint statewide that includes a comprehensive IT infrastructure that can help streamline services for Iowans, she said.

Iowa HHS Behavioral Health Division Director Marissa Eyanson said Iowa PCA laid out a robust plan to ensure services continue for Iowans throughout the transition period and into the launch of the new system.

“Iowa Primary Care Association embraces innovative delivery models of care and promises to expand that approach in order to provide a standard set of core services consistently systemwide,” Eyanson said in a statement.

Iowa PCA touted its experience in value-based care, health equity and quality improvement, among others. Todd said his organization will draw on this experience and seek input from local stakeholders as Iowa’s behavioral health services shift into this new model.

“Just as we have led the nation in our work with community health centers, we are prepared and excited to partner with Iowa HHS, behavioral health districts, providers and stakeholders to realize Iowa’s vision as the national leader in behavioral health service delivery,” Todd said.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Gov. Kim Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized. Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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DMR: Ex-ISU professor can pursue more than a decade of unequal pay claims, Supreme Court rules

William Morris

A former Iowa State University professor can pursue potentially decades of claims for gender-based pay discrimination, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled Friday.

Sylvia Cianzio worked as a professor in ISU's agronomy department from 1979 to 2020. In 2021, after her retirement, she filed a civil rights complaint against the university, alleging that she had been paid as much as \$46,000 less per year than equally or less-qualified male agronomy professors — discrepancies she discovered, she said, after being assigned to chair her department's diversity committee.

Sylvia Cianzio

In her lawsuit, Cianzio sought damages for pay discrimination dating back to 2009, when Iowa passed its equal pay statute. Attorneys for the university, though, argued that because the law requires such complaints to be filed within 300 days, Cianzio could only recover for alleged discrepancies on paychecks in the 300 days before her complaint.

The district judge disagreed with both, and ruled that Cianzio's claims were limited by a two-year statute of limitations.

Friday's decision reverses that ruling and opens the door for Cianzio to pursue more than a decade's worth of damages. Justice Christopher McDonald wrote for the full court, except Justice David May, who was recused.

"(The statute) means exactly what it says: the claimant can recover 'for the period of time for which the complainant has been discriminated against,'" McDonald wrote. "We thus decline the university's invitation to graft a temporal limitation into the damages statute where none exists."

The decision sends the case back to the district court for further proceedings.

Cianzio's attorney, Ann Brown, said in an email that Iowa's Equal Pay Act is a "critically important" law for tackling wage discrimination.

"I am happy with the Supreme Court's decision that the statute speaks for itself and allows victims of wage discrimination to recover damages during the entire period of discrimination," she said. "This decision should end employers' efforts to limit employee recovery for wage discrimination to only 300 days, which would have allowed employers to profit from wage discrimination."

The Iowa Attorney General's Office, which represented the university, declined to comment.

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Radio Iowa: Vilsack says Farm Bill negotiations hit snag over spending transfer

Kay Henderson

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack says it appears Farm Bill negotiations have become more complex. House Speaker Mike Johnson says a majority of House Republicans oppose a Senate plan to take nearly \$10 billion in unspent funds from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act and use it on conservation programs.

“It would have actually provided additional resources for congress to increase the level of disaster assistance and emergency assistance that could have been provided to producers in Iowa and across the country,” Vilsack said.

Current budget rules would allow congress to make that \$10 billion transfer, according to Vilsack. The sad reality is, by not protecting those resources, potentially congress could redirect them from farmers and ranches towards some other priority,” Vilsack said.

Funding for federal conservation assistance was increased dramatically by the Inflation Reduction Act. “This is a historic opportunity for us to significantly reduce the backlog of farmers who have been waiting for a while for resources to be able to do on their land what they know needs to be done,” Vilsack said, “to protect it and to enhance it.”

Neither the House nor the Senate brought a new Farm Bill up for a vote this year. If congress fails to reauthorize the 2018 Farm Bill this month, federal farm policies revert to laws passed eight decades ago. Vilsack said that would create chaos in the markets.

“I’m sure that something is going to get done, the question is whether it will get done in a way that provides the best benefit and the most opportunity for farmers and ranchers and producers who work so hard for the rest of us,” Vilsack said.

Lawmakers from states hit by Hurricane Helene in late September are seeking federal disaster aid for farmers who lost crops, livestock and farm buildings.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: D.C. Dispatch: Iowa's senators in the spotlight on Trump appointments

Kathie Obradovich and Brooklyn Draisey

As Congress worked to wrap up business in their lame-duck session this week, Iowa's senators engaged with high-profile appointees who hope to serve in the new Trump administration.

Meanwhile, delegation members addressed issues ranging from communism instruction in classrooms to buoys on the Missouri River. And the death of former Iowa Congressman Jim Leach brought lawmakers and others together in offering condolences.

Grassley, Ernst in spotlight on Trump appointments

Both of Iowa's Republican senators are playing influential roles as some of President-elect Donald Trump's key appointments work to secure support for Senate confirmation.

Sen. Joni Ernst, a member of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, faced criticism and talk of a primary challenge from Trump-aligned Republicans after initially appearing cool to the nomination of Pete Hegseth as secretary of Defense. Hegseth, a veteran, has said women should not serve in combat roles and he has been accused of sexual assault. Ernst is a combat veteran and a sexual assault survivor.

Ernst, who is up for reelection in 2026, has already drawn one announced primary challenger.

This week, she appeared to soften on Hegseth's nomination after meeting with him a second time but stopped short of promising to vote for him. In a statement, she said:

"I appreciate Pete Hegseth's responsiveness and respect for the process. Following our encouraging conversations, Pete committed to completing a full audit of the Pentagon and selecting a senior official who will uphold the roles and value of our servicemen and women — based on quality and standards, not quotas — and who will prioritize and strengthen my work to prevent sexual assault within the ranks. As I support Pete through this process, I look forward to a fair hearing based on truth, not anonymous sources."

Sen. Chuck Grassley, meanwhile, as incoming chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, pushed for the resignation of Christopher Wray, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI under Wray drew Trump's ire for its investigation of the Jan. 6 insurrection and Trump's possession of classified documents after he left office.

Wray, who has three years left in his 10-year term, has since announced he will resign at the end of the Biden administration, leaving the position open for Trump's appointment. Grassley issued a positive statement Monday after meeting with Kash Patel, Trump's choice to lead the agency:

“Today I reminded Kash that transparency brings accountability, and it’s badly needed at the FBI. As a former congressional investigator himself, Kash understands that cooperation with Congress is not optional and whistleblower protection is essential. Once formally nominated, I’d look forward to holding a hearing on Kash’s nomination in the Senate Judiciary Committee.”

Iowa lawmakers call for Coast Guard support on Missouri River
Ernst and Grassley, along with Reps. Randy Feenstra and Mariannette Miller-Meeks, signed a letter this week with other lawmakers calling for the U.S. Coast Guard reconsider removing 36 of its Aids to Navigation on the Missouri River north of Blencoe, Iowa.

The Coast Guard pays to maintain aids to navigation along Marine Highway 29 such as buoys, day beacons and lightships, which function as floating lighthouses, WOWT reported.

In recent years, navigation on the river up to Sioux City has increased, and planned development projects are expected to further increase traffic in years to come, according to a press release from Ernst’s office.

“In Iowa, we are proud to feed, fuel, and supply consumers around the globe with products straight from the heartland. Our beautiful rivers are integral to sharing those products with the rest of the world,” Ernst said in a release. “The removal of this infrastructure on the Missouri River threatens the livelihoods of Iowans in our manufacturing and agricultural communities. I urge the Coast Guard to reconsider this decision.”

Feenstra votes for Crucial Communism Teaching Act
Feenstra voted last week in favor of the Crucial Communism Teaching Act, according to a news release. The legislation would have the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation formulate a high school curriculum about the history of communism, the regimes in the system and “ongoing human rights abuses by such regimes,” according to the bill.

The foundation would also develop oral history resources that educators could utilize alongside the curriculum, the bill stated.

According to statistics cited in a news release from the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 18% of Gen Z “thinks communism is a fairer system than capitalism and deserves consideration in America.”

Feenstra in the release emphasized this number, and said “nearly one third of America’s youth hold a favorable opinion of communism.”

“These alarming findings cannot be the norm for future generations of Americans if we want our country to succeed and prosper,” Feenstra said in the release. “I voted for the Crucial Communism Teaching Act to push back against the spread of this dangerous ideology in our schools and educate our children about communism’s ugly past.”

Feenstra joins DOGE Caucus

Feenstra also announced in a news release Thursday that he has joined the Delivering Outstanding Government Efficiency, or DOGE, Caucus.

The name mimics the Department of Government Efficiency that Trump said he would create, headed by billionaire businessman Elon Musk and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy. The pair have said they'll find \$2 trillion in cuts to federal spending.

Ernst announced last month the creation of a DOGE Caucus in the Senate.

Feenstra said in the release that reckless spending and borrowing have driven up inflation and created more debt, and the federal government needs to balance its budget, eliminate wasteful spending and slow down debt growth in order to help future generations that will inherit what's left.

He said he's happy to work in the caucus to find ways to save taxpayers money and "eliminate unnecessary regulations" in order to grow the economy and make the country more fiscally responsible.

"As a strong, fiscal conservative, I came to Congress to get our debt under control, lower costs for our families, and stop wasteful government spending – and that's exactly what I'll continue to do," Feenstra said in the release.

Nunn, Ernst get provisions passed national defense package
An amendment headed by U.S. Rep. Zach Nunn was included in the National Defense Authorization Act, according to a Thursday news release, which passed out of the U.S. House of Representatives and was sent to the U.S. Senate.

All four of Iowa's representatives voted for the bill, which also eliminated gender-affirming health care coverage for children of military members.

According to the release, Nunn's proposal was to form a "strategic partnership" between the U.S. Defense Innovation Unit and the Israeli Ministry of Defense to simplify sharing of emerging technologies between the two powers.

Also included in the defense act were pay raises for certain servicemembers, increased funding to "U.S. defense initiatives" in the Indo-Pacific, and cuts to military programs and areas of the Pentagon totaling \$31 billion.

Other aspects of the legislation also touch on U.S.-Israel relations, like expanded collaborative military exercises and halting the "sale of goods at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges from any entities that have or are engaged in a boycott of Israel."

"America is the land of the free and home of the brave because of the men and women who serve in uniform," Nunn said in the release. "As a twenty-year combat veteran and current Colonel in the Air Force, I'm committed to protecting our national security. That means securing our Southern Border, stopping China in its tracks, bolstering our allies, and supporting our men and women in uniform throughout their career. This bill is a win for national security, a win for our troops, and a win for the future of our nation."

A measure backed by Ernst also made it into the final bill aimed at preventing, assessing and treating conditions, including traumatic brain injuries, suffered by service members repeatedly exposed to explosion pressure waves.

Lawmakers, other respond to death of former Rep. Jim Leach

Former Congressman Jim Leach. (Photo courtesy of the Leach family)

Members of Iowa's delegation joined a host of others, including former President Barack Obama, in paying tribute to former U.S. Rep. Jim Leach of Davenport, who died Wednesday at age 82. Leach represented his eastern Iowa district from 1977 to 2007 and later chaired the National Endowment for the Humanities, among other positions.

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids school district rejects College & Career Pathways petition
Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - The Cedar Rapids Community School District says a petition regarding the College & Career Pathways program is invalid.

A parent in the district, Brooke Oja, submitted the petition, which has more than 600 signatures.

It asks that the district slow down the implementation of the College & Career Pathways model, to give parents more time to understand the process.

In a response to the petition on Friday, district leaders said there were insufficient eligible signatures, with many of the signatures on the petition coming from outside Cedar Rapids and Iowa.

Because the district has deemed the petition invalid, district leaders won't add the matter to the next school board agenda.

However, Superintendent Dr. Tawana Grover said the district does value the feedback from the community.

"We deeply appreciate the engagement and passion families, educators, and others in the community have shown for our College & Career Pathways program," Dr. Grover said. "We are listening closely to the feedback and are committed to working together to ensure the program's success."

The first phase of the College & Career Pathways program, Freshman Academy, is set to launch in the fall of 2025. The initiative will require high schoolers to choose a "pathway" geared to a career and then take one class a year in that pathway.

The district has held some in-person meetings to try to explain the program to parents, but some parents say their concerns have not been adequately addressed.

The district is inviting parents to join the Parent Advisory Group, and it is planning to host additional community meetings in 2025.

Find more information about the College & Career Pathways program here.

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KCRG: University of Dubuque ‘on track’ to launch new medical school in 2028

Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - The University of Dubuque is “on track” to gain accreditation to open Iowa’s first new medical school in more than a century.

The university aims to open the John and Alice Butler College of Osteopathic Medicine by August 2028, funded by a \$60 million gift by John and Alice Butler. The donation will be invested into the following:

\$12.5 million in endowed scholarships for undergraduate health science students

\$12.5 million in scholarships for Dubuque County students

\$10 million to establish the College of Osteopathic Medicine

\$10 million to support lab research and update equipment

\$10 million for outreach and education efforts

\$5 million to recruit, support, and retain college leadership

“Today is a great win for health care and for education,” said University of Dubuque President Travis Frampton. “It is a great win for that high school student in rural Iowa who wonders if she can be a doctor someday to help make people feel better.”

According to the university, osteopathic medicine offers a holistic approach to medicine that treats the whole person - mind, body, and spirit.

The four-year medical program will accept around 200 students per class for a total enrollment of up to 800 students.

“That is 400 students on campus, enrolled, taking courses in a new medical school complex, and 400 spread across the tri-state area and beyond on clinical rotations,” explained Frampton. “To say it another way, this program will attract 400 new graduate students each year to reside in Dubuque. The impact on our local economy will be profound.”

UD officials were joined by Dubuque Mayor Brad Cavanagh, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, and other community and state leaders Friday for the announcement.

“A new medical school will be a catalyst for what our state needs right now. It has the potential to attract the best and brightest from across the country to study medicine right here in Iowa, build their lives and careers here, and ultimately, increase access to the quality of health care in rural areas of our state that need it most,” said Reynolds.

According to a March 2024 study by the Association of American Medical Colleges, the U.S. is expected to face a physician shortage of up to 86,000 workers by 2036.

“In communities like ours, whether that’s in Dubuque, in our region, in Iowa, or along the rural-urban divide in the U.S., there is a continuing shortage of physicians. This dramatically

impacts access to adequate care, which significantly affects healthcare and health outcomes. In order for us to change this trajectory, we must educate, prepare, and equip more physicians. By establishing a medical school in the Tri-State, the University of Dubuque will be able to serve our community and deliver on our Mission,” said Frampton.

The university has not selected a site to build a medical facility, but several locations are being considered in downtown Dubuque.

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Iowa News Now: Southeast Iowa manufacturing facility, EPA reach settlement over chemical leak

Maddie Lee

EDDYVILLE, Iowa — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is fining a southeast Iowa production plant for alleged violations of the federal Clean Air Act and Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.

The Ajinomoto Health and Nutrition Eddyville plants were inspected by the EPA after a 2021 release of hydrochloric acid led to evacuations and community shelter-in-place orders and a 2022 chlorine gas release that injured some employees.

The EPA identifies both substances as extremely hazardous.

Chlorine gas can be fatal when inhaled or lead to chronic lung conditions.

They will pay just over \$458,000 in civil penalties as a result.

According to the EPA, Ajinomoto has also agreed to install an ammonia water deluge system at one of its two facilities.

This will cost almost \$228,000.

The plant has conducted a compliance audit at its facilities to identify any outstanding noncompliance with federal law.

Ajinomoto's Eddyville plants manufacture amino acids for food and beverages and animal nutrition.

They employ about 270 local workers between Eddyville and Oskaloosa.

EPA Region 7 Enforcement and Compliance Division Director David Cozad said in a statement, "Ajinomoto's operation presented a significant risk to its workers and surrounding community."

He added that the settlement will reduce the risk to workers and residents.

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The Gazette: University of Iowa Health Care tackles growing demand for emergency care

Vanessa Miller

IOWA CITY — The number of Eastern Iowans needing or wanting emergency care has soared over the last two decades — as has the severity of the health issues patients are facing — cramping emergency rooms, crowding wait rooms and compelling hospitals to expand, renovate and build.

That includes University of Iowa Health Care, which in the spring will increase its emergency room count to three — including its main-campus ER west of the Iowa River in Iowa City; the former Mercy Hospital ER east of the river in Iowa City it acquired through a bankruptcy sale this year; and an ER attached to the new North Liberty hospital nearing completion.

“The emergency department at North Liberty will treat the same types of patients with the same spectrum of disease that we currently see at our university and downtown campus locations,” said Hans House, director of emergency medicine services at the UIHC North Liberty campus. “We will be ready for patients of all ages, including children.”

On the main UIHC campus — which has taken the brunt of the area’s ER-visit spike, given its ability to treat the sickest and highest-acuity patients — the emergency room is undergoing a \$37 million renovation and expansion, phase I of which wrapped this month.

After the full expansion and renovation anticipated by next winter, the main UIHC ER will have more than a dozen additional treatment rooms — bringing it to nearly 60 beds — a new triage area and more space for assessing and treating pediatric patients and those with mental health needs.

The project aims to improve the department’s capacity, efficiency and patient experience — which has suffered due to long wait times and other crowding issues.

“It’s just overwhelming at times,” UIHC Emergency Departmental Executive Officer Andrew Nugent told The Gazette about the university’s ER traffic. “And it really depends on the amount that is coming from outside institutions. Being the tertiary center, we take an enormous number of transfers into the hospital. ... There are days when everybody’s trying to send us patients because they’re all sick, and we’re the only place that can handle a lot of these things.”

The university’s most recent Board of Regents report on its emergency room use showed wait times rose about 40 percent from 2018 to 2022, while its emergency room-to-emergency room transfers from other hospitals to the UI climbed 33 percent during the period. The average length of stay in the UI ER increased from under 4.5 hours to over five.

While a typical wait time at the UIHC ER is between one to two hours, the wait time at the former Mercy ER — now called UI Medical Center Downtown — often is only minutes.

Adding that space to its emergency repertoire — in addition to the new North Liberty emergency room — will allow the university to better triage its patients based on severity and specific needs.

“We can kind of work synergistically to get the sickest patients here” at the main campus ER, Nugent said.

‘In the hallway quite a bit’

The first phase of the main campus ER project was focused on a south and vertical expansion — moving a relatively new “crisis stabilization unit” from the seventh floor of the John Pappajohn Pavilion to the second floor of the emergency department, where many with mental health needs first present.

“This move is designed to improve the speed and effectiveness of the care we provide patients experiencing a mental health emergency, as well as enhance efficiencies for staff,” according to a UIHC summary of the upgrade.

The upgrade also created a new adolescent-specific stabilization unit. That, according to the university, will streamline treatment for pediatric patients having a mental health crisis and allow the university to care for them in a “much more humane way.”

“One of the side effects of boarding and overcrowding is that our patients are in the hallway quite a bit,” Nugent said. “And so hopefully this alleviates that. Our mental health patients will have rooms. And they're being specifically built so they're safe for mental health patients but can be used multi-functionally.”

Both of those new units are opening this month, when phase II of the ER expansion is beginning — creating a larger pediatric emergency space on the north side that will include two resuscitation rooms, a procedure room and a triage room.

“And we’re going to have a waiting room for the kids, which is great — so they don’t have to be next to the adults that are sick and coughing, or vice versa,” he said.

On a 60-acre plot in North Liberty, the university’s new \$525.6 million, 469,000-square-foot hospital aims to absorb some of the visits to the main UIHC ER. The university expects 55,000 visits there this year — up 140 percent from the about 23,000 visits 25 years ago.

And while the new hospital itself will house the UI Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation and lean heavily toward orthopedics care, its ER will be capable of responding to any type of emergency.

“This will be a fully functional emergency department with the same equipment, technologies and capabilities available at the downtown campus (emergency department),” according to Ali Harmon, director of emergency medicine and transport services in the UI

Department of Emergency Medicine. “It will be available to anyone needing emergency treatment.”

The new North Liberty ER will have 14 emergency care rooms, including two for behavioral health patients; a designated trauma and resuscitation room; haz-mat space for patients needing to decontaminate from hazardous materials; an isolation room for patients with infectious diseases; and board-certified ER doctors and nurses.

The North Liberty emergency department will be designated a Level 4 trauma center — providing advanced trauma care and life support “in preparation for transfer to a facility that provides tertiary-level care and a broader scope of surgical, specialty, and subspecialty services.”

Patients needing that higher level of care will be transferred to the UIHC main campus ER, designated a level 1 trauma center, or to the Downtown Campus, a level 3 trauma center.

“The North Liberty ED won’t include all the specialty care teams on-site that we have on the university campus,” Harmon said. “That’s really what impacts a trauma center’s level designation. For patients who come to the North Liberty ED needing subspecialty care, we’ll transfer those patients to the university campus or downtown campus, depending on the care they need.”

‘Spreading out of the community visits’

Although UIHC doesn’t have much control over where patients decide to go for emergency care — aside from educating them on which site is most appropriate for their specific need — ER doctors now will be able to coordinate transfers where necessary using an up-and-coming internal ambulance system, Nugent said.

That system hasn’t officially been announced or come online, but Nugent said the goal is to have it up and running before the spring opening of the North Liberty hospital.

“So that we can get people effectively from here to downtown, and then we’ll just add North Liberty to the system,” he said.

Patients can help and avoid transfer by doing “some self-selection” — heading, for example, to North Liberty for a broken bone, to the downtown campus for a high fever or to the main UIHC ER for trauma or a life-threatening issue.

“But if you’re really hurting, go to the closest spot, and that’s fine,” Nugent said. “Because then we’ll get you to the right spot.”

Once the university has its ER trio online, Nugent said he expects to see some “spreading out of the community visits.”

“I would see wait times hopefully go down for everyone at every location,” he said. “I think the number of admissions still coming to the main campus is going to be the same, if maybe not higher, because we’re going to find out people are ill and getting seen faster.”

Part of the university's ER crowding issue has to do with its inpatient bed capacity and the fact that so many of its emergency patients need to stay overnight. Where an average community hospital reports a 12 to 14 percent admission rate from its ER, the university's ER admission rate is 33 percent, according to Nugent.

The university has 889 inpatient beds on its main campus, including 205 pediatric beds in its UI Stead Family Children's Hospital; 234 beds at its downtown campus; and it will add up to 48 inpatient beds in North Liberty. The hospital also is planning a new 842,000-gross-square-foot inpatient tower costing more than \$1 million, including multiple floors of 48 beds each.

But completion of that tower will take years.

"So we're still going to have some of those issues where we need to get people admitted," Nugent said. "We don't know the impact of moving some of our inpatient capacity out to North Liberty, and we're getting better at sending some downtown, so hopefully that evens out a little bit.

"But I don't want to have to wait for a new inpatient tower to make everything better," he said. "So we're constantly working on the efficiency of things."

Other expansion

Although the university is planning significant upgrades to the downtown campus it acquired from Mercy Iowa City — with expectations to spend "far" more than \$25 million over time — initial plans include roofing upgrades and operating room renovations.

"I think, first of all, they've got to get the building in shape," Nugent said about the prospect of expanding the downtown ER. "And then they'll probably have some discussions about whether they need to expand or not."

UI Health Care isn't the only hospital system in the area addressing emergency room crowding and wait times.

Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids in 2020 opened the state's first free-standing ER — by converting its Hiawatha MercyCare Urgent Care location into an extension of its emergency department.

That ER is open every hour of every day of the year — offering on-site radiology, lab and pharmaceutical services. And earlier this month, Mercy Cedar Rapids opened its second freestanding ER — this one in Marion — outfitted with 12 exam rooms, two trauma rooms, lab and imaging services, and a helipad.

"Like the Mercy Hiawatha ER, patients at the Marion location that require additional hospital intervention will be transferred free of charge to Mercy's downtown location based on well-developed protocols and in partnership with local ambulance services," according to hospital officials.

UnityPoint Health-St. Luke's Hospital, 1026 A Ave. NE in Cedar Rapids, also opened a Marion ER in August. The 10,000-square-foot ER was built inside an existing building at 3301 Armar Dr., just off Marion Boulevard near the border of Cedar Rapids and Marion.

St. Luke's identified Marion "as an ideal location due to its fast-growing population and community expansion projections," Dr. Sarah Hoper, the medical director for its new Marion ER, told a correspondent for The Gazette earlier this year.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

Stateline: Trump migrant deportations could threaten states' agricultural economies

Nada Hassanein

If President-elect Donald Trump follows through on his pledge to deport millions of immigrants, it could upend the economies of states where farming and other food-related industries are crucial — and where labor shortages abound.

Immigrants make up about two-thirds of the nation's crop farmworkers, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, and roughly 2 in 5 of them are not legally authorized to work in the United States.

Agricultural industries such as meatpacking, dairy farms and poultry and livestock farms also rely heavily on immigrants.

"We have five to six employees that do the work that nobody else will do. We wouldn't survive without them," said Bruce Lampman, who owns Lampman Dairy Farm, in Bruneau, Idaho. His farm, which has been in the family three decades, has 350 cows producing some 26,000 pounds of milk a day.

"My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work," said Lampman, adding that his workers are worried about what's to come.

Anita Alves Pena, a Colorado State University professor of economics who studies immigration, noted that many agricultural employers already can't find enough laborers. Without farm subsidies or other protections to make up for the loss of immigrant workers, she said, the harm to state economies could be significant.

"Farmers across the country, producers in a lot of different parts, are often talking about labor shortages — and that's even with the current status quo of having a fairly high percentage of unauthorized individuals in the workforce," Pena said. "A policy like this, if it was not coupled with something else, would exacerbate that."

Employers have a hard time hiring enough farm laborers because such workers generally are paid low wages for arduous work.

In addition to hiring immigrant laborers who are in the country illegally, agricultural employers rely on the federal H-2A visa program. H-2A visas usually are for seasonal work, often for about six to 10 months. However, they can be extended for up to three years before a worker must return to their home country.

Employers must pay H-2A workers a state-specific minimum wage and provide no-cost transportation and housing. Still, employers' applications for H-2A visas have soared in the

past 18 years, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a trend reflecting the shortage of U.S.-born laborers willing to do the work. The number of H-2A positions has surged from just over 48,000 in 2005 to more than 378,000 in 2023.

But agricultural employers that operate year-round, such as poultry, dairy and livestock producers, can't use the seasonal visa to fill gaps, according to the USDA.

My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work.

– Bruce Lampman, owner of Lampman Dairy Farm in Bruneau, Idaho

Farmers also employ foreign nationals who have “temporary protected status” under a 1990 law that allows immigrants to remain if the U.S. has determined their home countries are unsafe because of violence or other reasons. There are about 1.2 million people in the U.S. under the program or eligible for it, from countries including El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Lebanon and Ukraine. Many have been here for decades, and Trump has threatened to end the program.

Support for the program

Immigration advocates want a pathway for H-2A workers to gain permanent legal status, and agricultural trade organizations are pushing for an expansion of the H-2A program to include year-round operations.

The National Milk Producers Federation says it's too early to say how it would cope with mass deportations under the Trump administration. But the group states it “strongly supports efforts to pass agriculture labor reform that provides permanent legal status to current workers and their families and gives dairy farmers access to a workable guestworker program.”

Immigrants make up 51% of labor at dairy farms across states, and farms that employ immigrants produce nearly 80% of the nation's milk supply, according to the organization.

“Foreign workers are important to the success of U.S. dairy, and we will work closely with members of Congress and federal officials to show the importance of foreign workers to the dairy industry and farm communities,” Jaime Castaneda, the group's executive vice president for policy development and strategy, wrote in an email.

Adam Croissant, the former vice president of research and development at yogurt company Chobani, which has manufacturing plants in Idaho and New York, said he's seen a lot of misinformation around immigrants' workforce contributions.

“The dairy industry as a whole understands that without immigrant labor, the dairy industry doesn't exist. It's as simple as that,” Croissant said.

Tom Super, a spokesperson for the National Chicken Council, lambasted U.S. immigration policy and said the poultry industry “wants a stable, legal, and permanent workforce.”

“The chicken industry is heavily affected by our nation’s immigration policy or, more pointedly, lack thereof. ... The system is broken, and Washington has done nothing to fix it,” Super wrote in an email.

Changes ahead?

But major changes to the H-2A visa program are unlikely to happen before deportations begin. In an interview with NBC News’ “Meet the Press” over the weekend, Trump repeated his promise to start deporting some immigrants almost immediately.

He said he plans to begin with convicted criminals, but would then move to other immigrants. “We’re starting with the criminals, and we’ve got to do it. And then we’re starting with the others, and we’re going to see how it goes.”

Some farmers still hope that Trump’s actions won’t match his rhetoric. But “hoping isn’t a great business plan,” said Rick Naerebout, CEO of the Idaho Dairymen’s Association. “Our ability to feed ourselves as a country is completely jeopardized if you do see the mass deportations.”

If the deportations do happen, agricultural workers will disappear faster than they can be replaced, experts say.

“The H-2A program will not expand instantly to fill the gap. So, that’s going to be a problem,” said Jeffrey Dorfman, a professor of agricultural economics at North Carolina State University who was Georgia’s state economist from 2019 to 2023.

In Georgia, agriculture is an \$83.6 billion industry that supports more than 323,000 jobs. It is one of the five states most reliant on the federal H-2A visa program, depending on those workers to fill about 60% of agricultural jobs.

Dorfman argued that even the fear of deportation will have an impact on the workforce.

“When farmworkers hear about ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] raids on a nearby farm, lots of them disappear. Even the legal ones often disappear for a few days. So, if everybody just gets scared and self-deports, just goes back home, I think that would be the worst disruption,” said Dorfman, adding that even more jobs would need to be filled if the administration revokes temporary protected status.

Antonio De Loera-Brust, communications director for the farmworker labor union United Farm Workers, said the nation’s focus should be on protecting workers, no matter their legal status.

“They deserve a lot better than just not getting deported,” he said. “They deserve better wages, they deserve labor rights, they deserve citizenship.”

And though economists and the agriculture industry have said that mass deportations could raise grocery store prices, De Loera-Brust called that particular argument a sign of “moral weakness.”

“As if the worst thing about hundreds of thousands of people getting separated from their families was going to be that consumers would have to pay more for a bag of strawberries or a bag of baby carrots,” De Loera-Brust said. “There’s a moral gap there.”

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North Dakota Monitor: North Dakota landowners, 2 counties appealing Summit pipeline permit

Jeff Beach

A group of landowners and two counties are appealing a North Dakota's agency's approval of a large carbon dioxide pipeline.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission on Nov. 15 approved a route permit for 333 miles of the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline in North Dakota. North Dakota is the planned endpoint of a 2,500 mile pipeline network to carry CO₂ from ethanol plants in five states to an underground storage area west of Bismarck.

Attorney Brian Jorde of Domina Law, which represents landowners across the pipeline area, said Friday in an email that there are several problems with the PSC's findings.

He said the PSC received plume modeling and dispersion risk analysis as prepared by Summit that would show how CO₂ might spread if there was a rupture of the hazardous liquid pipeline.

The PSC did not allow the other parties to the case access to the plume information.

"This 'confidential' information was also shared with other members of the public, yet potentially directly affected citizens engaged in the routing application process were kept in the dark," Jorde wrote. He said that constituted a violation of due process rights.

If CO₂ leaks from a pipeline, it can sicken or kill people in the immediate area.

"The public of North Dakota deserve transparency before hazardous pipelines are forced upon them," Jorde said.

Jorde said the landowner appeal will be filed in Burleigh County District Court.

The two counties that are appealing are Burleigh and Emmons, both on the main trunk of the pipeline in central North Dakota.

The counties are appealing the PSC's February ruling that state rules supersede county ordinances on issues including how close a residence can be to a carbon pipeline.

Emmons County filed an appeal on the ruling in March, but the matter was set aside until the commission voted on the permit application.

Burleigh County filed its appeal this week.

In South Dakota, the Public Utilities Commission ruled that county ordinances preempt state carbon pipeline rules, a main reason Summit was denied a permit there. Summit has since filed a new application.

Summit has a permit in Iowa and for a short segment of its route in Minnesota. Nebraska has no state agency that issues carbon pipeline permits.

The North Dakota Industrial Commission on Thursday approved Summit's plan for underground storage of the carbon dioxide.

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Axios: Schumer requests "special drone-detection tech" for N.Y. and N.J.

Rebecca Falconer

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Sunday that he's "working to pass a bill" to give local law enforcement "more tools for drone detection" following a spate of mysterious sightings in Northeastern U.S. states.

The big picture: Schumer in online statements urged Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to send "special drone-detection tech" to New York and New Jersey to tackle the unidentified flying objects problem that saw N.Y. Stewart International Airport shut down Friday.

The Senate majority leader told reporters Sunday he's requesting Robin Radar Systems because they have "360-degree technology."

He added: "If the technology exists for a drone to make it up into the sky, there certainly is technology that can track the craft with precision and determine what the heck is going on, and that's what the Robin does."

State of play: New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) in an online statement Sunday said "our federal partners" were "deploying a state-of-the-art drone detection system" to N.Y., which she said would support state and federal law enforcement in their investigations into the matter, but she said further assistance was needed.

A screenshot of N.Y. Gov. Kathy Hochul's tweet, saying: "In response to my calls for additional resources, our federal partners are sending a drone detection system to New York. I am grateful for the support, but ... Congress must pass a law that will give us the power to deal directly with drones"

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy (D), who reposted Schumer's X post Sunday, has also requested that President Biden direct more resources to investigate the origins of the mystery of the drones.

Murphy said on X he had met with N.J. State Police officials and radar technicians Sunday night who are "surveying the area" for unmanned aircraft systems."

"The public deserves clear answers — we will keep pushing the federal government for more information and resources," he said, adding in a later post following a meeting with an FBI official on the matter: "We are ready to assist the federal government in getting to the bottom of this."

What they're saying: Mayorkas indicated on X that the Biden administration had sent some tech to N.J., saying that many of the "reported sightings have turned out to be piloted aircraft" as the "technology we have deployed to New Jersey has confirmed this."

Representatives for the Department of Homeland Security, Schumer and Murphy did not immediately respond to Axios' requests for comment in the evening.

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AP: One week into a new Syria, rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again

Sarah El Deeb

DAMASCUS (AP) — At Damascus' international airport, the new head of security — one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital — arrived with his team. The few maintenance workers who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager to learn what will happen next.

They quickly unloaded all the complaints they had been too afraid to express during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told the bearded fighter they were denied promotions and perks in favor of pro-Assad favorites, and that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned of hardcore Assad supporters among airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

As Al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, announced: "This is the first time we talk."

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Palestinian refugees return to Yarmouk amid questions about their place in the new Syria
Advertisement

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. “But we will not be silent about anything wrong again.”

Idlib comes to Damascus

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels’ de facto “salvation government,” which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria’s northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

“It will take a year to solve problems” he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents’ total fighting force at around 20,000.

Right now, the fighters and the public are learning about each other.

The fighters drive large SUVs and newer models of vehicles that are out of reach for most residents in Damascus, where they cost 10 times as much because of custom duties and bribes. The fighters carry Turkish lira, long forbidden in government-held areas, rather than the plunging Syrian pound.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria’s religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

But many Syrians remain suspicious. Some fighters sport ribbons with Islamist slogans on their uniforms and not all of them belong to HTS, the most organized group.

“The people we see on the streets, they don’t represent us,” said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident from the southern city of Daraa, where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began. He was concerned by reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings.

“We should be fearful,” he said, adding that he worries some insurgents feel superior to other Syrians because of their years of fighting. “With all due respect to those who sacrificed, we all sacrificed.”

People gather to celebrate days after the fall of Bashar Assad's government at Umayyad Square in Damascus, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2024. (AP Photo/Leo Correa, File)
Still, fear is not prevalent in Damascus, where many insist they will no longer let themselves be oppressed.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure
On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. People ransacked the airport's duty free, smashing all the bottles of liquor. The rebels blamed some of this on fleeing government loyalists.

The public stayed indoors, peeking out at the newcomers. Shops shut down.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order, ordering a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

For tens of thousands, their first destination was Assad's prisons, particularly Saydnaya on the capital's outskirts, to search for loved ones who disappeared years ago. Few have found any traces.

It was wrenching but also unifying. Rebels, some of them also searching, mingled with relatives of the missing in the dark halls of prisons that all had feared for years.

An armed opposition fighter walks among costumers at the Al-Hamidiyeh market inside the old walled city of Damascus, Syria, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla, File)

During celebrations in the street, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles. Insurgents posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. Suddenly shops and walls everywhere are plastered with revolutionary flags and posters of activists killed by Assad's state.

TV stations didn't miss a beat, flipping from praising Assad to playing revolutionary songs. State media aired the flurry of declarations issued by the new insurgent-led transitional government.

The new administration called on people to go back to work and urged Syrian refugees around the world to return to help rebuild. It announced plans to rehabilitate and vet the security forces to prevent the return of "those with blood on their hands." Fighters reassured airport staffers — many of them government loyalists — that their homes won't be attacked, one employee said.

But Syria's woes are far from being resolved.

While produce prices plunged after Assad's fall, because merchants no longer needed to pay hefty customs fees and bribes, fuel distribution was badly disrupted, jacking up transportation costs and causing widespread and lengthy blackouts.

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise.

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said.

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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Morning Clips 12.16.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 16, 2024 6:46 AM (UTC-06:00)

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IOWA NEWS:

KCCI: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds announces disaster proclamation for O'Brien County due to bird flu
Staff

O'BRIEN COUNTY, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds is enacting a disaster proclamation for a northwest Iowa county after bird flu was found in commercial layer chickens.

The governor's office made the announcement Saturday. According to a release from the governor's office, the USDA confirmed a case of bird flu in O'Brien County.

A disaster proclamation was issued for neighboring Sioux County earlier this month. In nearby Palo Alto County, 31,000 turkeys have been affected. Palo Alto County is also under a disaster proclamation.

The proclamation in O'Brien County is set to expire Jan. 15, 2025.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds: Iowa ready to use National Guard, law enforcement for mass deportations

Sabine Martin

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds says she is ready to use "every tool at our disposal," including deploying the state's National Guard and law enforcement, to carry out President-elect Donald Trump's plans for "mass deportations" of illegal immigrants, according to a joint statement by Republican governors.

Trump has signaled he wants to see an overhaul of the country's immigration system, starting with deporting immigrants living in the country illegally who have violated the law.

"On Day 1, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history to get the criminals out," Trump said during his campaign's closing speech at Madison Square Garden.

Reynolds and 25 other Republican governors vowed in the statement to stand behind Trump's plans to seal the border to illegal immigrants, which they said President Joe Biden's administration failed to accomplish.

"Republican governors remain fully committed to supporting the Trump Administration's efforts to deport dangerous criminals, gang members, and terrorists who are in this country illegally," the governors said in their statement. "We understand the direct threat these criminal illegal immigrants pose to public safety and our national security, and we will do everything in our power to assist in removing them from our communities."

Reynolds' office did not immediately respond to a request for additional information on how the National Guard and law enforcement might be deployed in the deportation effort.

The governor signed a Texas-style immigration law, Senate File 2340, in April that allows Iowa law enforcement to arrest undocumented immigrants for "illegal reentry" into the state. The U.S. Department of Justice sued to block the law from going into effect shortly after its passage in May, arguing that immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, and a federal judge agreed.

The state is appealing.

The law was met with some pushback from local law enforcement, including from then-Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert, who said his department is "not equipped, funded or staffed" to handle immigration enforcement.

How many people in Iowa would be affected by Trump's 'mass deportations' plan?

Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration would deport more than 11 million undocumented migrants in the U.S., more than 3% of the country's population, according to Pew Research Center estimates from 2022 data.

An estimated 26% of Iowa's immigrant population is undocumented, according to the American Immigration Council. The same data shows that 2.4% of Iowa's workforce is comprised of immigrants living in the state without legal permission.

Trump said recently in an NBC "Meet the Press" interview that he wants to be able to "work something out" with Democrats to help people under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, to remain in the U.S. The program allows children of undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally to be able to live and work in the country.

Trump attempted to remove the program during his first term in the White House.

There are more than 1,300 DACA recipients living in Iowa and Omaha, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' June data.

How would Trump's plan for 'mass deportations' be carried out?

Trump said in November he will declare a national emergency and call on the military to assist in the promised deportations. His spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told USA Today his administration will use "every federal and state power necessary" to execute the mass deportation program.

Experts say Trump's plan could face several hurdles. The mass deportations could cost \$150 billion to \$350 billion for American taxpayers, Axios reported in November.

The U.S. immigration system also has a backlog of nearly 4 million cases and a shortage of immigration judges, which is slowing the process.

Five witnesses testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee on the effects that proposed mass deportations could have on Americans.

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union have stated that Trump's plan can't be accomplished "without violating the Constitution and federal laws."

"While Trump made similar promises in his first term, he was never able to carry out deportations on that scale," according to a memo from the ACLU on Trump's plan. "That is because doing so is an enormous project that would entail restrictions on basic freedoms core to American life."

Trump deported over 1.5 million people during his first term, which is less than deportations reported during former President Barack Obama's first and second terms.

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DMR: Kim Reynolds sets the standard for good governance. Cities should follow suit. | Opinion

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski, Guest columnists

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before

Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth-lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In fiscal year 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in fiscal year 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by fiscal year 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the Legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by a legislative committee. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "blue state" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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DMR: Des Moines-based organization selected to lead state's new behavioral health system

Michaela Ramm

An Iowa-based health care association has been selected by the state to manage Iowa's new behavioral health system.

Gov. Kim Reynolds signed into law earlier this year a plan to overhaul the framework for behavioral health services in the state, a move top state officials hope will improve access to services for Iowans struggling with mental or substance use disorders. The new system is set to go online July 1, 2025.

On Friday, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services announced the Iowa Primary Care Association was selected to serve as the organization to oversee the new system.

Iowa PCA is a Des Moines-based health care nonprofit overseeing Iowa's federally qualified health centers, which provide services to low-income and medically under-served residents.

As the new Administrative Service Organization for the state, Iowa PCA will be responsible for "ensuring that all Iowans have clear, consistent pathways to care and support they need," Iowa HHS officials said in a statement.

Iowa PCA will develop and lead operations for each of the new system's seven districts. State officials say they will work with local entities to craft strategies to meet the unique needs within those districts' communities and establish a statewide network of behavioral health providers.

"Iowa Primary Care Association is an established and trusted health care provider in the state and now, as the statewide ASO, they become the welcoming front door to individuals in need of behavioral health support and care," Iowa HHS Director Kelly Garcia said in a statement.

Iowa PCA CEO Aaron Todd described the behavioral health redesign as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build "a more holistic, integrated model of service delivery" to help Iowans.

"At the Iowa PCA, we are motivated and driven to work at the systems and community levels to address the very real barriers Iowans face to access behavioral health services that we have witnessed first-hand in our work with community health centers and other stakeholders across the state," Todd said in a statement.

What is Iowa's new behavioral health system?

The law signed by Reynolds in May eliminates the 13 Mental Health and Disability Service regions and 19 Integrated Provider Networks that currently manage substance use disorder and problem gambling services in the state.

Instead, the new plan merges these 32 districts into seven new districts that would oversee both mental health and substance use treatment and services. Disability services would be overseen directly by Iowa HHS.

Reynolds and other state officials have said the goal of the new system is to remove administrative barriers separating mental health and substance use programming in Iowa. Each of the behavioral health districts will be charged with coordinating prevention, early intervention and treatment and crisis services, among others.

"By bringing services together in this way, we will enable better coordination of care supporting the best possible outcomes for each individual," Reynolds said in a statement Friday. "It's what Iowans deserve, and it's what we intend to deliver."

Many details about the new system are still forthcoming. Some behavioral health providers and other advocates have raised questions about the new system, saying they have concerns whether a large state-run system will have enough resources to address the needs of every Iowan.

Why was Iowa PCA selected by the state to lead the new system?

Garcia said in a statement that Iowa PCA is "uniquely qualified" to fulfill the state's vision for the new behavioral health system. The nonprofit already has an existing footprint statewide that includes a comprehensive IT infrastructure that can help streamline services for Iowans, she said.

Iowa HHS Behavioral Health Division Director Marissa Eyanson said Iowa PCA laid out a robust plan to ensure services continue for Iowans throughout the transition period and into the launch of the new system.

"Iowa Primary Care Association embraces innovative delivery models of care and promises to expand that approach in order to provide a standard set of core services consistently systemwide," Eyanson said in a statement.

Iowa PCA touted its experience in value-based care, health equity and quality improvement, among others. Todd said his organization will draw on this experience and seek input from local stakeholders as Iowa's behavioral health services shift into this new model.

"Just as we have led the nation in our work with community health centers, we are prepared and excited to partner with Iowa HHS, behavioral health districts, providers and stakeholders to realize Iowa's vision as the national leader in behavioral health service delivery," Todd said.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will

continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Gov. Kim Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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DMR: Ex-ISU professor can pursue more than a decade of unequal pay claims, Supreme Court rules

William Morris

A former Iowa State University professor can pursue potentially decades of claims for gender-based pay discrimination, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled Friday.

Sylvia Cianza worked as a professor in ISU's agronomy department from 1979 to 2020. In 2021, after her

retirement, she filed a civil rights complaint against the university, alleging that she had been paid as much as \$46,000 less per year than equally or less-qualified male agronomy professors — discrepancies she discovered, she said, after being assigned to chair her department's diversity committee.

Sylvia Ciano

In her lawsuit, Ciano sought damages for pay discrimination dating back to 2009, when Iowa passed its equal pay statute. Attorneys for the university, though, argued that because the law requires such complaints to be filed within 300 days, Ciano could only recover for alleged discrepancies on paychecks in the 300 days before her complaint.

The district judge disagreed with both, and ruled that Ciano's claims were limited by a two-year statute of limitations.

Friday's decision reverses that ruling and opens the door for Ciano to pursue more than a decade's worth of damages. Justice Christopher McDonald wrote for the full court, except Justice David May, who was recused.

"(The statute) means exactly what it says: the claimant can recover 'for the period of time for which the complainant has been discriminated against,'" McDonald wrote. "We thus decline the university's invitation to graft a temporal limitation into the damages statute where none exists."

The decision sends the case back to the district court for further proceedings.

Ciano's attorney, Ann Brown, said in an email that Iowa's Equal Pay Act is a "critically important" law for tackling wage discrimination.

"I am happy with the Supreme Court's decision that the statute speaks for itself and allows victims of wage discrimination to recover damages during the entire period of discrimination," she said. "This decision should end employers' efforts to limit employee recovery for wage discrimination to only 300 days, which would have allowed employers to profit from wage discrimination."

The Iowa Attorney General's Office, which represented the university, declined to comment.

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Radio Iowa: Vilsack says Farm Bill negotiations hit snag over spending transfer

Kay Henderson

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack says it appears Farm Bill negotiations have become more complex. House Speaker Mike Johnson says a majority of House Republicans oppose a Senate plan to take nearly \$10 billion in unspent funds from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act and use it on conservation programs.

"It would have actually provided additional resources for congress to increase the level of disaster assistance and emergency assistance that could have been provided to producers in Iowa and across the country," Vilsack said.

Current budget rules would allow congress to make that \$10 billion transfer, according to Vilsack. The sad reality is, by not protecting those resources, potentially congress could redirect them from farmers and ranches towards some other priority," Vilsack said.

Funding for federal conservation assistance was increased dramatically by the Inflation Reduction Act. "This is a historic opportunity for us to significantly reduce the backlog of farmers who have been waiting for a

while for resources to be able to do on their land what they know needs to be done,” Vilsack said, “to protect it and to enhance it.”

Neither the House nor the Senate brought a new Farm Bill up for a vote this year. If congress fails to reauthorize the 2018 Farm Bill this month, federal farm policies revert to laws passed eight decades ago. Vilsack said that would create chaos in the markets.

“I’m sure that something is going to get done, the question is whether it will get done in a way that provides the best benefit and the most opportunity for farmers and ranchers and producers who work so hard for the rest of us,” Vilsack said.

Lawmakers from states hit by Hurricane Helene in late September are seeking federal disaster aid for farmers who lost crops, livestock and farm buildings.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: D.C. Dispatch: Iowa’s senators in the spotlight on Trump appointments

Kathie Obradovich and Brooklyn Draisey

As Congress worked to wrap up business in their lame-duck session this week, Iowa’s senators engaged with high-profile appointees who hope to serve in the new Trump administration.

Meanwhile, delegation members addressed issues ranging from communism instruction in classrooms to buoys on the Missouri River. And the death of former Iowa Congressman Jim Leach brought lawmakers and others together in offering condolences.

Grassley, Ernst in spotlight on Trump appointments

Both of Iowa’s Republican senators are playing influential roles as some of President-elect Donald Trump’s key appointments work to secure support for Senate confirmation.

Sen. Joni Ernst, a member of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, faced criticism and talk of a primary challenge from Trump-aligned Republicans after initially appearing cool to the nomination of Pete Hegseth as secretary of Defense. Hegseth, a veteran, has said women should not serve in combat roles and he has been accused of sexual assault. Ernst is a combat veteran and a sexual assault survivor.

Ernst, who is up for reelection in 2026, has already drawn one announced primary challenger.

This week, she appeared to soften on Hegseth’s nomination after meeting with him a second time but stopped short of promising to vote for him. In a statement, she said:

“I appreciate Pete Hegseth’s responsiveness and respect for the process. Following our encouraging conversations, Pete committed to completing a full audit of the Pentagon and selecting a senior official who will uphold the roles and value of our servicemen and women — based on quality and standards, not quotas — and who will prioritize and strengthen my work to prevent sexual assault within the ranks. As I support Pete through this process, I look forward to a fair hearing based on truth, not anonymous sources.”

Sen. Chuck Grassley, meanwhile, as incoming chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, pushed for the

resignation of Christopher Wray, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI under Wray drew Trump's ire for its investigation of the Jan. 6 insurrection and Trump's possession of classified documents after he left office.

Wray, who has three years left in his 10-year term, has since announced he will resign at the end of the Biden administration, leaving the position open for Trump's appointment. Grassley issued a positive statement Monday after meeting with Kash Patel, Trump's choice to lead the agency:

"Today I reminded Kash that transparency brings accountability, and it's badly needed at the FBI. As a former congressional investigator himself, Kash understands that cooperation with Congress is not optional and whistleblower protection is essential. Once formally nominated, I'd look forward to holding a hearing on Kash's nomination in the Senate Judiciary Committee."

Iowa lawmakers call for Coast Guard support on Missouri River

Ernst and Grassley, along with Reps. Randy Feenstra and Mariannette Miller-Meeks, signed a letter this week with other lawmakers calling for the U.S. Coast Guard reconsider removing 36 of its Aids to Navigation on the Missouri River north of Blencoe, Iowa.

The Coast Guard pays to maintain aids to navigation along Marine Highway 29 such as buoys, day beacons and lightships, which function as floating lighthouses, WOWT reported.

In recent years, navigation on the river up to Sioux City has increased, and planned development projects are expected to further increase traffic in years to come, according to a press release from Ernst's office.

"In Iowa, we are proud to feed, fuel, and supply consumers around the globe with products straight from the heartland. Our beautiful rivers are integral to sharing those products with the rest of the world," Ernst said in a release. "The removal of this infrastructure on the Missouri River threatens the livelihoods of Iowans in our manufacturing and agricultural communities. I urge the Coast Guard to reconsider this decision."

Feenstra votes for Crucial Communism Teaching Act

Feenstra voted last week in favor of the Crucial Communism Teaching Act, according to a news release. The legislation would have the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation formulate a high school curriculum about the history of communism, the regimes in the system and "ongoing human rights abuses by such regimes," according to the bill.

The foundation would also develop oral history resources that educators could utilize alongside the curriculum, the bill stated.

According to statistics cited in a news release from the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 18% of Gen Z "thinks communism is a fairer system than capitalism and deserves consideration in America."

Feenstra in the release emphasized this number, and said "nearly one third of America's youth hold a favorable opinion of communism."

"These alarming findings cannot be the norm for future generations of Americans if we want our country to succeed and prosper," Feenstra said in the release. "I voted for the Crucial Communism Teaching Act to push back against the spread of this dangerous ideology in our schools and educate our children about communism's ugly past."

Feenstra joins DOGE Caucus

Feenstra also announced in a news release Thursday that he has joined the Delivering Outstanding

Government Efficiency, or DOGE, Caucus.

The name mimics the Department of Government Efficiency that Trump said he would create, headed by billionaire businessman Elon Musk and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy. The pair have said they'll find \$2 trillion in cuts to federal spending.

Ernst announced last month the creation of a DOGE Caucus in the Senate.

Feenstra said in the release that reckless spending and borrowing have driven up inflation and created more debt, and the federal government needs to balance its budget, eliminate wasteful spending and slow down debt growth in order to help future generations that will inherit what's left.

He said he's happy to work in the caucus to find ways to save taxpayers money and "eliminate unnecessary regulations" in order to grow the economy and make the country more fiscally responsible.

"As a strong, fiscal conservative, I came to Congress to get our debt under control, lower costs for our families, and stop wasteful government spending – and that's exactly what I'll continue to do," Feenstra said in the release.

Nunn, Ernst get provisions passed national defense package

An amendment headed by U.S. Rep. Zach Nunn was included in the National Defense Authorization Act, according to a Thursday news release, which passed out of the U.S. House of Representatives and was sent to the U.S. Senate.

All four of Iowa's representatives voted for the bill, which also eliminated gender-affirming health care coverage for children of military members.

According to the release, Nunn's proposal was to form a "strategic partnership" between the U.S. Defense Innovation Unit and the Israeli Ministry of Defense to simplify sharing of emerging technologies between the two powers.

Also included in the defense act were pay raises for certain servicemembers, increased funding to "U.S. defense initiatives" in the Indo-Pacific, and cuts to military programs and areas of the Pentagon totaling \$31 billion.

Other aspects of the legislation also touch on U.S.-Israel relations, like expanded collaborative military exercises and halting the "sale of goods at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges from any entities that have or are engaged in a boycott of Israel."

"America is the land of the free and home of the brave because of the men and women who serve in uniform," Nunn said in the release. "As a twenty-year combat veteran and current Colonel in the Air Force, I'm committed to protecting our national security. That means securing our Southern Border, stopping China in its tracks, bolstering our allies, and supporting our men and women in uniform throughout their career. This bill is a win for national security, a win for our troops, and a win for the future of our nation."

A measure backed by Ernst also made it into the final bill aimed at preventing, assessing and treating conditions, including traumatic brain injuries, suffered by service members repeatedly exposed to explosion pressure waves.

Lawmakers, other respond to death of former Rep. Jim Leach

Former Congressman Jim Leach. (Photo courtesy of the Leach family)

Members of Iowa's delegation joined a host of others, including former President Barack Obama, in paying

tribute to former U.S. Rep. Jim Leach of Davenport, who died Wednesday at age 82. Leach represented his eastern Iowa district from 1977 to 2007 and later chaired the National Endowment for the Humanities, among other positions.

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids school district rejects College & Career Pathways petition

Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - The Cedar Rapids Community School District says a petition regarding the College & Career Pathways program is invalid.

A parent in the district, Brooke Oja, submitted the petition, which has more than 600 signatures.

It asks that the district slow down the implementation of the College & Career Pathways model, to give parents more time to understand the process.

In a response to the petition on Friday, district leaders said there were insufficient eligible signatures, with many of the signatures on the petition coming from outside Cedar Rapids and Iowa.

Because the district has deemed the petition invalid, district leaders won't add the matter to the next school board agenda.

However, Superintendent Dr. Tawana Grover said the district does value the feedback from the community.

"We deeply appreciate the engagement and passion families, educators, and others in the community have shown for our College & Career Pathways program," Dr. Grover said. "We are listening closely to the feedback and are committed to working together to ensure the program's success."

The first phase of the College & Career Pathways program, Freshman Academy, is set to launch in the fall of 2025. The initiative will require high schoolers to choose a "pathway" geared to a career and then take one class a year in that pathway.

The district has held some in-person meetings to try to explain the program to parents, but some parents say their concerns have not been adequately addressed.

The district is inviting parents to join the Parent Advisory Group, and it is planning to host additional community meetings in 2025.

Find more information about the College & Career Pathways program [here](#).

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KCRG: University of Dubuque 'on track' to launch new medical school in 2028

Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - The University of Dubuque is "on track" to gain accreditation to open Iowa's first new medical school in more than a century.

The university aims to open the John and Alice Butler College of Osteopathic Medicine by August 2028, funded by a \$60 million gift by John and Alice Butler. The donation will be invested into the following:

\$12.5 million in endowed scholarships for undergraduate health science students

\$12.5 million in scholarships for Dubuque County students

\$10 million to establish the College of Osteopathic Medicine

\$10 million to support lab research and update equipment

\$10 million for outreach and education efforts

\$5 million to recruit, support, and retain college leadership

"Today is a great win for health care and for education," said University of Dubuque President Travis Frampton. "It is a great win for that high school student in rural Iowa who wonders if she can be a doctor someday to help make people feel better."

According to the university, osteopathic medicine offers a holistic approach to medicine that treats the whole person - mind, body, and spirit.

The four-year medical program will accept around 200 students per class for a total enrollment of up to 800 students.

"That is 400 students on campus, enrolled, taking courses in a new medical school complex, and 400 spread across the tri-state area and beyond on clinical rotations," explained Frampton. "To say it another way, this program will attract 400 new graduate students each year to reside in Dubuque. The impact on our local economy will be profound."

UD officials were joined by Dubuque Mayor Brad Cavanagh, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, and other community and state leaders Friday for the announcement.

"A new medical school will be a catalyst for what our state needs right now. It has the potential to attract the best and brightest from across the country to study medicine right here in Iowa, build their lives and careers here, and ultimately, increase access to the quality of health care in rural areas of our state that need it most," said Reynolds.

According to a March 2024 study by the Association of American Medical Colleges, the U.S. is expected to face a physician shortage of up to 86,000 workers by 2036.

"In communities like ours, whether that's in Dubuque, in our region, in Iowa, or along the rural-urban divide in the U.S., there is a continuing shortage of physicians. This dramatically impacts access to adequate care, which significantly affects healthcare and health outcomes. In order for us to change this trajectory, we must educate, prepare, and equip more physicians. By establishing a medical school in the Tri-State, the University of Dubuque will be able to serve our community and deliver on our Mission," said Frampton.

The university has not selected a site to build a medical facility, but several locations are being considered in downtown Dubuque.

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Iowa News Now: Southeast Iowa manufacturing facility, EPA reach settlement over chemical leak

Maddie Lee

EDDYVILLE, Iowa — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is fining a southeast Iowa production plant for alleged violations of the federal Clean Air Act and Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.

The Ajinomoto Health and Nutrition Eddyville plants were inspected by the EPA after a 2021 release of hydrochloric acid led to evacuations and community shelter-in-place orders and a 2022 chlorine gas release that injured some employees.

The EPA identifies both substances as extremely hazardous.

Chlorine gas can be fatal when inhaled or lead to chronic lung conditions.

They will pay just over \$458,000 in civil penalties as a result.

According to the EPA, Ajinomoto has also agreed to install an ammonia water deluge system at one of its two facilities.

This will cost almost \$228,000.

The plant has conducted a compliance audit at its facilities to identify any outstanding noncompliance with federal law.

Ajinomoto's Eddyville plants manufacture amino acids for food and beverages and animal nutrition.

They employ about 270 local workers between Eddyville and Oskaloosa.

EPA Region 7 Enforcement and Compliance Division Director David Cozad said in a statement, "Ajinomoto's operation presented a significant risk to its workers and surrounding community."

He added that the settlement will reduce the risk to workers and residents.

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The Gazette: University of Iowa Health Care tackles growing demand for emergency care

Vanessa Miller

IOWA CITY — The number of Eastern Iowans needing or wanting emergency care has soared over the last two decades — as has the severity of the health issues patients are facing — cramping emergency rooms, crowding wait rooms and compelling hospitals to expand, renovate and build.

That includes University of Iowa Health Care, which in the spring will increase its emergency room count to three — including its main-campus ER west of the Iowa River in Iowa City; the former Mercy Hospital ER east of the river in Iowa City it acquired through a bankruptcy sale this year; and an ER attached to the new North Liberty hospital nearing completion.

“The emergency department at North Liberty will treat the same types of patients with the same spectrum of disease that we currently see at our university and downtown campus locations,” said Hans House, director of emergency medicine services at the UIHC North Liberty campus. “We will be ready for patients of all ages, including children.”

On the main UIHC campus — which has taken the brunt of the area’s ER-visit spike, given its ability to treat the sickest and highest-acuity patients — the emergency room is undergoing a \$37 million renovation and expansion, phase I of which wrapped this month.

After the full expansion and renovation anticipated by next winter, the main UIHC ER will have more than a dozen additional treatment rooms — bringing it to nearly 60 beds — a new triage area and more space for assessing and treating pediatric patients and those with mental health needs.

The project aims to improve the department’s capacity, efficiency and patient experience — which has suffered due to long wait times and other crowding issues.

“It’s just overwhelming at times,” UIHC Emergency Departmental Executive Officer Andrew Nugent told The Gazette about the university’s ER traffic. “And it really depends on the amount that is coming from outside institutions. Being the tertiary center, we take an enormous number of transfers into the hospital. ... There are days when everybody’s trying to send us patients because they’re all sick, and we’re the only place that can handle a lot of these things.”

The university’s most recent Board of Regents report on its emergency room use showed wait times rose about 40 percent from 2018 to 2022, while its emergency room-to-emergency room transfers from other hospitals to the UI climbed 33 percent during the period. The average length of stay in the UI ER increased from under 4.5 hours to over five.

While a typical wait time at the UIHC ER is between one to two hours, the wait time at the former Mercy ER — now called UI Medical Center Downtown — often is only minutes.

Adding that space to its emergency repertoire — in addition to the new North Liberty emergency room — will allow the university to better triage its patients based on severity and specific needs.

“We can kind of work synergistically to get the sickest patients here” at the main campus ER, Nugent said.

‘In the hallway quite a bit’

The first phase of the main campus ER project was focused on a south and vertical expansion — moving a relatively new “crisis stabilization unit” from the seventh floor of the John Pappajohn Pavilion to the second floor of the emergency department, where many with mental health needs first present.

“This move is designed to improve the speed and effectiveness of the care we provide patients experiencing a mental health emergency, as well as enhance efficiencies for staff,” according to a UIHC summary of the upgrade.

The upgrade also created a new adolescent-specific stabilization unit. That, according to the university, will streamline treatment for pediatric patients having a mental health crisis and allow the university to care for

them in a “much more humane way.”

“One of the side effects of boarding and overcrowding is that our patients are in the hallway quite a bit,” Nugent said. “And so hopefully this alleviates that. Our mental health patients will have rooms. And they're being specifically built so they're safe for mental health patients but can be used multi-functionally.”

Both of those new units are opening this month, when phase II of the ER expansion is beginning — creating a larger pediatric emergency space on the north side that will include two resuscitation rooms, a procedure room and a triage room.

“And we’re going to have a waiting room for the kids, which is great — so they don’t have to be next to the adults that are sick and coughing, or vice versa,” he said.

On a 60-acre plot in North Liberty, the university’s new \$525.6 million, 469,000-square-foot hospital aims to absorb some of the visits to the main UIHC ER. The university expects 55,000 visits there this year — up 140 percent from the about 23,000 visits 25 years ago.

And while the new hospital itself will house the UI Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation and lean heavily toward orthopedics care, its ER will be capable of responding to any type of emergency.

“This will be a fully functional emergency department with the same equipment, technologies and capabilities available at the downtown campus (emergency department),” according to Ali Harmon, director of emergency medicine and transport services in the UI Department of Emergency Medicine. “It will be available to anyone needing emergency treatment.”

The new North Liberty ER will have 14 emergency care rooms, including two for behavioral health patients; a designated trauma and resuscitation room; haz-mat space for patients needing to decontaminate from hazardous materials; an isolation room for patients with infectious diseases; and board-certified ER doctors and nurses.

The North Liberty emergency department will be designated a Level 4 trauma center — providing advanced trauma care and life support “in preparation for transfer to a facility that provides tertiary-level care and a broader scope of surgical, specialty, and subspecialty services.”

Patients needing that higher level of care will be transferred to the UIHC main campus ER, designated a level 1 trauma center, or to the Downtown Campus, a level 3 trauma center.

“The North Liberty ED won’t include all the specialty care teams on-site that we have on the university campus,” Harmon said. “That’s really what impacts a trauma center’s level designation. For patients who come to the North Liberty ED needing subspecialty care, we’ll transfer those patients to the university campus or downtown campus, depending on the care they need.”

‘Spreading out of the community visits’

Although UIHC doesn’t have much control over where patients decide to go for emergency care — aside from educating them on which site is most appropriate for their specific need — ER doctors now will be able to coordinate transfers where necessary using an up-and-coming internal ambulance system, Nugent said.

That system hasn’t officially been announced or come online, but Nugent said the goal is to have it up and running before the spring opening of the North Liberty hospital.

“So that we can get people effectively from here to downtown, and then we’ll just add North Liberty to the system,” he said.

Patients can help and avoid transfer by doing “some self-selection” — heading, for example, to North Liberty for a broken bone, to the downtown campus for a high fever or to the main UIHC ER for trauma or a life-threatening issue.

“But if you’re really hurting, go to the closest spot, and that’s fine,” Nugent said. “Because then we’ll get you to the right spot.”

Once the university has its ER trio online, Nugent said he expects to see some “spreading out of the community visits.”

“I would see wait times hopefully go down for everyone at every location,” he said. “I think the number of admissions still coming to the main campus is going to be the same, if maybe not higher, because we’re going to find out people are ill and getting seen faster.”

Part of the university’s ER crowding issue has to do with its inpatient bed capacity and the fact that so many of its emergency patients need to stay overnight. Where an average community hospital reports a 12 to 14 percent admission rate from its ER, the university’s ER admission rate is 33 percent, according to Nugent.

The university has 889 inpatient beds on its main campus, including 205 pediatric beds in its UI Stead Family Children’s Hospital; 234 beds at its downtown campus; and it will add up to 48 inpatient beds in North Liberty. The hospital also is planning a new 842,000-gross-square-foot inpatient tower costing more than \$1 million, including multiple floors of 48 beds each.

But completion of that tower will take years.

“So we’re still going to have some of those issues where we need to get people admitted,” Nugent said. “We don’t know the impact of moving some of our inpatient capacity out to North Liberty, and we’re getting better at sending some downtown, so hopefully that evens out a little bit.

“But I don’t want to have to wait for a new inpatient tower to make everything better,” he said. “So we’re constantly working on the efficiency of things.”

Other expansion

Although the university is planning significant upgrades to the downtown campus it acquired from Mercy Iowa City — with expectations to spend “far” more than \$25 million over time — initial plans include roofing upgrades and operating room renovations.

“I think, first of all, they’ve got to get the building in shape,” Nugent said about the prospect of expanding the downtown ER. “And then they’ll probably have some discussions about whether they need to expand or not.”

UI Health Care isn’t the only hospital system in the area addressing emergency room crowding and wait times.

Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids in 2020 opened the state’s first free-standing ER — by converting its Hiawatha MercyCare Urgent Care location into an extension of its emergency department.

That ER is open every hour of every day of the year — offering on-site radiology, lab and pharmaceutical services. And earlier this month, Mercy Cedar Rapids opened its second freestanding ER — this one in Marion — outfitted with 12 exam rooms, two trauma rooms, lab and imaging services, and a helipad.

"Like the Mercy Hiawatha ER, patients at the Marion location that require additional hospital intervention will be transferred free of charge to Mercy's downtown location based on well-developed protocols and in partnership with local ambulance services," according to hospital officials.

UnityPoint Health-St. Luke's Hospital, 1026 A Ave. NE in Cedar Rapids, also opened a Marion ER in August. The 10,000-square-foot ER was built inside an existing building at 3301 Armar Dr., just off Marion Boulevard near the border of Cedar Rapids and Marion.

St. Luke's identified Marion "as an ideal location due to its fast-growing population and community expansion projections," Dr. Sarah Hoper, the medical director for its new Marion ER, told a correspondent for The Gazette earlier this year.

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DMR: Patients in limbo over stalled MercyOne, Aetna negotiations. How that could affect care:

Michaela Ramm

Aetna members soon may no longer be in-network for one of Iowa's top health care systems as contract negotiations between the insurance company and MercyOne stall ahead of the new year.

MercyOne patients were notified last month that if the health care system and Aetna fail to reach a new contract agreement before the end of the year, all of MercyOne's providers and facilities will be out of Aetna's network beginning Jan. 1, 2025.

That means patients would have to pay medical expenses out-of-pocket if they keep their Aetna commercial or Medicare health care plan.

MercyOne told the Register the two organizations are still working to reach an agreement in the contract dispute, which was first reported by KCCI.

"We believe everyone deserves access to high-quality health care," according to a statement from MercyOne. "That's why we are determined to protect patient access to MercyOne and push for what's right, which includes fair payment, so we are here to care for the next generation."

Aetna also expressed interest in reaching a deal with MercyOne.

"We are hopeful that we will reach an agreement that keeps them in our networks while keeping health care services affordable for our members and health plan sponsors," Aetna spokesperson Monica Prinzing said.

Who's to blame for the impasse?

MercyOne has been in contract negotiations for more than six months, trying to reach an agreement that "appropriately covers the true cost of the care we provide to our patients," officials said in a statement.

MercyOne blamed Aetna for the stalled negotiations, telling patients in its notice that the health insurance company has continued to delay progress and has failed to offer a proposed contract that meets the health system's needs.

At the same time, Aetna continues to raise premiums and out-of-pocket costs for its members, according to MercyOne officials. They pointed out Aetna profits last year of about \$5.6 billion.

"As a not-for-profit organization, rising supply and labor costs have made it difficult to maintain the high quality of care patients deserve," health system officials said in a statement. "MercyOne relies on fair payment to provide the care and services patients depend on and need. Our payments from Aetna have not kept pace with the rising costs to provide outstanding care."

I have Aetna insurance. What should I do?

Contract negotiations are ongoing, and an agreement could be reached before the new year. However, there are steps MercyOne patients should consider to protect themselves from pricey medical bills.

Individuals with Medicare Advantage plans may change their coverage and select a new health insurance plan between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2025. MercyOne has a list of in-network Medicare Advantage plans on its website, [MercyOne.org/Aetna](https://www.mercyone.org/Aetna).

Individuals who receive Aetna insurance through their employer and wish to continue receiving care at MercyOne should contact their employer to inquire about secondary health plan coverage.

Those who are pregnant or receiving ongoing treatment may be able to continue receiving in-network care through the plan's continuity-of-care provision. MercyOne officials encouraged these individuals to call Aetna to inquire.

MercyOne officials also urged patients to never delay care. Regardless of their Aetna status, they should seek out the closest emergency department if they are experiencing a medical emergency.

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The Gazette: Schools see better student attendance under new Iowa law

Grace King

Eastern Iowa schools are seeing less chronic absenteeism five months after the implementation of a new state law that aims to improve student attendance.

Chris Gibson, director of student services for the Cedar Rapids Community School District, said the law has helped the district be "very clean and clear with our expectations for families."

"It's forced us to really put a good-faith effort to do everything we can to get students in school, so they can learn," Gibson said.

The new Iowa law, Senate File 2435, defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10 percent of days in a grading period. It requires school districts to adopt a policy related to absenteeism and truancy. The law also applies to accredited non-public schools.

During the 2023-24 school year, almost 36 percent of students in the Cedar Rapids district were chronically absent. That number is at 11 percent so far this school year, Gibson said.

Almost 22 percent of Iowa students across the state were chronically absent during the 2023-24 school year, according to the Iowa School Performance Profile.

If a student misses 10 percent or more days in a grading period, the school sends a certified letter to the student's parent or guardian and notifies the county attorney. No legal action will be taken at this time.

The Cedar Rapids district has sent 1,667 letters to families so far this school year who have missed 10 percent or more days in the first semester. That equates to eight days, or about 56 hours of instructional time missed.

Each certified letter costs the district \$9.64 to send, which means the district has spent slightly more than \$16,000 so far this school year on letters about students missing school.

The letters are delivered to the family's home address and a signature must be obtained upon delivery. The U.S. Postal Service will attempt to deliver the letter three times before it is returned to the Cedar Rapids district.

"We have received letters back," Gibson said.

School officials also attempt to contact families through email and phone calls.

Cedar Rapids schools will change rule for excused sick days

Under the law, school districts can make their own determination on how to handle student absences due to illness. Currently, sick days in the Cedar Rapids district are only exempt if a doctor's note is provided.

Gibson said that policy will change in the district's second semester, which begins in January. The district will not require a doctor's note for eight illness absences. After eight illness absences, families will have to provide a doctor's note for an absence not to count toward chronic absenteeism if a child is out sick, Gibson said.

"You're not going to take your child to the doctor for a fever. People feel like they have had to do that, and it's a financial burden," Gibson said.

Continued absenteeism triggers prevention plan

If a student reaches 15 percent absenteeism, the student and their family are required by law to attend a school engagement meeting with school officials. During this meeting, an absenteeism prevention plan will be created to prevent more absences.

There are 830 students in the Cedar Rapids district on absenteeism prevention plans after missing 84 hours or more of school, Gibson said.

The family and a school official will sign the plan, which identifies the causes of the student's absences and the future responsibility of the family and school official related to the student's attendance.

If an absenteeism prevention plan is created for a student, the school official will contact that student's family at least once a week during the remainder of the school year to monitor the performance of the student and family under the plan.

Absenteeism prevention plans look different for each family. For younger students, it could be adding an alarm clock to their routine or giving them a sticker on the days they attend school. "Simple things like that sometimes help," Gibson said.

If a student misses 20 percent or more days in a grading period or semester, as in years predating the new law, families will be referred to the county attorney who will decide what action to take.

There have been 14 students in the Cedar Rapids district referred to the county attorney as of Dec. 12, Gibson said.

In an interview with The Gazette in August, assistant Linn County Attorney Nina Sheller said if a student is absent from school for 20 percent of a grading period, it will result in a simple misdemeanor charge for the family.

The family then will get the opportunity to participate in the county's Truancy Deferred Prosecution Program, started in 2019, which helps parents avoid being fined or going to jail for failing to get their children to school.

During the 2022-23 school year, there were 110 truancy cases in Linn County. Almost 80 percent of cases were dismissed due to success of the Truancy Deferred Prosecution Program.

"Our schools are working really hard to provide engaging, safe learning environments for our kids, so they feel safe coming to school and want to be here and learn," Gibson said.

Chronic absenteeism grows as students age

Across school districts, the number of students chronically absent is lower in elementary school and tends to grow as kids get older, school officials say.

In the Cedar Rapids district, 32 percent of 12th-graders are chronically absent, compared to 13 percent of sixth-graders, Gibson said. "What happens is (chronic absenteeism) starts in single digits in kindergarten and progressively goes up," she said.

There are a lot of factors that can contribute to older students attending school less, Gibson said. Older students might have more family responsibilities such as child care and work.

"There are so many family factors that happen, and yet we still have to have high expectations for kids to come to school," Gibson said.

Chronic absenteeism in other Eastern Iowa schools

The College Community School District has sent out 173 letters to families whose students have been chronically absent this school year, costing the district about \$1,300.

They are seeing almost 5 percent fewer students chronically absent this school year, compared to last year, College Community officials said. About 24 percent of students were chronically absent in the district during the 2023-24 school year.

So far this year, chronic absenteeism in the district is 14 percent.

"At Prairie, we're doing many other things to try to encourage positive attendance, so I don't think it's the law in and of itself. The law has brought a heightened awareness that attendance is important," said Laura Medberry, executive director of learning supports for the College Community district.

In the Iowa City Community School District, 13 percent of students have been chronically absent so far this school year. The district has sent 631 certified letters to families, costing about \$3,495, district spokeswoman Kristin Pedersen said.

During the 2023-24 school year, the Iowa City district saw almost 20 percent of students chronically absent, according to the Iowa School Performance Profile.

The Linn-Mar Community School District also is seeing a slight improvement in student attendance. The district's average daily attendance is more than 95 percent, said district spokeswoman Renee Nelson.

During the 2023-24 school year, the Linn-Mar district saw about 16.4 percent of students chronically absent, according to the Iowa School Performance Profile.

The Linn-Mar district has mailed about 100 letters to families with 10 percent or more absences so far this year.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

Stateline: Trump migrant deportations could threaten states' agricultural economies

Nada Hassanein

If President-elect Donald Trump follows through on his pledge to deport millions of immigrants, it could upend the economies of states where farming and other food-related industries are crucial — and where labor shortages abound.

Immigrants make up about two-thirds of the nation's crop farmworkers, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, and roughly 2 in 5 of them are not legally authorized to work in the United States.

Agricultural industries such as meatpacking, dairy farms and poultry and livestock farms also rely heavily on immigrants.

"We have five to six employees that do the work that nobody else will do. We wouldn't survive without them," said Bruce Lampman, who owns Lampman Dairy Farm, in Bruneau, Idaho. His farm, which has been in the family three decades, has 350 cows producing some 26,000 pounds of milk a day.

"My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work," said Lampman, adding that his workers are worried about what's to come.

Anita Alves Pena, a Colorado State University professor of economics who studies immigration, noted that many agricultural employers already can't find enough laborers. Without farm subsidies or other protections to make up for the loss of immigrant workers, she said, the harm to state economies could be significant.

"Farmers across the country, producers in a lot of different parts, are often talking about labor shortages — and that's even with the current status quo of having a fairly high percentage of unauthorized individuals in the workforce," Pena said. "A policy like this, if it was not coupled with something else, would exacerbate that."

Employers have a hard time hiring enough farm laborers because such workers generally are paid low wages for arduous work.

In addition to hiring immigrant laborers who are in the country illegally, agricultural employers rely on the

federal H-2A visa program. H-2A visas usually are for seasonal work, often for about six to 10 months. However, they can be extended for up to three years before a worker must return to their home country.

Employers must pay H-2A workers a state-specific minimum wage and provide no-cost transportation and housing. Still, employers' applications for H-2A visas have soared in the past 18 years, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a trend reflecting the shortage of U.S.-born laborers willing to do the work. The number of H-2A positions has surged from just over 48,000 in 2005 to more than 378,000 in 2023.

But agricultural employers that operate year-round, such as poultry, dairy and livestock producers, can't use the seasonal visa to fill gaps, according to the USDA.

My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work.

— Bruce Lampman, owner of Lampman Dairy Farm in Bruneau, Idaho

Farmers also employ foreign nationals who have "temporary protected status" under a 1990 law that allows immigrants to remain if the U.S. has determined their home countries are unsafe because of violence or other reasons. There are about 1.2 million people in the U.S. under the program or eligible for it, from countries including El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Lebanon and Ukraine. Many have been here for decades, and Trump has threatened to end the program.

Support for the program

Immigration advocates want a pathway for H-2A workers to gain permanent legal status, and agricultural trade organizations are pushing for an expansion of the H-2A program to include year-round operations.

The National Milk Producers Federation says it's too early to say how it would cope with mass deportations under the Trump administration. But the group states it "strongly supports efforts to pass agriculture labor reform that provides permanent legal status to current workers and their families and gives dairy farmers access to a workable guestworker program."

Immigrants make up 51% of labor at dairy farms across states, and farms that employ immigrants produce nearly 80% of the nation's milk supply, according to the organization.

"Foreign workers are important to the success of U.S. dairy, and we will work closely with members of Congress and federal officials to show the importance of foreign workers to the dairy industry and farm communities," Jaime Castaneda, the group's executive vice president for policy development and strategy, wrote in an email.

Adam Croissant, the former vice president of research and development at yogurt company Chobani, which has manufacturing plants in Idaho and New York, said he's seen a lot of misinformation around immigrants' workforce contributions.

"The dairy industry as a whole understands that without immigrant labor, the dairy industry doesn't exist. It's as simple as that," Croissant said.

Tom Super, a spokesperson for the National Chicken Council, lambasted U.S. immigration policy and said the poultry industry "wants a stable, legal, and permanent workforce."

"The chicken industry is heavily affected by our nation's immigration policy or, more pointedly, lack thereof. ... The system is broken, and Washington has done nothing to fix it," Super wrote in an email.

Changes ahead?

But major changes to the H-2A visa program are unlikely to happen before deportations begin. In an interview with NBC News' "Meet the Press" over the weekend, Trump repeated his promise to start deporting some immigrants almost immediately.

He said he plans to begin with convicted criminals, but would then move to other immigrants. "We're starting with the criminals, and we've got to do it. And then we're starting with the others, and we're going to see how it goes."

Some farmers still hope that Trump's actions won't match his rhetoric. But "hoping isn't a great business plan," said Rick Naerebout, CEO of the Idaho Dairyman's Association. "Our ability to feed ourselves as a country is completely jeopardized if you do see the mass deportations."

If the deportations do happen, agricultural workers will disappear faster than they can be replaced, experts say.

"The H-2A program will not expand instantly to fill the gap. So, that's going to be a problem," said Jeffrey Dorfman, a professor of agricultural economics at North Carolina State University who was Georgia's state economist from 2019 to 2023.

In Georgia, agriculture is an \$83.6 billion industry that supports more than 323,000 jobs. It is one of the five states most reliant on the federal H-2A visa program, depending on those workers to fill about 60% of agricultural jobs.

Dorfman argued that even the fear of deportation will have an impact on the workforce.

"When farmworkers hear about ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] raids on a nearby farm, lots of them disappear. Even the legal ones often disappear for a few days. So, if everybody just gets scared and self-deports, just goes back home, I think that would be the worst disruption," said Dorfman, adding that even more jobs would need to be filled if the administration revokes temporary protected status.

Antonio De Loera-Brust, communications director for the farmworker labor union United Farm Workers, said the nation's focus should be on protecting workers, no matter their legal status.

"They deserve a lot better than just not getting deported," he said. "They deserve better wages, they deserve labor rights, they deserve citizenship."

And though economists and the agriculture industry have said that mass deportations could raise grocery store prices, De Loera-Brust called that particular argument a sign of "moral weakness."

"As if the worst thing about hundreds of thousands of people getting separated from their families was going to be that consumers would have to pay more for a bag of strawberries or a bag of baby carrots," De Loera-Brust said. "There's a moral gap there."

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North Dakota Monitor: North Dakota landowners, 2 counties appealing Summit pipeline permit

Jeff Beach

A group of landowners and two counties are appealing a North Dakota's agency's approval of a large carbon dioxide pipeline.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission on Nov. 15 approved a route permit for 333 miles of the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline in North Dakota. North Dakota is the planned endpoint of a 2,500 mile pipeline network to carry CO₂ from ethanol plants in five states to an underground storage area west of Bismarck.

Attorney Brian Jorde of Domina Law, which represents landowners across the pipeline area, said Friday in an email that there are several problems with the PSC's findings.

He said the PSC received plume modeling and dispersion risk analysis as prepared by Summit that would show how CO₂ might spread if there was a rupture of the hazardous liquid pipeline.

The PSC did not allow the other parties to the case access to the plume information.

"This 'confidential' information was also shared with other members of the public, yet potentially directly affected citizens engaged in the routing application process were kept in the dark," Jorde wrote. He said that constituted a violation of due process rights.

If CO₂ leaks from a pipeline, it can sicken or kill people in the immediate area.

"The public of North Dakota deserve transparency before hazardous pipelines are forced upon them," Jorde said.

Jorde said the landowner appeal will be filed in Burleigh County District Court.

The two counties that are appealing are Burleigh and Emmons, both on the main trunk of the pipeline in central North Dakota.

The counties are appealing the PSC's February ruling that state rules supersede county ordinances on issues including how close a residence can be to a carbon pipeline.

Emmons County filed an appeal on the ruling in March, but the matter was set aside until the commission voted on the permit application.

Burleigh County filed its appeal this week.

In South Dakota, the Public Utilities Commission ruled that county ordinances preempt state carbon pipeline rules, a main reason Summit was denied a permit there. Summit has since filed a new application.

Summit has a permit in Iowa and for a short segment of its route in Minnesota. Nebraska has no state agency that issues carbon pipeline permits.

The North Dakota Industrial Commission on Thursday approved Summit's plan for underground storage of the carbon dioxide.

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Axios: Schumer requests "special drone-detection tech" for N.Y. and N.J.

Rebecca Falconer

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Sunday that he's "working to pass a bill" to give local law enforcement "more tools for drone detection" following a spate of mysterious sightings in Northeastern U.S. states.

The big picture: Schumer in online statements urged Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to send "special drone-detection tech" to New York and New Jersey to tackle the unidentified flying objects problem that saw N.Y. Stewart International Airport shut down Friday.

The Senate majority leader told reporters Sunday he's requesting Robin Radar Systems because they have "360-degree technology."

He added: "If the technology exists for a drone to make it up into the sky, there certainly is technology that can track the craft with precision and determine what the heck is going on, and that's what the Robin does." State of play: New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) in an online statement Sunday said "our federal partners" were "deploying a state-of-the-art drone detection system" to N.Y., which she said would support state and federal law enforcement in their investigations into the matter, but she said further assistance was needed.

A screenshot of N.Y. Gov. Kathy Hochul's tweet, saying: "In response to my calls for additional resources, our federal partners are sending a drone detection system to New York. I am grateful for the support, but ... Congress must pass a law that will give us the power to deal directly with drones" New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy (D), who reposted Schumer's X post Sunday, has also requested that President Biden direct more resources to investigate the origins of the mystery of the drones.

Murphy said on X he had met with N.J. State Police officials and radar technicians Sunday night who are "surveying the area" for unmanned aircraft systems." "The public deserves clear answers — we will keep pushing the federal government for more information and resources," he said, adding in a later post following a meeting with an FBI official on the matter: "We are ready to assist the federal government in getting to the bottom of this."

What they're saying: Mayorkas indicated on X that the Biden administration had sent some tech to N.J., saying that many of the "reported sightings have turned out to be piloted aircraft" as the "technology we have deployed to New Jersey has confirmed this."

Representatives for the Department of Homeland Security, Schumer and Murphy did not immediately respond to Axios' requests for comment in the evening.

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AP: One week into a new Syria, rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again

Sarah El Deeb

DAMASCUS (AP) — At Damascus' international airport, the new head of security — one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital — arrived with his team. The few maintenance workers who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager to learn what will happen next.

They quickly unloaded all the complaints they had been too afraid to express during the rule of President

Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told the bearded fighter they were denied promotions and perks in favor of pro-Assad favorites, and that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned of hardcore Assad supporters among airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

As Al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, announced: "This is the first time we talk."

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Palestinian refugees return to Yarmouk amid questions about their place in the new Syria
Advertisement

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

Idlib comes to Damascus

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems" he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half

are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000.

Right now, the fighters and the public are learning about each other.

The fighters drive large SUVs and newer models of vehicles that are out of reach for most residents in Damascus, where they cost 10 times as much because of custom duties and bribes. The fighters carry Turkish lira, long forbidden in government-held areas, rather than the plunging Syrian pound.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

But many Syrians remain suspicious. Some fighters sport ribbons with Islamist slogans on their uniforms and not all of them belong to HTS, the most organized group.

"The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident from the southern city of Daraa, where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began. He was concerned by reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings.

"We should be fearful," he said, adding that he worries some insurgents feel superior to other Syrians because of their years of fighting. "With all due respect to those who sacrificed, we all sacrificed."

People gather to celebrate days after the fall of Bashar Assad's government at Umayyad Square in Damascus, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2024. (AP Photo/Leo Correa, File)
Still, fear is not prevalent in Damascus, where many insist they will no longer let themselves be oppressed.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure

On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. People ransacked the airport's duty free, smashing all the bottles of liquor. The rebels blamed some of this on fleeing government loyalists.

The public stayed indoors, peeking out at the newcomers. Shops shut down.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order, ordering a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

For tens of thousands, their first destination was Assad's prisons, particularly Saydnaya on the capital's outskirts, to search for loved ones who disappeared years ago. Few have found any traces.

It was wrenching but also unifying. Rebels, some of them also searching, mingled with relatives of the missing in the dark halls of prisons that all had feared for years.

An armed opposition fighter walks among costumers at the Al-Hamidiyeh market inside the old walled city of Damascus, Syria, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla, File)

During celebrations in the street, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles. Insurgents posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. Suddenly shops and walls everywhere are plastered with revolutionary flags and posters of activists killed by Assad's state.

TV stations didn't miss a beat, flipping from praising Assad to playing revolutionary songs. State media aired the flurry of declarations issued by the new insurgent-led transitional government.

The new administration called on people to go back to work and urged Syrian refugees around the world to return to help rebuild. It announced plans to rehabilitate and vet the security forces to prevent the return of "those with blood on their hands." Fighters reassured airport staffers — many of them government loyalists — that their homes won't be attacked, one employee said.

But Syria's woes are far from being resolved.

While produce prices plunged after Assad's fall, because merchants no longer needed to pay hefty customs fees and bribes, fuel distribution was badly disrupted, jacking up transportation costs and causing widespread and lengthy blackouts.

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise.

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said.

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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Morning Clips 12.16.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 16, 2024 8:22 AM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: IGOV Morning Clips 12.16.2024.docx

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IOWA NEWS:

KCCI: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds announces disaster proclamation for O'Brien County due to bird flu
Staff

O'BRIEN COUNTY, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds is enacting a disaster proclamation for a northwest Iowa county after bird flu was found in commercial layer chickens.

The governor's office made the announcement Saturday. According to a release from the governor's office, the USDA confirmed a case of bird flu in O'Brien County.

A disaster proclamation was issued for neighboring Sioux County earlier this month. In nearby Palo Alto County, 31,000 turkeys have been affected. Palo Alto County is also under a disaster proclamation.

The proclamation in O'Brien County is set to expire Jan. 15, 2025.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds: Iowa ready to use National Guard, law enforcement for mass deportations

Sabine Martin

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds says she is ready to use "every tool at our disposal," including deploying the state's National Guard and law enforcement, to carry out President-elect Donald Trump's plans for "mass deportations" of illegal immigrants, according to a joint statement by Republican governors.

Trump has signaled he wants to see an overhaul of the country's immigration system, starting with deporting immigrants living in the country illegally who have violated the law.

"On Day 1, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history to get the criminals out," Trump said during his campaign's closing speech at Madison Square Garden.

Reynolds and 25 other Republican governors vowed in the statement to stand behind Trump's plans to seal the border to illegal immigrants, which they said President Joe Biden's administration failed to accomplish.

"Republican governors remain fully committed to supporting the Trump Administration's efforts to deport dangerous criminals, gang members, and terrorists who are in this country illegally," the governors said in their statement. "We understand the direct threat these criminal illegal immigrants pose to public safety and our national security, and we will do everything in our power to assist in removing them from our communities."

Reynolds' office did not immediately respond to a request for additional information on how the National Guard and law enforcement might be deployed in the deportation effort.

The governor signed a Texas-style immigration law, Senate File 2340, in April that allows Iowa law enforcement to arrest undocumented immigrants for "illegal reentry" into the state. The U.S. Department of Justice sued to block the law from going into effect shortly after its passage in May, arguing that immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, and a federal judge agreed.

The state is appealing.

The law was met with some pushback from local law enforcement, including from then-Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert, who said his department is "not equipped, funded or staffed" to handle immigration enforcement.

How many people in Iowa would be affected by Trump's 'mass deportations' plan?

Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration would deport more than 11 million undocumented migrants in the U.S., more than 3% of the country's population, according to Pew Research Center estimates from 2022 data.

An estimated 26% of Iowa's immigrant population is undocumented, according to the American Immigration Council. The same data shows that 2.4% of Iowa's workforce is comprised of immigrants living in the state without legal permission.

Trump said recently in an NBC "Meet the Press" interview that he wants to be able to "work something out" with Democrats to help people under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, to remain in the U.S. The program allows children of undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S.

illegally to be able to live and work in the country.

Trump attempted to remove the program during his first term in the White House.

There are more than 1,300 DACA recipients living in Iowa and Omaha, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' June data.

How would Trump's plan for 'mass deportations' be carried out?

Trump said in November he will declare a national emergency and call on the military to assist in the promised deportations. His spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told USA Today his administration will use "every federal and state power necessary" to execute the mass deportation program.

Experts say Trump's plan could face several hurdles. The mass deportations could cost \$150 billion to \$350 billion for American taxpayers, Axios reported in November.

The U.S. immigration system also has a backlog of nearly 4 million cases and a shortage of immigration judges, which is slowing the process.

Five witnesses testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee on the effects that proposed mass deportations could have on Americans.

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union have stated that Trump's plan can't be accomplished "without violating the Constitution and federal laws."

"While Trump made similar promises in his first term, he was never able to carry out deportations on that scale," according to a memo from the ACLU on Trump's plan. "That is because doing so is an enormous project that would entail restrictions on basic freedoms core to American life."

Trump deported over 1.5 million people during his first term, which is less than deportations reported during former President Barack Obama's first and second terms.

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DMR: Kim Reynolds sets the standard for good governance. Cities should follow suit. | Opinion

John Hendrickson and Meg Tuszynski, Guest columnists

Iowa is quickly becoming a beacon for economic growth and opportunity thanks in large part to Gov. Kim Reynolds. Her fiscally conservative policies have lowered tax rates, kept spending low, and reduced regulations.

Reynolds has received numerous honors for her fiscal prudence, including the Distinguished Service Award from the Tax Foundation and the Linda S. Weindruch award from the Iowa Taxpayers Association. She was also named a public official of the year by Governing magazine and recognized by the Cato Institute as the most fiscally conservative governor in the nation for the second year in a row.

All of these honors and recognitions center on the fiscal policies that Reynolds has implemented since 2018.

According to the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of North America index, Iowa ranks as the 26th most

economically free state in the nation. The Hawkeye state was ranked 32nd in 2016, just a year before Reynolds took office. Since that time, it has shown continuous improvement on this index and other similar rankings, largely as a result of the pro-growth and fiscally conservative policies that are being implemented.

Since 2018, Reynolds has placed a priority on tax reform. When Reynolds took office, the top income tax rate was 8.98%. Starting in January 2025, Iowa will have a 3.8% flat tax, which will be the sixth-lowest income tax in the nation. Likewise, until the early 2020s, the top corporate tax rate in Iowa was 12%. Iowa's corporate rate is currently 7.1% and will continue to be lowered until it reaches a flat 5.5%.

Conservative budgeting is at the heart of Iowa's pro-growth income tax reform success. This approach has strengthened the state's fiscal foundation, while still allowing the state to meet spending priorities. In fiscal year 2024, Iowa posted a budget surplus of \$2.05 billion, projected to increase to \$2.25 billion in fiscal year 2025. Further, the Cash Reserve Fund and Economic Emergency Fund, Iowa's primary reserve accounts, are filled to their statutory maximums, with a combined balance of nearly \$962 million.

Iowa's Taxpayer Relief Fund currently holds \$3.7 billion and is projected to grow to \$4 billion by fiscal year 2026. This fund's growth ensures that tax cuts can be sustained, benefiting Iowa families and small businesses directly by putting money back into the economy.

The governor has further made reforming and reducing the size and scope of government a priority. According to Reynolds, "like any large organization, government is marked by bureaucracy's natural tendency to grow. If that growth isn't constantly checked and rechanneled toward its core function, it quickly takes on a life of its own."

As a result, the Legislature passed the first major effort to reform state government in nearly 40 years. The number of executive-level agencies has been reduced from 37 to 16. Numerous boards and commissions are also being reviewed and will either be eliminated or consolidated. The reform and realignment process are not only making government more efficient, but it is reducing the bureaucracy. In less than 18 months taxpayers saved about \$130 million as a result of the reforms and additional savings are expected as the process continues.

Reynolds also spearheaded the process of reducing regulatory burden when she issued an executive order requiring a review of all regulations. Building on this, the legislature passed a regulatory reform measure, which requires a cost-benefit analysis of all new rules, and sunsets rules unless they undergo a substantive review and are re-approved by a legislative committee. In addition, occupational licensing reforms are reducing roadblocks for employment.

Iowa still has much work to be done to become more competitive. For one, the state has some of the highest property taxes in the country, which not only discourages economic growth, but also deters people and businesses from moving to or remaining in Iowa. Just as Reynolds and the legislature had to lower spending in order to lower income taxes, local governments in Iowa must do the same. Policymakers should consider a local government budget limit to force governments to limit their spending, which in turn would allow them to lower property taxes.

Iowa is confronted with unique challenges being a rural Midwestern state, but the foundation for a strong economy and a stable fiscal house resides in lowering tax rates, conservative budgeting, and reducing the regulatory burden. Iowa's "blue state" neighbors Minnesota and Illinois demonstrate that a state cannot tax and spend itself into prosperity.

Reynolds is setting the gold standard for state fiscal policy. Other states should take note.

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DMR: Des Moines-based organization selected to lead state's new behavioral health system

Michaela Ramm

An Iowa-based health care association has been selected by the state to manage Iowa's new behavioral health system.

Gov. Kim Reynolds signed into law earlier this year a plan to overhaul the framework for behavioral health services in the state, a move top state officials hope will improve access to services for Iowans struggling with mental or substance use disorders. The new system is set to go online July 1, 2025.

On Friday, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services announced the Iowa Primary Care Association was selected to serve as the organization to oversee the new system.

Iowa PCA is a Des Moines-based health care nonprofit overseeing Iowa's federally qualified health centers, which provide services to low-income and medically under-served residents.

As the new Administrative Service Organization for the state, Iowa PCA will be responsible for "ensuring that all Iowans have clear, consistent pathways to care and support they need," Iowa HHS officials said in a statement.

Iowa PCA will develop and lead operations for each of the new system's seven districts. State officials say they will work with local entities to craft strategies to meet the unique needs within those districts' communities and establish a statewide network of behavioral health providers.

"Iowa Primary Care Association is an established and trusted health care provider in the state and now, as the statewide ASO, they become the welcoming front door to individuals in need of behavioral health support and care," Iowa HHS Director Kelly Garcia said in a statement.

Iowa PCA CEO Aaron Todd described the behavioral health redesign as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build "a more holistic, integrated model of service delivery" to help Iowans.

"At the Iowa PCA, we are motivated and driven to work at the systems and community levels to address the very real barriers Iowans face to access behavioral health services that we have witnessed first-hand in our work with community health centers and other stakeholders across the state," Todd said in a statement.

What is Iowa's new behavioral health system?

The law signed by Reynolds in May eliminates the 13 Mental Health and Disability Service regions and 19 Integrated Provider Networks that currently manage substance use disorder and problem gambling services in the state.

Instead, the new plan merges these 32 districts into seven new districts that would oversee both mental health and substance use treatment and services. Disability services would be overseen directly by Iowa HHS.

Reynolds and other state officials have said the goal of the new system is to remove administrative barriers separating mental health and substance use programming in Iowa. Each of the behavioral health districts will be charged with coordinating prevention, early intervention and treatment and crisis services, among others.

"By bringing services together in this way, we will enable better coordination of care supporting the best possible outcomes for each individual," Reynolds said in a statement Friday. "It's what Iowans deserve, and it's what we intend to deliver."

Many details about the new system are still forthcoming. Some behavioral health providers and other advocates have raised questions about the new system, saying they have concerns whether a large state-run system will have enough resources to address the needs of every Iowan.

Why was Iowa PCA selected by the state to lead the new system?

Garcia said in a statement that Iowa PCA is "uniquely qualified" to fulfill the state's vision for the new behavioral health system. The nonprofit already has an existing footprint statewide that includes a comprehensive IT infrastructure that can help streamline services for Iowans, she said.

Iowa HHS Behavioral Health Division Director Marissa Eyanson said Iowa PCA laid out a robust plan to ensure services continue for Iowans throughout the transition period and into the launch of the new system.

"Iowa Primary Care Association embraces innovative delivery models of care and promises to expand that approach in order to provide a standard set of core services consistently systemwide," Eyanson said in a statement.

Iowa PCA touted its experience in value-based care, health equity and quality improvement, among others. Todd said his organization will draw on this experience and seek input from local stakeholders as Iowa's behavioral health services shift into this new model.

"Just as we have led the nation in our work with community health centers, we are prepared and excited to partner with Iowa HHS, behavioral health districts, providers and stakeholders to realize Iowa's vision as the national leader in behavioral health service delivery," Todd said.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will

continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Gov. Kim Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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DMR: Ex-ISU professor can pursue more than a decade of unequal pay claims, Supreme Court rules

William Morris

A former Iowa State University professor can pursue potentially decades of claims for gender-based pay discrimination, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled Friday.

Sylvia Cianza worked as a professor in ISU's agronomy department from 1979 to 2020. In 2021, after her

retirement, she filed a civil rights complaint against the university, alleging that she had been paid as much as \$46,000 less per year than equally or less-qualified male agronomy professors — discrepancies she discovered, she said, after being assigned to chair her department's diversity committee.

Sylvia Ciano

In her lawsuit, Ciano sought damages for pay discrimination dating back to 2009, when Iowa passed its equal pay statute. Attorneys for the university, though, argued that because the law requires such complaints to be filed within 300 days, Ciano could only recover for alleged discrepancies on paychecks in the 300 days before her complaint.

The district judge disagreed with both, and ruled that Ciano's claims were limited by a two-year statute of limitations.

Friday's decision reverses that ruling and opens the door for Ciano to pursue more than a decade's worth of damages. Justice Christopher McDonald wrote for the full court, except Justice David May, who was recused.

"(The statute) means exactly what it says: the claimant can recover 'for the period of time for which the complainant has been discriminated against,'" McDonald wrote. "We thus decline the university's invitation to graft a temporal limitation into the damages statute where none exists."

The decision sends the case back to the district court for further proceedings.

Ciano's attorney, Ann Brown, said in an email that Iowa's Equal Pay Act is a "critically important" law for tackling wage discrimination.

"I am happy with the Supreme Court's decision that the statute speaks for itself and allows victims of wage discrimination to recover damages during the entire period of discrimination," she said. "This decision should end employers' efforts to limit employee recovery for wage discrimination to only 300 days, which would have allowed employers to profit from wage discrimination."

The Iowa Attorney General's Office, which represented the university, declined to comment.

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Radio Iowa: Vilsack says Farm Bill negotiations hit snag over spending transfer

Kay Henderson

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack says it appears Farm Bill negotiations have become more complex. House Speaker Mike Johnson says a majority of House Republicans oppose a Senate plan to take nearly \$10 billion in unspent funds from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act and use it on conservation programs.

"It would have actually provided additional resources for congress to increase the level of disaster assistance and emergency assistance that could have been provided to producers in Iowa and across the country," Vilsack said.

Current budget rules would allow congress to make that \$10 billion transfer, according to Vilsack. The sad reality is, by not protecting those resources, potentially congress could redirect them from farmers and ranches towards some other priority," Vilsack said.

Funding for federal conservation assistance was increased dramatically by the Inflation Reduction Act. "This is a historic opportunity for us to significantly reduce the backlog of farmers who have been waiting for a

while for resources to be able to do on their land what they know needs to be done,” Vilsack said, “to protect it and to enhance it.”

Neither the House nor the Senate brought a new Farm Bill up for a vote this year. If congress fails to reauthorize the 2018 Farm Bill this month, federal farm policies revert to laws passed eight decades ago. Vilsack said that would create chaos in the markets.

“I’m sure that something is going to get done, the question is whether it will get done in a way that provides the best benefit and the most opportunity for farmers and ranchers and producers who work so hard for the rest of us,” Vilsack said.

Lawmakers from states hit by Hurricane Helene in late September are seeking federal disaster aid for farmers who lost crops, livestock and farm buildings.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: D.C. Dispatch: Iowa’s senators in the spotlight on Trump appointments

Kathie Obradovich and Brooklyn Draisey

As Congress worked to wrap up business in their lame-duck session this week, Iowa’s senators engaged with high-profile appointees who hope to serve in the new Trump administration.

Meanwhile, delegation members addressed issues ranging from communism instruction in classrooms to buoys on the Missouri River. And the death of former Iowa Congressman Jim Leach brought lawmakers and others together in offering condolences.

Grassley, Ernst in spotlight on Trump appointments

Both of Iowa’s Republican senators are playing influential roles as some of President-elect Donald Trump’s key appointments work to secure support for Senate confirmation.

Sen. Joni Ernst, a member of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, faced criticism and talk of a primary challenge from Trump-aligned Republicans after initially appearing cool to the nomination of Pete Hegseth as secretary of Defense. Hegseth, a veteran, has said women should not serve in combat roles and he has been accused of sexual assault. Ernst is a combat veteran and a sexual assault survivor.

Ernst, who is up for reelection in 2026, has already drawn one announced primary challenger.

This week, she appeared to soften on Hegseth’s nomination after meeting with him a second time but stopped short of promising to vote for him. In a statement, she said:

“I appreciate Pete Hegseth’s responsiveness and respect for the process. Following our encouraging conversations, Pete committed to completing a full audit of the Pentagon and selecting a senior official who will uphold the roles and value of our servicemen and women — based on quality and standards, not quotas — and who will prioritize and strengthen my work to prevent sexual assault within the ranks. As I support Pete through this process, I look forward to a fair hearing based on truth, not anonymous sources.”

Sen. Chuck Grassley, meanwhile, as incoming chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, pushed for the

resignation of Christopher Wray, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI under Wray drew Trump's ire for its investigation of the Jan. 6 insurrection and Trump's possession of classified documents after he left office.

Wray, who has three years left in his 10-year term, has since announced he will resign at the end of the Biden administration, leaving the position open for Trump's appointment. Grassley issued a positive statement Monday after meeting with Kash Patel, Trump's choice to lead the agency:

"Today I reminded Kash that transparency brings accountability, and it's badly needed at the FBI. As a former congressional investigator himself, Kash understands that cooperation with Congress is not optional and whistleblower protection is essential. Once formally nominated, I'd look forward to holding a hearing on Kash's nomination in the Senate Judiciary Committee."

Iowa lawmakers call for Coast Guard support on Missouri River

Ernst and Grassley, along with Reps. Randy Feenstra and Mariannette Miller-Meeks, signed a letter this week with other lawmakers calling for the U.S. Coast Guard reconsider removing 36 of its Aids to Navigation on the Missouri River north of Blencoe, Iowa.

The Coast Guard pays to maintain aids to navigation along Marine Highway 29 such as buoys, day beacons and lightships, which function as floating lighthouses, WOWT reported.

In recent years, navigation on the river up to Sioux City has increased, and planned development projects are expected to further increase traffic in years to come, according to a press release from Ernst's office.

"In Iowa, we are proud to feed, fuel, and supply consumers around the globe with products straight from the heartland. Our beautiful rivers are integral to sharing those products with the rest of the world," Ernst said in a release. "The removal of this infrastructure on the Missouri River threatens the livelihoods of Iowans in our manufacturing and agricultural communities. I urge the Coast Guard to reconsider this decision."

Feenstra votes for Crucial Communism Teaching Act

Feenstra voted last week in favor of the Crucial Communism Teaching Act, according to a news release. The legislation would have the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation formulate a high school curriculum about the history of communism, the regimes in the system and "ongoing human rights abuses by such regimes," according to the bill.

The foundation would also develop oral history resources that educators could utilize alongside the curriculum, the bill stated.

According to statistics cited in a news release from the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 18% of Gen Z "thinks communism is a fairer system than capitalism and deserves consideration in America."

Feenstra in the release emphasized this number, and said "nearly one third of America's youth hold a favorable opinion of communism."

"These alarming findings cannot be the norm for future generations of Americans if we want our country to succeed and prosper," Feenstra said in the release. "I voted for the Crucial Communism Teaching Act to push back against the spread of this dangerous ideology in our schools and educate our children about communism's ugly past."

Feenstra joins DOGE Caucus

Feenstra also announced in a news release Thursday that he has joined the Delivering Outstanding

Government Efficiency, or DOGE, Caucus.

The name mimics the Department of Government Efficiency that Trump said he would create, headed by billionaire businessman Elon Musk and former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy. The pair have said they'll find \$2 trillion in cuts to federal spending.

Ernst announced last month the creation of a DOGE Caucus in the Senate.

Feenstra said in the release that reckless spending and borrowing have driven up inflation and created more debt, and the federal government needs to balance its budget, eliminate wasteful spending and slow down debt growth in order to help future generations that will inherit what's left.

He said he's happy to work in the caucus to find ways to save taxpayers money and "eliminate unnecessary regulations" in order to grow the economy and make the country more fiscally responsible.

"As a strong, fiscal conservative, I came to Congress to get our debt under control, lower costs for our families, and stop wasteful government spending – and that's exactly what I'll continue to do," Feenstra said in the release.

Nunn, Ernst get provisions passed national defense package

An amendment headed by U.S. Rep. Zach Nunn was included in the National Defense Authorization Act, according to a Thursday news release, which passed out of the U.S. House of Representatives and was sent to the U.S. Senate.

All four of Iowa's representatives voted for the bill, which also eliminated gender-affirming health care coverage for children of military members.

According to the release, Nunn's proposal was to form a "strategic partnership" between the U.S. Defense Innovation Unit and the Israeli Ministry of Defense to simplify sharing of emerging technologies between the two powers.

Also included in the defense act were pay raises for certain servicemembers, increased funding to "U.S. defense initiatives" in the Indo-Pacific, and cuts to military programs and areas of the Pentagon totaling \$31 billion.

Other aspects of the legislation also touch on U.S.-Israel relations, like expanded collaborative military exercises and halting the "sale of goods at Department of Defense commissaries and exchanges from any entities that have or are engaged in a boycott of Israel."

"America is the land of the free and home of the brave because of the men and women who serve in uniform," Nunn said in the release. "As a twenty-year combat veteran and current Colonel in the Air Force, I'm committed to protecting our national security. That means securing our Southern Border, stopping China in its tracks, bolstering our allies, and supporting our men and women in uniform throughout their career. This bill is a win for national security, a win for our troops, and a win for the future of our nation."

A measure backed by Ernst also made it into the final bill aimed at preventing, assessing and treating conditions, including traumatic brain injuries, suffered by service members repeatedly exposed to explosion pressure waves.

Lawmakers, other respond to death of former Rep. Jim Leach

Former Congressman Jim Leach. (Photo courtesy of the Leach family)

Members of Iowa's delegation joined a host of others, including former President Barack Obama, in paying

tribute to former U.S. Rep. Jim Leach of Davenport, who died Wednesday at age 82. Leach represented his eastern Iowa district from 1977 to 2007 and later chaired the National Endowment for the Humanities, among other positions.

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KCRG: Cedar Rapids school district rejects College & Career Pathways petition

Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - The Cedar Rapids Community School District says a petition regarding the College & Career Pathways program is invalid.

A parent in the district, Brooke Oja, submitted the petition, which has more than 600 signatures.

It asks that the district slow down the implementation of the College & Career Pathways model, to give parents more time to understand the process.

In a response to the petition on Friday, district leaders said there were insufficient eligible signatures, with many of the signatures on the petition coming from outside Cedar Rapids and Iowa.

Because the district has deemed the petition invalid, district leaders won't add the matter to the next school board agenda.

However, Superintendent Dr. Tawana Grover said the district does value the feedback from the community.

"We deeply appreciate the engagement and passion families, educators, and others in the community have shown for our College & Career Pathways program," Dr. Grover said. "We are listening closely to the feedback and are committed to working together to ensure the program's success."

The first phase of the College & Career Pathways program, Freshman Academy, is set to launch in the fall of 2025. The initiative will require high schoolers to choose a "pathway" geared to a career and then take one class a year in that pathway.

The district has held some in-person meetings to try to explain the program to parents, but some parents say their concerns have not been adequately addressed.

The district is inviting parents to join the Parent Advisory Group, and it is planning to host additional community meetings in 2025.

Find more information about the College & Career Pathways program [here](#).

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KCRG: University of Dubuque 'on track' to launch new medical school in 2028

Staff

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - The University of Dubuque is "on track" to gain accreditation to open Iowa's first new medical school in more than a century.

The university aims to open the John and Alice Butler College of Osteopathic Medicine by August 2028, funded by a \$60 million gift by John and Alice Butler. The donation will be invested into the following:

\$12.5 million in endowed scholarships for undergraduate health science students

\$12.5 million in scholarships for Dubuque County students

\$10 million to establish the College of Osteopathic Medicine

\$10 million to support lab research and update equipment

\$10 million for outreach and education efforts

\$5 million to recruit, support, and retain college leadership

"Today is a great win for health care and for education," said University of Dubuque President Travis Frampton. "It is a great win for that high school student in rural Iowa who wonders if she can be a doctor someday to help make people feel better."

According to the university, osteopathic medicine offers a holistic approach to medicine that treats the whole person - mind, body, and spirit.

The four-year medical program will accept around 200 students per class for a total enrollment of up to 800 students.

"That is 400 students on campus, enrolled, taking courses in a new medical school complex, and 400 spread across the tri-state area and beyond on clinical rotations," explained Frampton. "To say it another way, this program will attract 400 new graduate students each year to reside in Dubuque. The impact on our local economy will be profound."

UD officials were joined by Dubuque Mayor Brad Cavanagh, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, and other community and state leaders Friday for the announcement.

"A new medical school will be a catalyst for what our state needs right now. It has the potential to attract the best and brightest from across the country to study medicine right here in Iowa, build their lives and careers here, and ultimately, increase access to the quality of health care in rural areas of our state that need it most," said Reynolds.

According to a March 2024 study by the Association of American Medical Colleges, the U.S. is expected to face a physician shortage of up to 86,000 workers by 2036.

"In communities like ours, whether that's in Dubuque, in our region, in Iowa, or along the rural-urban divide in the U.S., there is a continuing shortage of physicians. This dramatically impacts access to adequate care, which significantly affects healthcare and health outcomes. In order for us to change this trajectory, we must educate, prepare, and equip more physicians. By establishing a medical school in the Tri-State, the University of Dubuque will be able to serve our community and deliver on our Mission," said Frampton.

The university has not selected a site to build a medical facility, but several locations are being considered in downtown Dubuque.

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Iowa News Now: Southeast Iowa manufacturing facility, EPA reach settlement over chemical leak

Maddie Lee

EDDYVILLE, Iowa — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is fining a southeast Iowa production plant for alleged violations of the federal Clean Air Act and Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.

The Ajinomoto Health and Nutrition Eddyville plants were inspected by the EPA after a 2021 release of hydrochloric acid led to evacuations and community shelter-in-place orders and a 2022 chlorine gas release that injured some employees.

The EPA identifies both substances as extremely hazardous.

Chlorine gas can be fatal when inhaled or lead to chronic lung conditions.

They will pay just over \$458,000 in civil penalties as a result.

According to the EPA, Ajinomoto has also agreed to install an ammonia water deluge system at one of its two facilities.

This will cost almost \$228,000.

The plant has conducted a compliance audit at its facilities to identify any outstanding noncompliance with federal law.

Ajinomoto's Eddyville plants manufacture amino acids for food and beverages and animal nutrition.

They employ about 270 local workers between Eddyville and Oskaloosa.

EPA Region 7 Enforcement and Compliance Division Director David Cozad said in a statement, "Ajinomoto's operation presented a significant risk to its workers and surrounding community."

He added that the settlement will reduce the risk to workers and residents.

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The Gazette: University of Iowa Health Care tackles growing demand for emergency care

Vanessa Miller

IOWA CITY — The number of Eastern Iowans needing or wanting emergency care has soared over the last two decades — as has the severity of the health issues patients are facing — cramping emergency rooms, crowding wait rooms and compelling hospitals to expand, renovate and build.

That includes University of Iowa Health Care, which in the spring will increase its emergency room count to three — including its main-campus ER west of the Iowa River in Iowa City; the former Mercy Hospital ER east of the river in Iowa City it acquired through a bankruptcy sale this year; and an ER attached to the new North Liberty hospital nearing completion.

“The emergency department at North Liberty will treat the same types of patients with the same spectrum of disease that we currently see at our university and downtown campus locations,” said Hans House, director of emergency medicine services at the UIHC North Liberty campus. “We will be ready for patients of all ages, including children.”

On the main UIHC campus — which has taken the brunt of the area’s ER-visit spike, given its ability to treat the sickest and highest-acuity patients — the emergency room is undergoing a \$37 million renovation and expansion, phase I of which wrapped this month.

After the full expansion and renovation anticipated by next winter, the main UIHC ER will have more than a dozen additional treatment rooms — bringing it to nearly 60 beds — a new triage area and more space for assessing and treating pediatric patients and those with mental health needs.

The project aims to improve the department’s capacity, efficiency and patient experience — which has suffered due to long wait times and other crowding issues.

“It’s just overwhelming at times,” UIHC Emergency Departmental Executive Officer Andrew Nugent told The Gazette about the university’s ER traffic. “And it really depends on the amount that is coming from outside institutions. Being the tertiary center, we take an enormous number of transfers into the hospital. ... There are days when everybody’s trying to send us patients because they’re all sick, and we’re the only place that can handle a lot of these things.”

The university’s most recent Board of Regents report on its emergency room use showed wait times rose about 40 percent from 2018 to 2022, while its emergency room-to-emergency room transfers from other hospitals to the UI climbed 33 percent during the period. The average length of stay in the UI ER increased from under 4.5 hours to over five.

While a typical wait time at the UIHC ER is between one to two hours, the wait time at the former Mercy ER — now called UI Medical Center Downtown — often is only minutes.

Adding that space to its emergency repertoire — in addition to the new North Liberty emergency room — will allow the university to better triage its patients based on severity and specific needs.

“We can kind of work synergistically to get the sickest patients here” at the main campus ER, Nugent said.

‘In the hallway quite a bit’

The first phase of the main campus ER project was focused on a south and vertical expansion — moving a relatively new “crisis stabilization unit” from the seventh floor of the John Pappajohn Pavilion to the second floor of the emergency department, where many with mental health needs first present.

“This move is designed to improve the speed and effectiveness of the care we provide patients experiencing a mental health emergency, as well as enhance efficiencies for staff,” according to a UIHC summary of the upgrade.

The upgrade also created a new adolescent-specific stabilization unit. That, according to the university, will streamline treatment for pediatric patients having a mental health crisis and allow the university to care for

them in a “much more humane way.”

“One of the side effects of boarding and overcrowding is that our patients are in the hallway quite a bit,” Nugent said. “And so hopefully this alleviates that. Our mental health patients will have rooms. And they're being specifically built so they're safe for mental health patients but can be used multi-functionally.”

Both of those new units are opening this month, when phase II of the ER expansion is beginning — creating a larger pediatric emergency space on the north side that will include two resuscitation rooms, a procedure room and a triage room.

“And we’re going to have a waiting room for the kids, which is great — so they don’t have to be next to the adults that are sick and coughing, or vice versa,” he said.

On a 60-acre plot in North Liberty, the university’s new \$525.6 million, 469,000-square-foot hospital aims to absorb some of the visits to the main UIHC ER. The university expects 55,000 visits there this year — up 140 percent from the about 23,000 visits 25 years ago.

And while the new hospital itself will house the UI Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation and lean heavily toward orthopedics care, its ER will be capable of responding to any type of emergency.

“This will be a fully functional emergency department with the same equipment, technologies and capabilities available at the downtown campus (emergency department),” according to Ali Harmon, director of emergency medicine and transport services in the UI Department of Emergency Medicine. “It will be available to anyone needing emergency treatment.”

The new North Liberty ER will have 14 emergency care rooms, including two for behavioral health patients; a designated trauma and resuscitation room; haz-mat space for patients needing to decontaminate from hazardous materials; an isolation room for patients with infectious diseases; and board-certified ER doctors and nurses.

The North Liberty emergency department will be designated a Level 4 trauma center — providing advanced trauma care and life support “in preparation for transfer to a facility that provides tertiary-level care and a broader scope of surgical, specialty, and subspecialty services.”

Patients needing that higher level of care will be transferred to the UIHC main campus ER, designated a level 1 trauma center, or to the Downtown Campus, a level 3 trauma center.

“The North Liberty ED won’t include all the specialty care teams on-site that we have on the university campus,” Harmon said. “That’s really what impacts a trauma center’s level designation. For patients who come to the North Liberty ED needing subspecialty care, we’ll transfer those patients to the university campus or downtown campus, depending on the care they need.”

‘Spreading out of the community visits’

Although UIHC doesn’t have much control over where patients decide to go for emergency care — aside from educating them on which site is most appropriate for their specific need — ER doctors now will be able to coordinate transfers where necessary using an up-and-coming internal ambulance system, Nugent said.

That system hasn’t officially been announced or come online, but Nugent said the goal is to have it up and running before the spring opening of the North Liberty hospital.

“So that we can get people effectively from here to downtown, and then we’ll just add North Liberty to the system,” he said.

Patients can help and avoid transfer by doing “some self-selection” — heading, for example, to North Liberty for a broken bone, to the downtown campus for a high fever or to the main UIHC ER for trauma or a life-threatening issue.

“But if you’re really hurting, go to the closest spot, and that’s fine,” Nugent said. “Because then we’ll get you to the right spot.”

Once the university has its ER trio online, Nugent said he expects to see some “spreading out of the community visits.”

“I would see wait times hopefully go down for everyone at every location,” he said. “I think the number of admissions still coming to the main campus is going to be the same, if maybe not higher, because we’re going to find out people are ill and getting seen faster.”

Part of the university’s ER crowding issue has to do with its inpatient bed capacity and the fact that so many of its emergency patients need to stay overnight. Where an average community hospital reports a 12 to 14 percent admission rate from its ER, the university’s ER admission rate is 33 percent, according to Nugent.

The university has 889 inpatient beds on its main campus, including 205 pediatric beds in its UI Stead Family Children’s Hospital; 234 beds at its downtown campus; and it will add up to 48 inpatient beds in North Liberty. The hospital also is planning a new 842,000-gross-square-foot inpatient tower costing more than \$1 million, including multiple floors of 48 beds each.

But completion of that tower will take years.

“So we’re still going to have some of those issues where we need to get people admitted,” Nugent said. “We don’t know the impact of moving some of our inpatient capacity out to North Liberty, and we’re getting better at sending some downtown, so hopefully that evens out a little bit.

“But I don’t want to have to wait for a new inpatient tower to make everything better,” he said. “So we’re constantly working on the efficiency of things.”

Other expansion

Although the university is planning significant upgrades to the downtown campus it acquired from Mercy Iowa City — with expectations to spend “far” more than \$25 million over time — initial plans include roofing upgrades and operating room renovations.

“I think, first of all, they’ve got to get the building in shape,” Nugent said about the prospect of expanding the downtown ER. “And then they’ll probably have some discussions about whether they need to expand or not.”

UI Health Care isn’t the only hospital system in the area addressing emergency room crowding and wait times.

Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids in 2020 opened the state’s first free-standing ER — by converting its Hiawatha MercyCare Urgent Care location into an extension of its emergency department.

That ER is open every hour of every day of the year — offering on-site radiology, lab and pharmaceutical services. And earlier this month, Mercy Cedar Rapids opened its second freestanding ER — this one in Marion — outfitted with 12 exam rooms, two trauma rooms, lab and imaging services, and a helipad.

"Like the Mercy Hiawatha ER, patients at the Marion location that require additional hospital intervention will be transferred free of charge to Mercy's downtown location based on well-developed protocols and in partnership with local ambulance services," according to hospital officials.

UnityPoint Health-St. Luke's Hospital, 1026 A Ave. NE in Cedar Rapids, also opened a Marion ER in August. The 10,000-square-foot ER was built inside an existing building at 3301 Armar Dr., just off Marion Boulevard near the border of Cedar Rapids and Marion.

St. Luke's identified Marion "as an ideal location due to its fast-growing population and community expansion projections," Dr. Sarah Hoper, the medical director for its new Marion ER, told a correspondent for The Gazette earlier this year.

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DMR: Patients in limbo over stalled MercyOne, Aetna negotiations. How that could affect care:

Michaela Ramm

Aetna members soon may no longer be in-network for one of Iowa's top health care systems as contract negotiations between the insurance company and MercyOne stall ahead of the new year.

MercyOne patients were notified last month that if the health care system and Aetna fail to reach a new contract agreement before the end of the year, all of MercyOne's providers and facilities will be out of Aetna's network beginning Jan. 1, 2025.

That means patients would have to pay medical expenses out-of-pocket if they keep their Aetna commercial or Medicare health care plan.

MercyOne told the Register the two organizations are still working to reach an agreement in the contract dispute, which was first reported by KCCI.

"We believe everyone deserves access to high-quality health care," according to a statement from MercyOne. "That's why we are determined to protect patient access to MercyOne and push for what's right, which includes fair payment, so we are here to care for the next generation."

Aetna also expressed interest in reaching a deal with MercyOne.

"We are hopeful that we will reach an agreement that keeps them in our networks while keeping health care services affordable for our members and health plan sponsors," Aetna spokesperson Monica Prinzing said.

Who's to blame for the impasse?

MercyOne has been in contract negotiations for more than six months, trying to reach an agreement that "appropriately covers the true cost of the care we provide to our patients," officials said in a statement.

MercyOne blamed Aetna for the stalled negotiations, telling patients in its notice that the health insurance company has continued to delay progress and has failed to offer a proposed contract that meets the health system's needs.

At the same time, Aetna continues to raise premiums and out-of-pocket costs for its members, according to MercyOne officials. They pointed out Aetna profits last year of about \$5.6 billion.

"As a not-for-profit organization, rising supply and labor costs have made it difficult to maintain the high quality of care patients deserve," health system officials said in a statement. "MercyOne relies on fair payment to provide the care and services patients depend on and need. Our payments from Aetna have not kept pace with the rising costs to provide outstanding care."

I have Aetna insurance. What should I do?

Contract negotiations are ongoing, and an agreement could be reached before the new year. However, there are steps MercyOne patients should consider to protect themselves from pricey medical bills.

Individuals with Medicare Advantage plans may change their coverage and select a new health insurance plan between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2025. MercyOne has a list of in-network Medicare Advantage plans on its website, [MercyOne.org/Aetna](https://www.mercyone.org/Aetna).

Individuals who receive Aetna insurance through their employer and wish to continue receiving care at MercyOne should contact their employer to inquire about secondary health plan coverage.

Those who are pregnant or receiving ongoing treatment may be able to continue receiving in-network care through the plan's continuity-of-care provision. MercyOne officials encouraged these individuals to call Aetna to inquire.

MercyOne officials also urged patients to never delay care. Regardless of their Aetna status, they should seek out the closest emergency department if they are experiencing a medical emergency.

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The Gazette: Schools see better student attendance under new Iowa law

Grace King

Eastern Iowa schools are seeing less chronic absenteeism five months after the implementation of a new state law that aims to improve student attendance.

Chris Gibson, director of student services for the Cedar Rapids Community School District, said the law has helped the district be "very clean and clear with our expectations for families."

"It's forced us to really put a good-faith effort to do everything we can to get students in school, so they can learn," Gibson said.

The new Iowa law, Senate File 2435, defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10 percent of days in a grading period. It requires school districts to adopt a policy related to absenteeism and truancy. The law also applies to accredited non-public schools.

During the 2023-24 school year, almost 36 percent of students in the Cedar Rapids district were chronically absent. That number is at 11 percent so far this school year, Gibson said.

Almost 22 percent of Iowa students across the state were chronically absent during the 2023-24 school year, according to the Iowa School Performance Profile.

If a student misses 10 percent or more days in a grading period, the school sends a certified letter to the student's parent or guardian and notifies the county attorney. No legal action will be taken at this time.

The Cedar Rapids district has sent 1,667 letters to families so far this school year who have missed 10 percent or more days in the first semester. That equates to eight days, or about 56 hours of instructional time missed.

Each certified letter costs the district \$9.64 to send, which means the district has spent slightly more than \$16,000 so far this school year on letters about students missing school.

The letters are delivered to the family's home address and a signature must be obtained upon delivery. The U.S. Postal Service will attempt to deliver the letter three times before it is returned to the Cedar Rapids district.

"We have received letters back," Gibson said.

School officials also attempt to contact families through email and phone calls.

Cedar Rapids schools will change rule for excused sick days

Under the law, school districts can make their own determination on how to handle student absences due to illness. Currently, sick days in the Cedar Rapids district are only exempt if a doctor's note is provided.

Gibson said that policy will change in the district's second semester, which begins in January. The district will not require a doctor's note for eight illness absences. After eight illness absences, families will have to provide a doctor's note for an absence not to count toward chronic absenteeism if a child is out sick, Gibson said.

"You're not going to take your child to the doctor for a fever. People feel like they have had to do that, and it's a financial burden," Gibson said.

Continued absenteeism triggers prevention plan

If a student reaches 15 percent absenteeism, the student and their family are required by law to attend a school engagement meeting with school officials. During this meeting, an absenteeism prevention plan will be created to prevent more absences.

There are 830 students in the Cedar Rapids district on absenteeism prevention plans after missing 84 hours or more of school, Gibson said.

The family and a school official will sign the plan, which identifies the causes of the student's absences and the future responsibility of the family and school official related to the student's attendance.

If an absenteeism prevention plan is created for a student, the school official will contact that student's family at least once a week during the remainder of the school year to monitor the performance of the student and family under the plan.

Absenteeism prevention plans look different for each family. For younger students, it could be adding an alarm clock to their routine or giving them a sticker on the days they attend school. "Simple things like that sometimes help," Gibson said.

If a student misses 20 percent or more days in a grading period or semester, as in years predating the new law, families will be referred to the county attorney who will decide what action to take.

There have been 14 students in the Cedar Rapids district referred to the county attorney as of Dec. 12, Gibson said.

In an interview with The Gazette in August, assistant Linn County Attorney Nina Sheller said if a student is absent from school for 20 percent of a grading period, it will result in a simple misdemeanor charge for the family.

The family then will get the opportunity to participate in the county's Truancy Deferred Prosecution Program, started in 2019, which helps parents avoid being fined or going to jail for failing to get their children to school.

During the 2022-23 school year, there were 110 truancy cases in Linn County. Almost 80 percent of cases were dismissed due to success of the Truancy Deferred Prosecution Program.

"Our schools are working really hard to provide engaging, safe learning environments for our kids, so they feel safe coming to school and want to be here and learn," Gibson said.

Chronic absenteeism grows as students age

Across school districts, the number of students chronically absent is lower in elementary school and tends to grow as kids get older, school officials say.

In the Cedar Rapids district, 32 percent of 12th-graders are chronically absent, compared to 13 percent of sixth-graders, Gibson said. "What happens is (chronic absenteeism) starts in single digits in kindergarten and progressively goes up," she said.

There are a lot of factors that can contribute to older students attending school less, Gibson said. Older students might have more family responsibilities such as child care and work.

"There are so many family factors that happen, and yet we still have to have high expectations for kids to come to school," Gibson said.

Chronic absenteeism in other Eastern Iowa schools

The College Community School District has sent out 173 letters to families whose students have been chronically absent this school year, costing the district about \$1,300.

They are seeing almost 5 percent fewer students chronically absent this school year, compared to last year, College Community officials said. About 24 percent of students were chronically absent in the district during the 2023-24 school year.

So far this year, chronic absenteeism in the district is 14 percent.

"At Prairie, we're doing many other things to try to encourage positive attendance, so I don't think it's the law in and of itself. The law has brought a heightened awareness that attendance is important," said Laura Medberry, executive director of learning supports for the College Community district.

In the Iowa City Community School District, 13 percent of students have been chronically absent so far this school year. The district has sent 631 certified letters to families, costing about \$3,495, district spokeswoman Kristin Pedersen said.

During the 2023-24 school year, the Iowa City district saw almost 20 percent of students chronically absent, according to the Iowa School Performance Profile.

The Linn-Mar Community School District also is seeing a slight improvement in student attendance. The district's average daily attendance is more than 95 percent, said district spokeswoman Renee Nelson.

During the 2023-24 school year, the Linn-Mar district saw about 16.4 percent of students chronically absent, according to the Iowa School Performance Profile.

The Linn-Mar district has mailed about 100 letters to families with 10 percent or more absences so far this year.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

Stateline: Trump migrant deportations could threaten states' agricultural economies

Nada Hassanein

If President-elect Donald Trump follows through on his pledge to deport millions of immigrants, it could upend the economies of states where farming and other food-related industries are crucial — and where labor shortages abound.

Immigrants make up about two-thirds of the nation's crop farmworkers, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, and roughly 2 in 5 of them are not legally authorized to work in the United States.

Agricultural industries such as meatpacking, dairy farms and poultry and livestock farms also rely heavily on immigrants.

"We have five to six employees that do the work that nobody else will do. We wouldn't survive without them," said Bruce Lampman, who owns Lampman Dairy Farm, in Bruneau, Idaho. His farm, which has been in the family three decades, has 350 cows producing some 26,000 pounds of milk a day.

"My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work," said Lampman, adding that his workers are worried about what's to come.

Anita Alves Pena, a Colorado State University professor of economics who studies immigration, noted that many agricultural employers already can't find enough laborers. Without farm subsidies or other protections to make up for the loss of immigrant workers, she said, the harm to state economies could be significant.

"Farmers across the country, producers in a lot of different parts, are often talking about labor shortages — and that's even with the current status quo of having a fairly high percentage of unauthorized individuals in the workforce," Pena said. "A policy like this, if it was not coupled with something else, would exacerbate that."

Employers have a hard time hiring enough farm laborers because such workers generally are paid low wages for arduous work.

In addition to hiring immigrant laborers who are in the country illegally, agricultural employers rely on the

federal H-2A visa program. H-2A visas usually are for seasonal work, often for about six to 10 months. However, they can be extended for up to three years before a worker must return to their home country.

Employers must pay H-2A workers a state-specific minimum wage and provide no-cost transportation and housing. Still, employers' applications for H-2A visas have soared in the past 18 years, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a trend reflecting the shortage of U.S.-born laborers willing to do the work. The number of H-2A positions has surged from just over 48,000 in 2005 to more than 378,000 in 2023.

But agricultural employers that operate year-round, such as poultry, dairy and livestock producers, can't use the seasonal visa to fill gaps, according to the USDA.

My business and every agriculture business in the U.S. will be crippled if they want to get rid of everybody who does the work.

— Bruce Lampman, owner of Lampman Dairy Farm in Bruneau, Idaho

Farmers also employ foreign nationals who have "temporary protected status" under a 1990 law that allows immigrants to remain if the U.S. has determined their home countries are unsafe because of violence or other reasons. There are about 1.2 million people in the U.S. under the program or eligible for it, from countries including El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Lebanon and Ukraine. Many have been here for decades, and Trump has threatened to end the program.

Support for the program

Immigration advocates want a pathway for H-2A workers to gain permanent legal status, and agricultural trade organizations are pushing for an expansion of the H-2A program to include year-round operations.

The National Milk Producers Federation says it's too early to say how it would cope with mass deportations under the Trump administration. But the group states it "strongly supports efforts to pass agriculture labor reform that provides permanent legal status to current workers and their families and gives dairy farmers access to a workable guestworker program."

Immigrants make up 51% of labor at dairy farms across states, and farms that employ immigrants produce nearly 80% of the nation's milk supply, according to the organization.

"Foreign workers are important to the success of U.S. dairy, and we will work closely with members of Congress and federal officials to show the importance of foreign workers to the dairy industry and farm communities," Jaime Castaneda, the group's executive vice president for policy development and strategy, wrote in an email.

Adam Croissant, the former vice president of research and development at yogurt company Chobani, which has manufacturing plants in Idaho and New York, said he's seen a lot of misinformation around immigrants' workforce contributions.

"The dairy industry as a whole understands that without immigrant labor, the dairy industry doesn't exist. It's as simple as that," Croissant said.

Tom Super, a spokesperson for the National Chicken Council, lambasted U.S. immigration policy and said the poultry industry "wants a stable, legal, and permanent workforce."

"The chicken industry is heavily affected by our nation's immigration policy or, more pointedly, lack thereof. ... The system is broken, and Washington has done nothing to fix it," Super wrote in an email.

Changes ahead?

But major changes to the H-2A visa program are unlikely to happen before deportations begin. In an interview with NBC News' "Meet the Press" over the weekend, Trump repeated his promise to start deporting some immigrants almost immediately.

He said he plans to begin with convicted criminals, but would then move to other immigrants. "We're starting with the criminals, and we've got to do it. And then we're starting with the others, and we're going to see how it goes."

Some farmers still hope that Trump's actions won't match his rhetoric. But "hoping isn't a great business plan," said Rick Naerebout, CEO of the Idaho Dairyman's Association. "Our ability to feed ourselves as a country is completely jeopardized if you do see the mass deportations."

If the deportations do happen, agricultural workers will disappear faster than they can be replaced, experts say.

"The H-2A program will not expand instantly to fill the gap. So, that's going to be a problem," said Jeffrey Dorfman, a professor of agricultural economics at North Carolina State University who was Georgia's state economist from 2019 to 2023.

In Georgia, agriculture is an \$83.6 billion industry that supports more than 323,000 jobs. It is one of the five states most reliant on the federal H-2A visa program, depending on those workers to fill about 60% of agricultural jobs.

Dorfman argued that even the fear of deportation will have an impact on the workforce.

"When farmworkers hear about ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] raids on a nearby farm, lots of them disappear. Even the legal ones often disappear for a few days. So, if everybody just gets scared and self-deports, just goes back home, I think that would be the worst disruption," said Dorfman, adding that even more jobs would need to be filled if the administration revokes temporary protected status.

Antonio De Loera-Brust, communications director for the farmworker labor union United Farm Workers, said the nation's focus should be on protecting workers, no matter their legal status.

"They deserve a lot better than just not getting deported," he said. "They deserve better wages, they deserve labor rights, they deserve citizenship."

And though economists and the agriculture industry have said that mass deportations could raise grocery store prices, De Loera-Brust called that particular argument a sign of "moral weakness."

"As if the worst thing about hundreds of thousands of people getting separated from their families was going to be that consumers would have to pay more for a bag of strawberries or a bag of baby carrots," De Loera-Brust said. "There's a moral gap there."

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North Dakota Monitor: North Dakota landowners, 2 counties appealing Summit pipeline permit

Jeff Beach

A group of landowners and two counties are appealing a North Dakota's agency's approval of a large carbon dioxide pipeline.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission on Nov. 15 approved a route permit for 333 miles of the Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline in North Dakota. North Dakota is the planned endpoint of a 2,500 mile pipeline network to carry CO₂ from ethanol plants in five states to an underground storage area west of Bismarck.

Attorney Brian Jorde of Domina Law, which represents landowners across the pipeline area, said Friday in an email that there are several problems with the PSC's findings.

He said the PSC received plume modeling and dispersion risk analysis as prepared by Summit that would show how CO₂ might spread if there was a rupture of the hazardous liquid pipeline.

The PSC did not allow the other parties to the case access to the plume information.

"This 'confidential' information was also shared with other members of the public, yet potentially directly affected citizens engaged in the routing application process were kept in the dark," Jorde wrote. He said that constituted a violation of due process rights.

If CO₂ leaks from a pipeline, it can sicken or kill people in the immediate area.

"The public of North Dakota deserve transparency before hazardous pipelines are forced upon them," Jorde said.

Jorde said the landowner appeal will be filed in Burleigh County District Court.

The two counties that are appealing are Burleigh and Emmons, both on the main trunk of the pipeline in central North Dakota.

The counties are appealing the PSC's February ruling that state rules supersede county ordinances on issues including how close a residence can be to a carbon pipeline.

Emmons County filed an appeal on the ruling in March, but the matter was set aside until the commission voted on the permit application.

Burleigh County filed its appeal this week.

In South Dakota, the Public Utilities Commission ruled that county ordinances preempt state carbon pipeline rules, a main reason Summit was denied a permit there. Summit has since filed a new application.

Summit has a permit in Iowa and for a short segment of its route in Minnesota. Nebraska has no state agency that issues carbon pipeline permits.

The North Dakota Industrial Commission on Thursday approved Summit's plan for underground storage of the carbon dioxide.

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Axios: Schumer requests "special drone-detection tech" for N.Y. and N.J.

Rebecca Falconer

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Sunday that he's "working to pass a bill" to give local law enforcement "more tools for drone detection" following a spate of mysterious sightings in Northeastern U.S. states.

The big picture: Schumer in online statements urged Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to send "special drone-detection tech" to New York and New Jersey to tackle the unidentified flying objects problem that saw N.Y. Stewart International Airport shut down Friday.

The Senate majority leader told reporters Sunday he's requesting Robin Radar Systems because they have "360-degree technology."

He added: "If the technology exists for a drone to make it up into the sky, there certainly is technology that can track the craft with precision and determine what the heck is going on, and that's what the Robin does." State of play: New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) in an online statement Sunday said "our federal partners" were "deploying a state-of-the-art drone detection system" to N.Y., which she said would support state and federal law enforcement in their investigations into the matter, but she said further assistance was needed.

A screenshot of N.Y. Gov. Kathy Hochul's tweet, saying: "In response to my calls for additional resources, our federal partners are sending a drone detection system to New York. I am grateful for the support, but ... Congress must pass a law that will give us the power to deal directly with drones" New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy (D), who reposted Schumer's X post Sunday, has also requested that President Biden direct more resources to investigate the origins of the mystery of the drones.

Murphy said on X he had met with N.J. State Police officials and radar technicians Sunday night who are "surveying the area" for unmanned aircraft systems." "The public deserves clear answers — we will keep pushing the federal government for more information and resources," he said, adding in a later post following a meeting with an FBI official on the matter: "We are ready to assist the federal government in getting to the bottom of this."

What they're saying: Mayorkas indicated on X that the Biden administration had sent some tech to N.J., saying that many of the "reported sightings have turned out to be piloted aircraft" as the "technology we have deployed to New Jersey has confirmed this."

Representatives for the Department of Homeland Security, Schumer and Murphy did not immediately respond to Axios' requests for comment in the evening.

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AP: One week into a new Syria, rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again

Sarah El Deeb

DAMASCUS (AP) — At Damascus' international airport, the new head of security — one of the rebels who marched across Syria to the capital — arrived with his team. The few maintenance workers who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager to learn what will happen next.

They quickly unloaded all the complaints they had been too afraid to express during the rule of President

Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told the bearded fighter they were denied promotions and perks in favor of pro-Assad favorites, and that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned of hardcore Assad supporters among airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

As Al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, announced: "This is the first time we talk."

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Palestinian refugees return to Yarmouk amid questions about their place in the new Syria
Advertisement

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

Idlib comes to Damascus

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems" he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half

are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000.

Right now, the fighters and the public are learning about each other.

The fighters drive large SUVs and newer models of vehicles that are out of reach for most residents in Damascus, where they cost 10 times as much because of custom duties and bribes. The fighters carry Turkish lira, long forbidden in government-held areas, rather than the plunging Syrian pound.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

But many Syrians remain suspicious. Some fighters sport ribbons with Islamist slogans on their uniforms and not all of them belong to HTS, the most organized group.

"The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident from the southern city of Daraa, where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began. He was concerned by reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings.

"We should be fearful," he said, adding that he worries some insurgents feel superior to other Syrians because of their years of fighting. "With all due respect to those who sacrificed, we all sacrificed."

People gather to celebrate days after the fall of Bashar Assad's government at Umayyad Square in Damascus, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2024. (AP Photo/Leo Correa, File)
Still, fear is not prevalent in Damascus, where many insist they will no longer let themselves be oppressed.

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discretely to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure

On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. People ransacked the airport's duty free, smashing all the bottles of liquor. The rebels blamed some of this on fleeing government loyalists.

The public stayed indoors, peeking out at the newcomers. Shops shut down.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order, ordering a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

For tens of thousands, their first destination was Assad's prisons, particularly Saydnaya on the capital's outskirts, to search for loved ones who disappeared years ago. Few have found any traces.

It was wrenching but also unifying. Rebels, some of them also searching, mingled with relatives of the missing in the dark halls of prisons that all had feared for years.

An armed opposition fighter walks among costumers at the Al-Hamidiyeh market inside the old walled city of Damascus, Syria, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla, File)

During celebrations in the street, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles. Insurgents posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. Suddenly shops and walls everywhere are plastered with revolutionary flags and posters of activists killed by Assad's state.

TV stations didn't miss a beat, flipping from praising Assad to playing revolutionary songs. State media aired the flurry of declarations issued by the new insurgent-led transitional government.

The new administration called on people to go back to work and urged Syrian refugees around the world to return to help rebuild. It announced plans to rehabilitate and vet the security forces to prevent the return of "those with blood on their hands." Fighters reassured airport staffers — many of them government loyalists — that their homes won't be attacked, one employee said.

But Syria's woes are far from being resolved.

While produce prices plunged after Assad's fall, because merchants no longer needed to pay hefty customs fees and bribes, fuel distribution was badly disrupted, jacking up transportation costs and causing widespread and lengthy blackouts.

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise.

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said.

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Office of the Governor

From: Martin, Sabine
Subject: Gov. Reynolds comment on Satanic Temple of Iowa canceled event
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 16, 2024 2:23 PM (UTC-06:00)

Hi Mason,

I hope you're doing well. I am writing to ask if Gov. Kim Reynolds has a comment today on the Iowa Department of Administrative Services' decision to cancel the Satanic Temple of Iowa's Satanic Holiday Joy event in the Iowa State Capitol meeting scheduled this Saturday? DAS Director Adam Steen said the event was canceled because the Temple's event request included elements that are harmful to minors.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Best regards,
Sabine Martin

Des Moines Register

Sabine Martin, Politics Reporter

sabine.martin@gannett.com

Cell | (319) 486-6784

Work | (515) 284-8132

From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Re: Gov. Reynolds comment on Satanic Temple of Iowa canceled event
To: Martin, Sabine
Sent: December 16, 2024 2:26 PM (UTC-06:00)

Hi Sabine,

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Thanks,
MM

Mason Mauro
Deputy Communications Director
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds | Lt. Governor Chris Cournoyer
Iowa State Capitol
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515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov

From: Martin, Sabine <Sabine.Martin@gannett.com>
Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 2:23:14 PM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: Gov. Reynolds comment on Satanic Temple of Iowa canceled event

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From: Martin, Sabine
Subject: RE: Gov. Reynolds comment on Satanic Temple of Iowa canceled event
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 16, 2024 2:41 PM (UTC-06:00)

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Sabine

Des Moines Register

Sabine Martin, Politics Reporter

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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Evening Clips 12.16.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 16, 2024 11:40 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: IGOV Evening Clips 12.16.2024.docx

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IOWA NEWS:

KCCI: 'Deeply honored': Chris Cournoyer sworn in as Iowa's lieutenant governor

Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds appointed state Sen. Chris Cournoyer to be her lieutenant governor Monday, more than three months after her first and only No. 2 in elected office resigned to take over the state bankers association.

Cournoyer was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and has a background in technology, having earned a computer science degree, done website design and worked for a tech company. In the Senate, she chaired the Education Budget Committee and was vice chair of the State Government Committee.

"She has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to — qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis," Reynolds said in a statement. "I can't wait to deploy Chris' extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans."

Cournoyer is from LeClaire, in eastern Iowa.

"I am deeply honored to join your team," Cournoyer said to Reynolds in her opening remarks after being sworn in.

"I'm profoundly honored to serve as lieutenant governor, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach the role with all the seriousness it deserves," Cournoyer said. "I couldn't be more excited to join Governor Reynolds' team and do my part to implement her bold agenda for our state."

Reynolds' initial running mate, Adam Gregg, resigned his position Sept. 3 after serving more than seven years in office, saying that "my time in public service must come to a close." The Iowa Bankers Association on the same day announced Gregg as its incoming president and CEO.

Reynolds described Gregg as "a tremendous partner."

Iowa law states that the governor must appoint someone to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term.

Reynolds told reporters in early October that she would make a decision on Gregg's successor after the 2024 election, and the end-of-the-year rollout will allow Cournoyer a few weeks to settle in before joining Reynolds at her annual condition of the state speech after the legislative session begins in January.

"We want to get it right, you know, not only for the team, but for Iowans, and so I want to be very thoughtful in how I do that," Reynolds said in October.

'Deeply honored': Iowa state Sen. Chris Cournoyer speaks after being named lieutenant governor

Up for reelection in 2026, Reynolds will likely be joined by Cournoyer on the ballot if she chooses to run again.

Reynolds, who was former Gov. Terry Branstad's lieutenant governor, became governor in 2017 when Branstad was named U.S. ambassador to China. She was elected to a full term in 2018 and was reelected in 2022.

Reynolds in 2017 had named Gregg as her "acting" lieutenant governor after her own promotion. That followed legal questions over whether the Iowa Constitution gave an elected lieutenant governor the authority to appoint her replacement if she needed to step in as governor in the event the elected governor dies, resigns, or was removed from office. Until their inauguration in 2019, Gregg was left out of the line of succession.

In November's election, Iowa voters approved a legislatively referred constitutional amendment to explicitly allow for that appointment.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds names state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as next lieutenant governor of Iowa

Brianne Pfannenstiel and Stephen Gruber-Miller

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds has named state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as her next lieutenant governor after Adam Gregg resigned the post earlier this year.

It marks the first time Iowa will have women in both top roles.

The pick comes as Reynolds prepares to deliver her priorities for the 2025 legislative session and as she gears up for an expected reelection campaign in 2026.

Cournoyer, a Republican from LeClaire, will serve out the remainder of Gregg's term, which is set to expire at the end of 2026.

Reynolds made the announcement in her formal office in the Iowa Capitol Monday morning, and Cournoyer, who resigned her Senate seat the same day, immediately took the oath of office.

Reynolds praised her new second-in-command as a "doer" who, after failing to get answers from her local school board, first entered politics to run for the seat herself.

"That's the kind of person that Chris is," Reynolds said. "Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I."

Cournoyer, who was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and reelected to a second four-year term in 2022, called the experience "surreal."

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," she said.

Cournoyer was one of Nikki Haley's most high-profile endorsers in Iowa's 2024 Republican caucuses, writing that the former United Nations ambassador is "unafraid to stand up, correct the record and talk about the tough issues."

Reynolds suggests new lieutenant governor will play a role in STEM policy, making government more efficient. A mom of four, Cournoyer previously served as president of her local school board, as an adviser on the governor's STEM Advisory Council and as a reserve sheriff deputy. She has worked as a technology consultant, and she now runs her own business as an independent website designer and developer.

"Given this firsthand experience, Chris understands that one of the most effective ways to promote innovation in our economy is to promote it in our schools," Reynolds said. "As a member of the governor's STEM Advisory Council, she's been a key ally in my administration's efforts to prepare every student for the modern economy. She's also been engaged in the issue at a local level, serving as the president of her school board, and even teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students. This wide ranging expertise at the intersection of business, innovation and education is a major asset."

The role of lieutenant governor is often ceremonial in Iowa, and the state Constitution says the lieutenant governor is in charge of whatever duties the governor assigns.

Cournoyer said Monday she looks forward to "advancing the governor's agenda in any way I possibly can."

Cournoyer was the vice chair of the Senate State Government Committee, where she helped lead Reynolds' effort to reorganize and consolidate state government and Iowa's hundreds of state boards and commissions.

She took the lead in the Senate on a law Reynolds signed this year eliminating dozens of state boards and commissions. And she served as a member of a new board created by that law: The State Government Efficiency Review Committee.

She also spoke in Reynolds' office this year at the bill signing for a law that eliminated the requirement that Iowa boards and commissions have a balance of men and women serving on them. At the signing, she said there are more women serving in a range of careers than ever before.

"As Gov. Reynolds mentioned, her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively, as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills, dovetails especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science and artificial intelligence," Cournoyer said.

Special election will be needed to fill Cournoyer's Senate vacancy

Reynolds will need to call a special election to fill her vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans hold a 34-15 majority with Cournoyer's resignation of her legislative seat. Reynolds' spokesperson would not comment on when that election would be set.

"Chris has proven herself over the last six years as a smart, capable conservative," Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver, R-Grimes, said in a statement. "During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as lieutenant governor."

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner, D-Iowa City, also offered Cournoyer her congratulations.

"I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party," she said in a statement. "Iowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new lieutenant governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process."

Position opened after Adam Gregg resigned lieutenant governor role

Gregg resigned Sept. 3 to become president and CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association — a surprise decision that took effect immediately. He had served alongside Reynolds since she assumed the governorship in 2017 and named him as her No. 2. He was elected to the post as her running mate in 2018 and again in 2022.

Gregg's decision to leave mid-term was taken as a sign by many in the political world that Reynolds would seek reelection herself, rather than stepping aside and giving him room to run for governor.

Cournoyer is now expected to run alongside Reynolds if she does decide to seek a third full term as the state's chief executive. In Iowa, the governor and lieutenant governor run on a single ticket rather than being elected separately.

Iowa has no term limits for state offices.

During his tenure, Gregg served as co-chair of the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative and as chair of the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. He earned a base salary of just over \$103,000 last year.

In November, Iowa voters passed a state constitutional amendment clarifying the state's gubernatorial line of succession. Now, if the governor leaves office, the lieutenant governor will take that person's place. The

new governor can then appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill the office's new vacancy.

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KCRG: Gov. Reynolds names new Lt. Governor

Conner Hendricks

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa Capitol Bureau) - Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds announced State Senator from LeClaire, Chris Cournoyer, as her new Lt. Governor during a press conference at the State Capitol on Monday morning.

Cournoyer was officially sworn in shortly after Reynolds' announcement.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019, representing the 35th Senate District. That includes parts of Clinton, Jackson, and Scott counties.

While introducing Cournoyer, Governor Reynolds said Iowans can trust Cournoyer should she ever have to step in as Governor.

"First and foremost, she has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to—qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis," Reynolds said. "I can't wait to deploy Chris' extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans."

Aside from the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has a background in technology and education. "I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed," she said.

In the state Senate, Cournoyer was the first to chair the newly created technology committee. Reynolds says she plans to tap in to Cournoyer's background to make state government better.

"Significant opportunities still exist to find efficiencies through technology. Hereto her expertise, especially in AI, will be invaluable," Reynolds said.

Cournoyer also serves on the Governor's STEM advisory council and she says she plans to continue that work to create more apprenticeships for Iowa students.

"Her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills dovetail especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science, and artificial intelligence," Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer replaces former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who had served alongside Reynolds since 2017. He resigned in September to take a position leading the Iowa Bankers Association.

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The Gazette: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds names Sen. Chris Cournoyer lieutenant governor

Erin Murphy, Tom Barton

DES MOINES — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds describes Chris Cournoyer, her new lieutenant governor, as someone who is driven, whose character and judgment she trusts and who can help her efforts to streamline state government.

Cournoyer, 54, from Le Claire, was sworn in Monday as Iowa's 48th lieutenant governor during a ceremony in the Governor's Formal Office at the Iowa Capitol. Cournoyer, a Republican like Reynolds, had been serving in the Iowa Senate since 2019.

She succeeds former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who abruptly resigned in early September to become the incoming president and chief executive officer of the Iowa Bankers Association. The association advocates for, provides resources to and lobbies on behalf of Iowa banks.

"It's an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa's lieutenant governor," Cournoyer said Monday. "I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would ever be second in line to Iowa's succession. In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves."

Cournoyer was sworn in by Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice Susan Christensen. Reynolds, Iowa's first female governor, appointed Christensen to the court in 2018.

Neither Reynolds nor Cournoyer took questions from reporters after the ceremony.

Iowa voters in November passed a state constitutional amendment that clarifies that an appointed — rather than elected — lieutenant governor is first in line in the succession order. While the position was vacant, next in the gubernatorial line of succession was Iowa Senate President Amy Sinclair, a Republican from Allerton.

Reynolds has two years remaining on her current term. She will be up for re-election in 2026. She has not yet said whether she will seek another term.

With Cournoyer's appointment, she and Reynolds form the state's first-ever all-female governor and lieutenant governor leadership duo.

"First and foremost, she's someone that I would trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to. I have complete confidence in her character, her judgment and her ability," Reynolds said Monday. "It's these same qualities that also make her ideally suited to serve as a member of my team, where she'll support our work on a wide range of policy priorities, often drawing on her knowledge of technology and innovation. ...

"It's exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris' experience in her new role."

Cournoyer will be paid \$103,000, the salary for the position set by the Iowa Legislature.

Cournoyer resigned from her Iowa Senate seat, a Senate Republican spokesman confirmed Monday. Cournoyer had two years remaining in her second, four-year term. She represented Iowa Senate District 35, which covers Clinton County as well as slices of northern Scott and southwestern Jackson counties.

A special election will be held to fill the seat vacated by Cournoyer's move. The governor sets special election dates. A spokesman for the governor said there was no information yet on that special election date.

Cournoyer will be Reynolds' second lieutenant governor. Reynolds was herself Iowa's lieutenant governor

from 2011 to 2017 under then-Gov. Terry Branstad. She ascended to the governor's office when Branstad was tabbed as U.S. ambassador to China.

Reynolds selected Gregg, who had been serving as the state's public defender. He served as lieutenant governor from 2017 to earlier this year.

During her remarks Monday, Cournoyer recalled the first time she met Reynolds, in 2015, when Reynolds was lieutenant governor. Reynolds spoke at an event in Davenport to encourage girls to engage in science, technology, engineering and mathematics — commonly known as STEM — classes and programs.

"Having someone of (Reynolds') stature in attendance was a big win for us, and I was even more excited when I heard her speak on a subject that I cared so deeply about," Cournoyer said. "She spoke with passion and understanding about how a new, hands-on, work-based learning paradigm could modernize our economy while reaching underserved students of all stripes. And just as importantly, she had bold ideas for making it happen."

In addition to serving in the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has worked as a website designer, a substitute teacher and as a reserve deputy for the Scott County Sheriff's Department. In the Senate, she served as chair of the Senate Technology Committee and vice chair of the State Government committee and an assistant majority leader. Previously, she chaired the subcommittee that writes the state's education budget.

Cournoyer first won election to the Iowa Senate in 2018, flipping the seat to Republican control, and was reelected in 2022. Before that, she served on the Pleasant Valley School Board.

During her time in the Senate, Cournoyer has supported Reynolds' priorities on tax cuts, education savings accounts, restrictions of content in schools and changes to Area Education Agencies. In recent years, Cournoyer has worked on legislation dealing with consumer data privacy, digital stalking, cybersecurity, public notices, vapor products and repealing gender balance for public boards and commissions.

During the run-up to the 2024 Republican Iowa presidential precinct caucuses, Cournoyer endorsed Republican presidential candidate and former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley. Reynolds endorsed Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Cournoyer was born in Dallas, Texas, and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor's degree in computer science. She has four children.

"She has one, final, central trait that I love, and that is she's a doer. She gets in there and she wants to make a difference," Reynolds said. "That's the kind of person that Chris is. Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I."

As lieutenant governor, Gregg led the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative, the Feeding Iowans Task Force in 2020 and the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. The working group focused on recommendations to reduce recidivism through successful offender reentry.

Gregg, in his resignation letter to Reynolds, said he was stepping down to focus more on his family. Before serving as Reynolds' first lieutenant governor, Gregg was the state's public defender. He ran unsuccessfully for Iowa Attorney General in 2014.

The role of lieutenant governor is not statutorily defined in Iowa Code. Under the Iowa Constitution, the lieutenant governor performs duties assigned by the governor. Under Iowa law, the governor has the power

to appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill a vacancy and serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Iowa voters last fall approved an amendment to the Iowa Constitution that clarified when a governor chooses a new lieutenant governor, that new lieutenant is endowed with all of the office's constitutional authority, including being placed first in the line of succession to the governor.

Previously, the Iowa Constitution was unclear about an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor's authority. A formal opinion from then-Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller in 2017 said the state constitution did not place an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor in the gubernatorial line of succession.

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DMR: DMPS recommits to 'sanctuary resolution' to help immigrant students in face of deportations

Samantha Hernandez

The Des Moines School Board is taking a stand in support of its immigrant families ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's call for mass deportations.

During the regular board meeting Tuesday, members Anna Campos and Maria Alonzo read a statement in English and Spanish declaring that the board and district officials would do everything possible to support area families.

While the board stopped short of declaring itself a "sanctuary district," it recommitted to the "sanctuary resolution" it passed in 2017 that promised "to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status," Campos said.

"The intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is creating anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status," Campos said. "We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds."

The district doesn't track undocumented students, but officials say more than 4,000 of Des Moines' 30,000 public school students were born outside of the U.S. DMPS is Iowa's largest and most diverse school district, with students of color comprising more than half its enrollment.

During Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, he promised to curb immigration, deport undocumented immigrants en masse and build a wall along the United States-Mexico border. Early in his presidency, he banned people from Muslim-majority countries from entering the country for 90 days.

During his 2024 campaign, Trump once again promised mass deportations of people who are undocumented.

On Friday, Gov. Kim Reynolds joined with 25 other Republican governors who vowed to help the incoming president carry out his plan to remove undocumented people.

This includes deploying the Iowa National Guard and law enforcement, according to a joint statement.

Reynolds – who has traveled multiple times to the U.S.-Mexico border – has previously deployed Iowa State

Patrol officers and National Guard soldiers to the border.

The Des Moines School Board joins Chicago Public Schools' board of education in publicly standing behind its immigrant community. Last month, the Chicago Board of Education passed a resolution reaffirming "its commitment to protect students of various immigration statuses, gender identities and sexual orientation," according to Chalkbeat Chicago.

The Des Moines School Board felt making this statement was important, Alonzo told the Des Moines Register.

"We recognize as a board and as a district that the lives of many of our students and their families will be impacted because of immigration policy," she said.

From 2016:Yes, Trump will have broad power to crack down on immigration

DMPS school board passed 2017 'sanctuary resolution'

In February 2017, the school board approved two resolutions that gave guidance on how employees should handle requests from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE and encouraged state lawmakers to support the Bar Removal of Individuals who Dream and Grow our Economy Act or BRIDGE Act.

The "sanctuary resolution" required all requests to go through the superintendent and district legal counsel, according to a news release at the time. The resolution was also intended to "remind DMPS staff that they may not inquire about the immigration or citizenship status of students or their parents or guardians."

At the time, about 4,000 Des Moines students were born outside of the United States.

Currently, 86% of the Des Moines Public Schools' students were born in the United States, said Phil Roeder, a district spokesperson. The remaining 14% represent 101 nations.

The second resolution was in support of 5,500 Iowa students registered under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy or DACA, the 2017 news release states.

The BRIDGE Act would have provided temporary relief from deportation for DACA recipients and allowed them to work in the U.S.

"What we did eight years ago was really make a commitment that our buildings would be safe for all of our students and families," said Rob Barron, who sat on the board at the time, in an interview Thursday.

Trump has previously worked to end DACA but said in a recent interview he wants to protect recipients. However, he has also said he intends to end birthright citizenship for the children of undocumented immigrants. The U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment establishes the right to citizenship by birth.

From 2017:Des Moines creates 'sanctuary schools' for undocumented students

School districts are probably serving more undocumented or mixed immigration status families than people realize, Barron said.

"What matters more than anything else is students feel safe in their schools, and their parents feel like they can come to school and be active participants in the school community," he said. "... And there's a long-standing precedent that schools and churches are not a place where ICE will do an immigration enforcement action. And it's a federal precedent (and) it's been bipartisan."

Alonzo: 'We are a safe space for families'

Superintendent Ian Roberts and others have been working with community partners to identify needed resources.

"We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance and their ability to learn," Campos said during Tuesday's meeting. "To address these challenges, the board is partnering with the superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families."

Alonzo believes there will be no cost to the district to offer this assistance.

Des Moines Public Schools and the board's overarching message is that families know they are not alone, she said.

"Our statement, I think, sent the message that we are a safe space for families," Alonzo told the Register. "That we stand with immigrant (and) refugee communities who might be affected by a change in policy."

The DMPS statement

Living in a democracy means embracing the peaceful transfer of power through elections, a cornerstone of our nation's history. However, the intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is (creating) anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status. We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds.

In 2017, in light of multiple federal executive actions negatively impacting immigrant families, Des Moines Public Schools passed a resolution to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status. As a district, we remain committed to ensuring equal protection and safeguarding our students from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, citizenship, immigration status, or national origin.

We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance, and their ability to learn. To address these challenges, the Board is partnering with the Superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families.

Our dedication to fostering a safe and inclusive environment remains unwavering. DMPS is committed to respecting and supporting our youth and their families, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive. Together, we uphold the values of inclusivity, respect, and understanding that are essential to our vibrant, diverse, amazing school community.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building

in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said in a statement Monday the state government is always going to be concerned about the well-being of children.

"The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit," she said. "Because of this, the state's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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KCCI: Pella school board considers budget cuts for upcoming school year, cites enrollment numbers

Ophelie Jacobson

PELLA, Iowa —

The Pella school board reviewed the superintendent's recommended reductions for the district's budget for the upcoming school year Monday night.

Pella Community School District superintendent Greg Ebeling presented ways he feels the school district can save money next year. The recommended cuts would save the district \$888,949.

"Enrollment is obviously a driver of this stuff," Ebeling said. "We know we're graduating a class of 200, we're bringing in 150. We know we got a 50-student gap."

Ebeling says school vouchers have played a role causing the drop in enrollment. Gov. Kim Reynolds' Education Savings Account Program went into effect in 2023.

The superintendent told KCCI that class sizes could increase and staff members could be shifted within the school district. However, Ebeling said he is only estimating that one to two people will lose their jobs.

"We don't love making the reductions, but in terms of actually affecting people that want to be employed here next year, it's very little," he said.

The school board set a public hearing for the budget reduction for Jan. 13. A work session is scheduled for the following week. The final budget will be up for a vote on Jan. 27.

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KCCI: Opposition group to Summit pipeline says company threatened legal action

Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

One of the most active opponents to a controversial carbon pipeline says it has been threatened with legal action.

The Sierra Club says at least six people received letters from Summit Carbon Solutions, demanding retractions of various public statements. That includes Sierra Club's conservation director Jess Mazour.

KCCI has asked the Sierra Club to provide us the letter itself. It has not responded to our request. We've also asked Summit for a statement on the letters. We have not yet received one.

The Summit Carbon Capture Pipeline would go through five states, including here in Iowa.

The company wants to store carbon dioxide delivered through the pipeline underground.

The Iowa Utilities Commission already issued a permit for the project. Just last month, the North Dakota Public Service Commission granted a route permit.

Summit is still waiting on a permit from South Dakota.

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WOI: Iowa leaders congratulate Chris Cournoyer on being sworn in as lieutenant governor

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — Congratulations are rolling in from both sides of the aisle for Iowa's newly sworn-in lieutenant governor.

Gov. Kim Reynolds announced Monday that Republican Sen. Chris Cournoyer, who currently represents District 35, will serve as lieutenant governor for the remainder of Reynolds' term.

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," Cournoyer said.

Leaders from across the state offered congratulatory messages and praised Cournoyer for her experience and knowledge. Here's what they had to say:

Attorney General Brenna Bird

"Chris Cournoyer will make an excellent Lieutenant Governor! She is tough and determined. As a State Senator, she delivered for Iowa families and strengthened our schools. Together, Gov. Reynolds and LG Cournoyer will keep Iowa moving in the right direction!"

State Auditor Rob Sand

"Congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on her appointment as Iowa's Lieutenant Governor. I am happy to work with anyone to serve Iowans."

State Treasurer Roby Smith

"I've known Chris for nearly a decade and worked closely with her during my time in the Iowa Senate. During

the two years she served as Vice Chair while I was Chair of the State Government Committee, she consistently impressed me with her energy, work ethic and character. With her experience, knowledge, and skills, Chris is well positioned to serve lowans in this important role.”

Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver

“Chris has proven herself over the last 6 years as a smart, capable conservative. During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as Lieutenant Governor.”

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner

“I would like to offer my congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on being named Iowa’s new Lieutenant Governor. I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party. lowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new Lieutenant Governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process. On behalf of Iowa families, our commitment to bettering our schools and easing pocketbook burdens is resolute. I encourage the Reynolds Administration, and our new Lieutenant Governor, to join the effort of creating a freer, more prosperous Iowa for all.”

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig

“Governor Reynolds is a champion for Iowa’s farmers, agribusinesses and our rural communities and she has made a strong selection in choosing Chris Cournoyer as Iowa’s next Lieutenant Governor. As a State Senator, Chris Cournoyer was a strong supporter of Iowa agriculture, and I have no doubt that she will bring the same leadership to her new role as we work to keep Iowa moving forward. I am excited to work with Governor Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Cournoyer to grow markets for Iowa products, accelerate our conservation and water quality efforts, and make Iowa an even better place to live, work, and raise a family.”

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Radio Iowa: Governor Reynolds chooses State Senator Cournoyer as Lt. Governor

Kay Henderson

Governor Kim Reynolds has chosen a state senator from Le Claire to be her lieutenant governor.

“She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty and she does the work,” Reynolds said, “and the people of Iowa couldn’t ask for more in a lieutenant governor and neither can I.”

Chris Cournoyer took the oath of office in a ceremony at the statehouse this morning. “It’s an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa’s lieutenant governor,” Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019. Iowa has not had a lieutenant governor since September 2 when Adam Gregg resigned to become CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association. Reynolds waited until after the election to begin interviewing candidates for the position. The governor said Cournoyer will support a wide range of policy priorities.

“First and foremost she’s someone that lowans could trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to,”

Reynolds said. “I have complete confidence in her character, her judgement and her ability.”

Reynolds, who was a state senator in 2010 when Governor Terry Branstad chose her as his running mate, said Cournoyer is ideally suited to join her administration. “Chris has been a state senator, a reserve deputy and a long time leader and volunteer in her rural community of Le Claire. She’s also a small business owner and an expert in technology and A.I. and what I know she considers her most important job — a mom to four children,” Reynolds said. “Even on paper, the depth of her experience stands out.”

Cournoyer, who is 54, graduated from the University of Texas with a computer science degree and worked as a consultant in a Fortune 500 firm before becoming an independent website developer. The governor said Cournoyer’s firsthand experience — including her work teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students — are major assets.

“It’s exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris’s experience in her new role,” Reynolds said. “Here’s a working mother who has known the joys and challenges of raising children while being in the workforce and owning a business.”

Cournoyer has been chairman of the Iowa Senate Technology Committee since its creation. “Growing up in the ’80s, I had a subscription to PC Magazine and a treasured dot matrix printer,” Cournoyer said. “I even did an 8th grade science fair project on Artificial Intelligence, so basically I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed.”

Cournoyer first met the governor in 2015, back when Reynolds was lieutenant governor, at a Davenport event focused on encouraging girls and young women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

“She isn’t afraid to tackle tough problems from tax reform to education freedom to mental health and so much more,” Cournoyer said. “She also has a rare gift for getting stakeholders to the table and a tenacity to championing a cause to completion.”

The ceremony for Cournoyer’s ascension to the role of lieutenant governor was held in Reynolds’ formal office. Cournoyer’s parents, three other statewide elected officials and the Republican leader of the state senate entered the room before the event began. Cournoyer who spoke briefly after the governor explained her choice, said she’s ready to advance the governor’s agenda in any way that she can.

“I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would be second in line to Iowa’s succession,” Cournoyer said. “In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves.”

Cournoyer’s first campaign was for the Pleasant Valley School Board after she had raised a safety concern — and didn’t get a response from the board. Cournoyer won her seat in the Iowa Senate in 2018. A special election will be scheduled next year to fill the vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans will hold a super majority in 2025.

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KCRG: RCSD advocates for early childhood education, meets with state lawmakers

Mollie Swayne

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Lawmakers will be back in Des Moines for the start of the 2025 legislative session in just a few weeks. On Monday, education officials on the local level shared their hopes and concerns with those lawmakers ahead of the new year.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD) School Board met with four state lawmakers to share legislative priorities. The board and members of the public brought up a lot of topics: state funding, the new attendance law, book bans, free and reduced lunch, and more. However, School Board members made it clear their top priority was funding to make early childhood education available to every child.

“Parents and the community want full day four-year-old preschool,” said Board President Cindy Garlock.

“Thank you for all of your work that you are looking at ahead with funding, hopefully, full day preschool. We need it. We need it for our kids we need it for our economy,” said Monica Frey, principal of the Truman Early Learning Center, which does currently provide full day preschool.

The lawmakers heard board members' perspectives, then discussed whether funding for early childhood education was a priority for them, too.

The only member of the majority party at the meeting said child care was a priority, but that might not mean more money for schools.

Rep. Cindy Golding (R - Linn County) said, “Early childhood— child care is one of the initiatives. We’re not exactly sure how that funding — if it’s going through public schools, or child care centers, or it’s going to businesses for reimbursement for child care, but child care is a top priority.”

Tracy Ehlert (D- NW Cedar Rapids) pointed out that child care is not the same as early childhood education.

All lawmakers encouraged constituents to reach out to them and share their thoughts.

The legislative session starts on January 13.

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KCRG: ‘It means everything’: Dubuque manufacturer plans \$7M expansion, creating 15 new jobs

Keegan Turnbough

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - 15 new manufacturing jobs could be coming to Dubuque in 2026.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creates custom pressure vessels and tanks to filter water, capture landfill gases, vacuum trucks, and more. A \$7 million expansion plan would increase its capacity and reduce logjams.

“We have to move a tank 2 or 3 times because there’s no room to put it where we want to put it,” said Universal Tank & Fabrication President Dan Davis. “If we don’t have a booth sized the way or the size we need for a particular product, we have to lay a tank down that otherwise we could leave standing up.”

Davis' goal for the facility is to create a continuous assembly line from bending metal, welding, blasting, and painting to putting together the finished product. Accomplishing the feat requires more space.

The project would add a 28,000-square-foot facility adjacent to its current structure, moving the blasting, painting, and assembling of products to the new facility. Increasing capacity means more hands are needed to handle more business.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creating 15 new jobs comes as job cuts hit Iowa's manufacturing sector. In the last year, the state has lost 6,100 jobs in the industry.

Greater Dubuque Development Vice President of Business Services Jason White said by tapping into a variety of markets, Universal Tank & Fabrication helps stave off reductions.

"It's a cause for celebration," said White. "One industry that they serve may be down but others might be up. That's a good way [...] to mute their risk. It's a benefit to the community to foresee that because obviously it protects jobs, and in this case, creates new investments and new jobs."

Growing the company in opposition to statewide manufacturing trends "means everything" to Davis.

"Nobody's recession-proof, but we try to put ourselves in a position with the type of work we produce that we can continue to move forward even when the economy is not at its best," explained Davis. "To be able to bring more people on, maybe people that are struggling to find work or maybe got put out of a job, it means a lot."

Davis said Universal Tank and Fabrication is getting \$730,000 in rebates and tax incentives from city, state, and regional sources to finish expansions by January 2026.

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KCRG: Trump threatens lawsuit against Des Moines Register

Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - President-elect Donald Trump is threatening legal action against additional media outlets after ABC News agreed to settle a defamation lawsuit over the weekend.

The lawsuit against ABC News was over inaccurate statements made by anchor George Stephanopoulos, claiming that Trump had been found civilly liable for raping E. Jean Carroll.

Under the settlement, ABC News agreed to pay \$15 million toward Donald Trump's presidential library, and to post an editor's note online expressing regret over the statements.

CNN reports that on Monday, Trump shifted his sights onto the Des Moines Register, over its final poll before the 2024 election that showed Trump losing to Kamala Harris.

Trump's comments regarding the possible lawsuit were made during a press conference at Mar-a-Lago.

"We need a great media, we need a fair media. It's very important," Trump said.

Trump went on to say he believes the poll results were fraudulent and that it amounted to election interference.

The poll was conducted by J. Ann Selzer.

It showed Kamala Harris was beating Donald Trump in Iowa by three points. Trump ended up winning Iowa by more than 13 points.

Selzer has since ended her election polling to move onto "other ventures and opportunities."

"The idea that I intentionally set up to deliver this response, when I've never done that before - I've had plenty of opportunity to do it. It's not my ethic," Selzer told CNN. "But to suggest without a single shred of evidence that I was in cahoots with somebody, that I was being paid by somebody, it's hard to pay too much attention to it except that they are accusing me of a crime."

Other media lawsuits Trump spoke of include one against CBS over the editing of a 60 Minutes interview with Kamala Harris, which Trump also says he believes amounted to fraud and election interference.

A third potential lawsuit Trump mentioned was against journalist Bob Woodward. Trump alleges Woodward misquoted him from the tapes of an interview, and then sold the tapes, which were meant for reporting purposes only.

"I feel I have to do this. I shouldn't really be the one to do it. It should have been the Justice Department or somebody else," Trump said. "But I have to do it. It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press."

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KCRG: Inside Iowa Politics: More accurate elections with quicker results ahead?

Dave Price

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa State Capitol Bureau) Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate, a Republican, wants Iowa legislators to help him make changes which he said will help ensure that only U.S. citizens vote in elections and that Iowans can get results sooner.

Pate wants county auditors to begin counting absentee ballots at 9 a.m. on Election Day instead of waiting until later in the day. That could speed up the reporting of results.

Pate thinks that could build trust among voters, especially those who question the process when they have to wait on results.

There was a 56-point difference between Democrats and Republicans in their confidence level about the accuracy results in this national Gallup Poll released before the election.

The secretary of state also wants access to a federal database that could help determine whether a registered voter is a U.S. citizen, a requirement for voting in federal elections. The Biden administration

refused to allow Pate access to those records in 2024, leading Pate and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird to file a lawsuit.

Here is background on the lawsuit from Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate and Attorney General Brenna Bird vs. the Biden administration on access to federal database on voters' citizenship.

Paul is optimistic that the incoming Trump administration will be more favorable to his request. Although, he said sometimes the federal bureaucracy can be slow to change.

Pate wants Iowa lawmakers to grant him the authority to seek state and federal records that could help confirm a person's legal status.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: Drone sighting epidemic spurs Dems in Congress to urge more transparency from feds

Jacob Fischler

Members of Congress are among those calling for greater transparency from the federal government as a spate of reported drone sightings concentrated in New Jersey and New York has raised questions beyond the Northeast.

Reported sightings of drones, officially known as unmanned aerial systems, or UAS, have spiked since Nov. 18, when authorities received several reports of suspicious drone activity near critical infrastructure in New Jersey, according to an FBI official in the state who briefed reporters over the weekend.

The increased activity has worried some and led to calls from lawmakers for the federal agencies to provide more information on drone activity, even as security officials urged caution.

In a statement that described an "epidemic of non-stop drone sightings," U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for the federal government to deploy more drone-detection systems and to share information with local authorities.

"I want it deployed widely across New York and New Jersey to help give us concrete answers on what is going on, and from where," Schumer, a New York Democrat, said of a drone-detection system that the federal government uses. "What we need right now is data. The briefings I have had tell me there is no evidence that this is a government or foreign activity, and so, we have to answer the logical question of: who?"

Schumer called on Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to deploy the drone-detection system and said he would cosponsor a bill that would give local law enforcement more authority to respond to drone sightings.

Drones, like planes and other users of the national airspace, are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

"We still have very few answers on where some of these drones come from and who may be operating them," Schumer said Monday on the Senate floor. "The people of New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions and haven't gotten many answers. We know one thing, though. Local officials now don't have the resources nor the authority to get to the bottom of what's happening."

On CBS' Sunday morning news show "Face the Nation," Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat who is a senior member of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee with jurisdiction over the FAA, called for federal officials to brief U.S. senators.

"We need more transparency," she said.

'No evidence' of threat, says DOD

U.S. Defense Department spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Monday that there was "no evidence at this time that the reported drone sightings pose a national security or public safety threat or have a foreign nexus."

Regardless, he said he wanted to take the public's concerns seriously, but also offered further context.

The drone industry is expanding, with more than 1 million hobbyist and commercial drones licensed by the FAA and 8,000 in use daily.

He likened the drone sightings, even those near military installations or other important sites, to drivers who may get lost and turn up in their cars at places they are not supposed to be, something he said happens regularly without incident.

"The point being is that flying drones is not illegal," he said. "There are thousands of drones flown around the U.S. on a daily basis. So, as a result, it's not that unusual to see drones in the sky, nor is it an indication of malicious activity or any public safety threat."

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, noted Monday that federal investigators had not found any malicious activity and urged residents to "calm down" about drone sightings.

Many recent reports of drones, noted by non-experts, turned out to be commercial planes flying regularly scheduled nighttime routes.

More than 5,000 tips

The New Jersey-based FBI official said that the vast majority of the more than 5,000 tips his office received in the past month related to unidentified objects in the night skies have not been "actionable."

The official, who briefed reporters along with officials from other agencies on the condition their names not be used, said the FBI was working to identify the 100 or so tips that did warrant further investigation.

"I don't want to cause alarm and panic, but you can't ignore the sightings that have been there, and we are concerned about those just as much as anybody else is," the FBI official said. "We're doing our best to find the origin of that specific — of those drone activities. But I think there has been a slight overreaction."

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CBS News: 2 killed, suspect dead in school shooting in Madison, Wisconsin, police say

Staff

MADISON, Wis. (CBS) — Two people were killed and a suspect was found dead in a shooting at Abundant Life

Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin, on Monday morning.

Just before 11 a.m., Madison police responded to the mass shooting at the private school located at 4901 E. Buckeye Rd. on the east side of Madison.

Madison Chief of Police Shon F. Barnes said a second-grade student called 911 at 10:57 a.m. to report the shooting.

The shooting took place inside a classroom and study hall occupied by students in various grades, Barnes said.

The shooter has been identified as 15-year-old Natalie Rupnow, a student at the school who lived in Madison and went by the name Samantha. It is believed she died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after opening fire in the school.

Police said the two people who died in the shooting were a teenage student and a teacher.

According to Pastor Chris Dolson, who was speaking at a vigil for the victims on Monday night, the teacher who was killed may have been a substitute.

"There's a woman who called in sick today. She's a teacher. And there was a substitute that came in to take her place that was shot and killed," Dolson said. "Survivor guilt kicks in when those things happen."

CBS News has not independently confirmed the teacher's identity.

Five other students and another teacher were injured. Two of the wounded students remained in critical condition with life-threatening injuries Monday night, Barnes said.

The surviving teacher and three other students were treated for non-life-threatening injuries, and two of those victims have been released, while the other two have been stabilized, Barnes said.

Barnes confirmed officers found the teenage shooting suspect at the scene apparently having shot herself, and officers fired no shots. Police said the suspect used a 9 mm pistol, and police were working to trace the gun.

Rupnow was pronounced dead while being taken to the hospital, Barnes said.

All surviving students were reunited with their loved ones in the hours after the shooting, officials said.

As police searched for a motive late Monday, the FBI was working with local law enforcement to process the scene, conduct interviews, and obtain search warrants.

CBS News Chicago is told the suspected shooter's family is cooperating with police.

"Right now, my heart is heavy for my community," Barnes said earlier Monday. "My heart is heavy for Madison, and we have to come together as a community and figure out what happened here and make sure that it doesn't happen at any other place that should be a refuge for students in our community."

Mireille Jean-Charles is the mother of three boys who attend Abundant Life Christian School. She spoke with Meryl Hubbard, a reporter for CBS affiliate WISC-TV in Madison.

"It's sad, you know, to be home and then somebody calls you and says your kids' school in lockdown—and

you don't know where they are. And I was there since 11. I finally got them, and thank God they were safe," Jean-Charles said. "But the trauma—it's a lot, because I'm sure they lost friends and a teacher, which is not OK. And I don't think they will be OK for a long time, and I'm not."

As reported by WISC, school director of elementary and school relations Barbara Weirs said the school does not have metal detectors, but does follow safety protocols. Weirs said the school held a practice lockdown at the beginning of the current academic year, the station reported.

"We've joked around about how safe a 400-student-bodied school—Christian private school—is, right?" a man said. "If it can happen here, it can literally happen anywhere."

Hours after the shooting, several officers were seen removing the door from a Madison home in a search Chief Barnes said was connected to the investigation.

"Our detectives are working hard in the investigative process to find out as many answers as we can so that we can further prevent these things from happening—not only in this community, but in other communities around our country," Barnes said.

Dave Wagner is the former principal of the school.

"My heart grieves beyond words with them," Wagner said. "I know the principal. I know several of the teachers. They're going to be impacted for their life by the tragedy of this day."

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers released the following statement:

"There are no words to describe the devastation and heartbreak we feel today after the school shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison this morning.

"Kathy and I join the people of Wisconsin in praying for the families and loved ones of those whose lives were so senselessly taken and for the educators, staff, and the entire Abundant Life school community as they grapple with the grief, trauma, and loss of this gut-wrenching tragedy. We are also praying and hoping all those injured survive and recover.

"Kathy and I are also keeping in our hearts the first responders who acted quickly and ran toward danger to help save lives. This day will no doubt weigh heavily on them, and we are grateful for their critical response efforts in answering the call when they were needed most.

"As a father, a grandfather, and as governor, it is unthinkable that a kid or an educator might wake up and go to school one morning and never come home. This should never happen, and I will never accept this as a foregone reality or stop working to change it.

"Today my focus is on supporting these families and kids and the Abundant Life community, and the state stands ready to support them and the efforts of local law enforcement through what will undoubtedly be difficult days ahead."

Gov. Evers will be ordering the flags of the United States and the state of Wisconsin to half-staff across the state immediately until sunset on Sun., Dec. 22.

Abundant Life Christian School is a private, nondenominational religious school that serves just under 400 students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

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NPR: First public comments attributed to Assad claim he never planned to leave Syria

Hadeel Al-Shalchi

DAMASCUS, Syria — Former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is believed to have issued his first remarks since opposition forces took over Syria more than a week ago, claiming his departure from the country was "neither planned nor did it occur in the final hours of the battles" against the rebel forces he calls "terrorists."

The statement attributed to Assad was posted in English on the deposed Syrian presidency's account on the Telegram messaging app, dated Dec. 16, from Moscow. The Telegram post says there had been "several unsuccessful attempts to release the statement via Arabic and international media outlets."

It claims he fought beside the army to the very end "just meters from terrorists in the most dangerous and intense battlefields."

As the rebel forces entered the capital on Dec. 8, the statement says, Assad moved to a military airbase in the port city of Latakia in coordination with his Russian allies.

The statement goes on to say that upon arrival at the base, it was clear that his army had withdrawn from all battle lines and all their positions had fallen. It says that Moscow then arranged an immediate evacuation that evening as the base came under drone attacks. The Kremlin then gave Assad asylum in Russia.

"At no point during these events did I consider stepping down or seeking refuge, nor was such proposal made by any individual or party," the statement says. "The only course of action was to continue fighting against the terrorist onslaught."

The Assad regime fell just over a week ago when rebel forces led by jihadist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, stormed Damascus. The leader of HTS is Ahmed al-Sharaa, formerly known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, who has a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head and is designated as a terrorist by the United States.

Sharaa has made some appearances since his group's victory, asking the international community to assist Syria and send aid.

World

U.S. has made contact with Syrian rebel group HTS, Blinken says

But countries are grappling with how to interact with Syria's interim leadership. The European Union set out conditions on Monday for lifting sanctions that have devastated the Syrian economy. The EU said it wants guarantees that the interim Syrian government is planning a peaceful political transition which includes minorities.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday the U.S. had made "direct contact" with HTS, without elaborating on details of the talks.

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Office of Governor Kim Reynolds

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KCCI: 'Deeply honored': Chris Cournoyer sworn in as Iowa's lieutenant governor Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds appointed state Sen. Chris Cournoyer to be her lieutenant governor Monday, more than three months after her first and only No. 2 in elected office resigned to take over the state bankers association.

Cournoyer was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and has a background in technology, having earned a computer science degree, done website design and worked for a tech company. In the Senate, she chaired the Education Budget Committee and was vice chair of the State Government Committee.

“She has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to — qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis,” Reynolds said in a statement. “I can’t wait to deploy Chris’ extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans.”

Cournoyer is from LeClaire, in eastern Iowa.

“I am deeply honored to join your team,” Cournoyer said to Reynolds in her opening remarks after being sworn in.

“I’m profoundly honored to serve as lieutenant governor, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach the role with all the seriousness it deserves,” Cournoyer said. “I couldn’t be more excited to join Governor Reynolds’ team and do my part to implement her bold agenda for our state.”

Reynolds’ initial running mate, Adam Gregg, resigned his position Sept. 3 after serving more than seven years in office, saying that “my time in public service must come to a close.” The Iowa Bankers Association on the same day announced Gregg as its incoming president and CEO.

Reynolds described Gregg as “a tremendous partner.”

Iowa law states that the governor must appoint someone to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term.

Reynolds told reporters in early October that she would make a decision on Gregg’s successor after the 2024 election, and the end-of-the-year rollout will allow Cournoyer a few weeks to settle in before joining Reynolds at her annual condition of the state speech after the legislative session begins in January.

“We want to get it right, you know, not only for the team, but for Iowans, and so I want to be very thoughtful in how I do that,” Reynolds said in October.

'Deeply honored': Iowa state Sen. Chris Cournoyer speaks after being named lieutenant governor

Up for reelection in 2026, Reynolds will likely be joined by Cournoyer on the ballot if she chooses to run again.

Reynolds, who was former Gov. Terry Branstad's lieutenant governor, became governor in 2017 when Branstad was named U.S. ambassador to China. She was elected to a full term in 2018 and was reelected in 2022.

Reynolds in 2017 had named Gregg as her “acting” lieutenant governor after her own promotion. That followed legal questions over whether the Iowa Constitution gave an elected lieutenant governor the authority to appoint her replacement if she needed to step in as governor in the event the elected governor dies, resigns, or was removed from office. Until their inauguration in 2019, Gregg was left out of the line of succession.

In November's election, Iowa voters approved a legislatively referred constitutional amendment to explicitly allow for that appointment.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds names state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as next lieutenant governor of Iowa

Brianne Pfannenstiel and Stephen Gruber-Miller

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds has named state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as her next lieutenant governor after Adam Gregg resigned the post earlier this year.

It marks the first time Iowa will have women in both top roles.

The pick comes as Reynolds prepares to deliver her priorities for the 2025 legislative session and as she gears up for an expected reelection campaign in 2026.

Cournoyer, a Republican from LeClaire, will serve out the remainder of Gregg's term, which is set to expire at the end of 2026.

Reynolds made the announcement in her formal office in the Iowa Capitol Monday morning, and Cournoyer, who resigned her Senate seat the same day, immediately took the oath of office.

Reynolds praised her new second-in-command as a "doer" who, after failing to get answers from her local school board, first entered politics to run for the seat herself.

"That's the kind of person that Chris is," Reynolds said. "Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I."

Cournoyer, who was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and reelected to a second four-year term in 2022, called the experience "surreal."

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," she said.

Cournoyer was one of Nikki Haley's most high-profile endorsers in Iowa's 2024 Republican caucuses, writing that the former United Nations ambassador is "unafraid to stand up, correct the record and talk about the tough issues."

Reynolds suggests new lieutenant governor will play a role in STEM policy, making government more efficient

A mom of four, Cournoyer previously served as president of her local school board, as an adviser on the governor's STEM Advisory Council and as a reserve sheriff deputy. She has worked as a technology consultant, and she now runs her own business as an independent website designer and developer.

"Given this firsthand experience, Chris understands that one of the most effective ways to promote innovation in our economy is to promote it in our schools," Reynolds said. "As a member of the governor's STEM Advisory Council, she's been a key ally in my administration's efforts to prepare every student for the modern economy. She's also been engaged in the issue at a local level, serving as the president of her school board, and even teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students. This wide ranging expertise at the intersection of business, innovation and education is a major asset."

The role of lieutenant governor is often ceremonial in Iowa, and the state Constitution says the lieutenant governor is in charge of whatever duties the governor assigns.

Cournoyer said Monday she looks forward to "advancing the governor's agenda in any way I possibly can."

Cournoyer was the vice chair of the Senate State Government Committee, where she helped lead Reynolds' effort to reorganize and consolidate state government and Iowa's hundreds of state boards and commissions.

She took the lead in the Senate on a law Reynolds signed this year eliminating dozens of state boards and commissions. And she served as a member of a new board created by that law: The State Government Efficiency Review Committee.

She also spoke in Reynolds' office this year at the bill signing for a law that eliminated the requirement that Iowa boards and commissions have a balance of men and women serving on them. At the signing, she said there are more women serving in a range of careers than ever before.

"As Gov. Reynolds mentioned, her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively, as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills, dovetails especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science and artificial intelligence," Cournoyer said.

Special election will be needed to fill Cournoyer's Senate vacancy
Reynolds will need to call a special election to fill her vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans hold a 34-15 majority with Cournoyer's resignation of her legislative seat. Reynolds' spokesperson would not comment on when that election would be set.

"Chris has proven herself over the last six years as a smart, capable conservative," Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver, R-Grimes, said in a statement. "During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as lieutenant governor."

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner, D-Iowa City, also offered Cournoyer her congratulations.

"I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party," she said in a statement. "Iowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new lieutenant governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process."

Position opened after Adam Gregg resigned lieutenant governor role
Gregg resigned Sept. 3 to become president and CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association — a surprise decision that took effect immediately. He had served alongside Reynolds since she assumed the governorship in 2017 and named him as her No. 2. He was elected to the post as her running mate in 2018 and again in 2022.

Gregg's decision to leave mid-term was taken as a sign by many in the political world that Reynolds would seek reelection herself, rather than stepping aside and giving him room to run for governor.

Cournoyer is now expected to run alongside Reynolds if she does decide to seek a third full term as the state's chief executive. In Iowa, the governor and lieutenant governor run on a single ticket rather than being elected separately.

Iowa has no term limits for state offices.

During his tenure, Gregg served as co-chair of the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative and as chair of the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. He earned a base salary of just over \$103,000 last year.

In November, Iowa voters passed a state constitutional amendment clarifying the state's gubernatorial line of succession. Now, if the governor leaves office, the lieutenant governor will take that person's place. The new governor can then appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill the office's new vacancy.

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KCRG: Gov. Reynolds names new Lt. Governor

Conner Hendricks

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa Capitol Bureau) - Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds announced State Senator from LeClaire, Chris Cournoyer, as her new Lt. Governor during a press conference at the State Capitol on Monday morning.

Cournoyer was officially sworn in shortly after Reynolds' announcement.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019, representing the 35th Senate District. That includes parts of Clinton, Jackson, and Scott counties.

While introducing Cournoyer, Governor Reynolds said Iowans can trust Cournoyer should she ever have to step in as Governor.

“First and foremost, she has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to—qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis,” Reynolds said. “I can’t wait to deploy Chris’ extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans.”

Aside from the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has a background in technology and education. “I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed,” she said.

In the state Senate, Cournoyer was the first to chair the newly created technology committee. Reynolds says she plans to tap in to Cournoyer’s background to make state government better.

“Significant opportunities still exist to find efficiencies through technology. Hereto her expertise, especially in AI, will be invaluable,” Reynolds said.

Cournoyer also serves on the Governor’s STEM advisory council and she says she plans to continue that work to create more apprenticeships for Iowa students.

“Her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills dovetail especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science, and artificial intelligence,” Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer replaces former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who had served alongside Reynolds since 2017. He resigned in September to take a position leading the Iowa Bankers Association.

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The Gazette: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds names Sen. Chris Cournoyer lieutenant governor

Erin Murphy, Tom Barton

DES MOINES — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds describes Chris Cournoyer, her new lieutenant governor, as someone who is driven, whose character and judgment she trusts and who can help her efforts to streamline state government.

Cournoyer, 54, from Le Claire, was sworn in Monday as Iowa's 48th lieutenant governor during a ceremony in the Governor's Formal Office at the Iowa Capitol. Cournoyer, a Republican like Reynolds, had been serving in the Iowa Senate since 2019.

She succeeds former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who abruptly resigned in early September to become the incoming president and chief executive officer of the Iowa Bankers Association. The association advocates for, provides resources to and lobbies on behalf of Iowa banks.

"It's an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa's lieutenant governor," Cournoyer said Monday. "I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would ever be second in line to Iowa's succession. In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves."

Cournoyer was sworn in by Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice Susan Christensen. Reynolds, Iowa's first female governor, appointed Christensen to the court in 2018.

Neither Reynolds nor Cournoyer took questions from reporters after the ceremony.

Iowa voters in November passed a state constitutional amendment that clarifies that an appointed — rather than elected — lieutenant governor is first in line in the succession order. While the position was vacant, next in the gubernatorial line of succession was Iowa Senate President Amy Sinclair, a Republican from Allerton.

Reynolds has two years remaining on her current term. She will be up for re-election in 2026. She has not yet said whether she will seek another term.

With Cournoyer's appointment, she and Reynolds form the state's first-ever all-female governor and lieutenant governor leadership duo.

"First and foremost, she's someone that I would trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to. I have complete confidence in her character, her judgment and her ability," Reynolds said Monday. "It's these same qualities that also make her ideally suited to serve as a member of my team, where she'll support our work on a wide range of policy priorities, often drawing on her knowledge of technology and innovation. ...

"It's exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris' experience in her new role."

Cournoyer will be paid \$103,000, the salary for the position set by the Iowa Legislature.

Cournoyer resigned from her Iowa Senate seat, a Senate Republican spokesman confirmed Monday. Cournoyer had two years remaining in her second, four-year term. She represented Iowa Senate District 35, which covers Clinton County as well as slices of northern Scott and southwestern Jackson counties.

A special election will be held to fill the seat vacated by Cournoyer's move. The governor sets special election dates. A spokesman for the governor said there was no information yet on that special election date.

Cournoyer will be Reynolds' second lieutenant governor. Reynolds was herself Iowa's lieutenant governor from 2011 to 2017 under then-Gov. Terry Branstad. She ascended to the governor's office when Branstad was tabbed as U.S. ambassador to China.

Reynolds selected Gregg, who had been serving as the state's public defender. He served as lieutenant governor from 2017 to earlier this year.

During her remarks Monday, Cournoyer recalled the first time she met Reynolds, in 2015, when Reynolds was lieutenant governor. Reynolds spoke at an event in Davenport to encourage girls to engage in science, technology, engineering and mathematics — commonly known as STEM — classes and programs.

“Having someone of (Reynolds') stature in attendance was a big win for us, and I was even more excited when I heard her speak on a subject that I cared so deeply about,” Cournoyer said. “She spoke with passion and understanding about how a new, hands-on, work-based learning paradigm could modernize our economy while reaching underserved students of all stripes. And just as importantly, she had bold ideas for making it happen.”

In addition to serving in the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has worked as a website designer, a substitute teacher and as a reserve deputy for the Scott County Sheriff's Department. In the Senate, she served as chair of the Senate Technology Committee and vice chair of the State Government committee and an assistant majority leader. Previously, she chaired the subcommittee that writes the state's education budget.

Cournoyer first won election to the Iowa Senate in 2018, flipping the seat to Republican control, and was reelected in 2022. Before that, she served on the Pleasant Valley School Board.

During her time in the Senate, Cournoyer has supported Reynolds' priorities on tax cuts, education savings accounts, restrictions of content in schools and changes to Area Education Agencies. In recent years, Cournoyer has worked on legislation dealing with consumer data privacy, digital stalking, cybersecurity, public notices, vapor products and repealing gender balance for public boards and commissions.

During the run-up to the 2024 Republican Iowa presidential precinct caucuses, Cournoyer endorsed Republican presidential candidate and former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley. Reynolds endorsed Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Cournoyer was born in Dallas, Texas, and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor's degree in computer science. She has four children.

"She has one, final, central trait that I love, and that is she's a doer. She gets in there and she wants to make a difference," Reynolds said. "That's the kind of person that Chris is. Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I."

As lieutenant governor, Gregg led the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative, the Feeding Iowans Task Force in 2020 and the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. The working group focused on recommendations to reduce recidivism through successful offender reentry.

Gregg, in his resignation letter to Reynolds, said he was stepping down to focus more on his family. Before serving as Reynolds' first lieutenant governor, Gregg was the state's public defender. He ran unsuccessfully for Iowa Attorney General in 2014.

The role of lieutenant governor is not statutorily defined in Iowa Code. Under the Iowa Constitution, the lieutenant governor performs duties assigned by the governor. Under Iowa law, the governor has the power to appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill a vacancy and serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Iowa voters last fall approved an amendment to the Iowa Constitution that clarified when a governor chooses a new lieutenant governor, that new lieutenant is endowed with all of the office's constitutional authority, including being placed first in the line of succession to the governor.

Previously, the Iowa Constitution was unclear about an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor's authority. A formal opinion from then-Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller in 2017 said the state constitution did not place an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor in the gubernatorial line of succession.

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DMR: DMPS recommits to 'sanctuary resolution' to help immigrant students in face of deportations

Samantha Hernandez

The Des Moines School Board is taking a stand in support of its immigrant families ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's call for mass deportations.

During the regular board meeting Tuesday, members Anna Campos and Maria Alonzo read a statement in English and Spanish declaring that the board and district officials would do everything possible to support area families.

While the board stopped short of declaring itself a "sanctuary district," it recommitted to the "sanctuary resolution" it passed in 2017 that promised "to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status," Campos said.

"The intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is creating anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status," Campos said. "We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds."

The district doesn't track undocumented students, but officials say more than 4,000 of Des Moines' 30,000 public school students were born outside of the U.S. DMPS is Iowa's largest and most diverse school district, with students of color comprising more than half its enrollment.

During Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, he promised to curb immigration, deport undocumented immigrants en masse and build a wall along the United States-Mexico border. Early in his presidency, he banned people from Muslim-majority countries from entering the country for 90 days.

During his 2024 campaign, Trump once again promised mass deportations of people who are undocumented.

On Friday, Gov. Kim Reynolds joined with 25 other Republican governors who vowed to help the incoming president carry out his plan to remove undocumented people.

This includes deploying the Iowa National Guard and law enforcement, according to a joint statement.

Reynolds – who has traveled multiple times to the U.S.-Mexico border – has previously deployed Iowa State Patrol officers and National Guard soldiers to the border.

The Des Moines School Board joins Chicago Public Schools' board of education in publicly standing behind its immigrant community. Last month, the Chicago Board of Education passed a resolution reaffirming "its commitment to protect students of various immigration statuses, gender identities and sexual orientation," according to Chalkbeat Chicago.

The Des Moines School Board felt making this statement was important, Alonzo told the Des Moines Register.

"We recognize as a board and as a district that the lives of many of our students and their families will be impacted because of immigration policy," she said.

From 2016:Yes, Trump will have broad power to crack down on immigration

DMPS school board passed 2017 'sanctuary resolution'

In February 2017, the school board approved two resolutions that gave guidance on how employees should handle requests from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE and encouraged state lawmakers to support the Bar Removal of Individuals who Dream and Grow our Economy Act or BRIDGE Act.

The "sanctuary resolution" required all requests to go through the superintendent and district legal counsel, according to a news release at the time. The resolution was also intended to "remind DMPS staff that they may not inquire about the immigration or citizenship status of students or their parents or guardians."

At the time, about 4,000 Des Moines students were born outside of the United States.

Currently, 86% of the Des Moines Public Schools' students were born in the United States, said Phil Roeder, a district spokesperson. The remaining 14% represent 101 nations.

The second resolution was in support of 5,500 Iowa students registered under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy or DACA, the 2017 news release states.

The BRIDGE Act would have provided temporary relief from deportation for DACA recipients and allowed them to work in the U.S.

"What we did eight years ago was really make a commitment that our buildings would be safe for all of our students and families," said Rob Barron, who sat on the board at the time, in an interview Thursday.

Trump has previously worked to end DACA but said in a recent interview he wants to protect recipients. However, he has also said he intends to end birthright citizenship for the children of undocumented immigrants. The U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment establishes the right to citizenship by birth.

From 2017:Des Moines creates 'sanctuary schools' for undocumented students

School districts are probably serving more undocumented or mixed immigration status families than people realize, Barron said.

"What matters more than anything else is students feel safe in their schools, and their parents feel like they can come to school and be active participants in the school community," he said. "... And there's a long-standing precedent that schools and churches are not a place

where ICE will do an immigration enforcement action. And it's a federal precedent (and) it's been bipartisan."

Alonzo: 'We are a safe space for families'

Superintendent Ian Roberts and others have been working with community partners to identify needed resources.

"We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance and their ability to learn," Campos said during Tuesday's meeting. "To address these challenges, the board is partnering with the superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families."

Alonzo believes there will be no cost to the district to offer this assistance.

Des Moines Public Schools and the board's overarching message is that families know they are not alone, she said.

"Our statement, I think, sent the message that we are a safe space for families," Alonzo told the Register. "That we stand with immigrant (and) refugee communities who might be affected by a change in policy."

The DMPS statement

Living in a democracy means embracing the peaceful transfer of power through elections, a cornerstone of our nation's history. However, the intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is (creating) anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status. We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds.

In 2017, in light of multiple federal executive actions negatively impacting immigrant families, Des Moines Public Schools passed a resolution to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status. As a district, we remain committed to ensuring equal protection and safeguarding our students from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, citizenship, immigration status, or national origin.

We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance, and their ability to learn. To address these challenges, the Board is partnering with the Superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families.

Our dedication to fostering a safe and inclusive environment remains unwavering. DMPS is committed to respecting and supporting our youth and their families, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive. Together, we uphold the values of inclusivity, respect, and understanding that are essential to our vibrant, diverse, amazing school community.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said in a statement Monday the state government is always going to be concerned about the well-being of children.

"The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit," she said. "Because of this, the state's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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KCCI: Pella school board considers budget cuts for upcoming school year, cites enrollment numbers

Ophelie Jacobson

PELLA, Iowa —

The Pella school board reviewed the superintendent's recommended reductions for the district's budget for the upcoming school year Monday night.

Pella Community School District superintendent Greg Ebeling presented ways he feels the school district can save money next year. The recommended cuts would save the district \$888,949.

"Enrollment is obviously a driver of this stuff," Ebeling said. "We know we're graduating a class of 200, we're bringing in 150. We know we got a 50-student gap."

Ebeling says school vouchers have played a role causing the drop in enrollment. Gov. Kim Reynolds' Education Savings Account Program went into effect in 2023.

The superintendent told KCCI that class sizes could increase and staff members could be shifted within the school district. However, Ebeling said he is only estimating that one to two people will lose their jobs.

"We don't love making the reductions, but in terms of actually affecting people that want to be employed here next year, it's very little," he said.

The school board set a public hearing for the budget reduction for Jan. 13. A work session is scheduled for the following week. The final budget will be up for a vote on Jan. 27.

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KCCI: Opposition group to Summit pipeline says company threatened legal action
Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

One of the most active opponents to a controversial carbon pipeline says it has been threatened with legal action.

The Sierra Club says at least six people received letters from Summit Carbon Solutions, demanding retractions of various public statements. That includes Sierra Club's conservation director Jess Mazour.

KCCI has asked the Sierra Club to provide us the letter itself. It has not responded to our request. We've also asked Summit for a statement on the letters. We have not yet received one.

The Summit Carbon Capture Pipeline would go through five states, including here in Iowa.

The company wants to store carbon dioxide delivered through the pipeline underground.

The Iowa Utilities Commission already issued a permit for the project. Just last month, the North Dakota Public Service Commission granted a route permit.

Summit is still waiting on a permit from South Dakota.

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WOI: Iowa leaders congratulate Chris Cournoyer on being sworn in as lieutenant governor

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — Congratulations are rolling in from both sides of the aisle for Iowa's newly sworn-in lieutenant governor.

Gov. Kim Reynolds announced Monday that Republican Sen. Chris Cournoyer, who currently represents District 35, will serve as lieutenant governor for the remainder of Reynolds' term.

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," Cournoyer said.

Leaders from across the state offered congratulatory messages and praised Cournoyer for her experience and knowledge. Here's what they had to say:

Attorney General Brenna Bird

"Chris Cournoyer will make an excellent Lieutenant Governor! She is tough and determined. As a State Senator, she delivered for Iowa families and strengthened our schools. Together, Gov. Reynolds and LG Cournoyer will keep Iowa moving in the right direction!"

State Auditor Rob Sand

"Congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on her appointment as Iowa's Lieutenant Governor. I am happy to work with anyone to serve Iowans."

State Treasurer Roby Smith

"I've known Chris for nearly a decade and worked closely with her during my time in the Iowa Senate. During the two years she served as Vice Chair while I was Chair of the State Government Committee, she consistently impressed me with her energy, work ethic and character. With her experience, knowledge, and skills, Chris is well positioned to serve Iowans in this important role."

Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver

"Chris has proven herself over the last 6 years as a smart, capable conservative. During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as Lieutenant Governor."

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner

"I would like to offer my congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on being named Iowa's new Lieutenant Governor. I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for

opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party. Iowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new Lieutenant Governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process. On behalf of Iowa families, our commitment to bettering our schools and easing pocketbook burdens is resolute. I encourage the Reynolds Administration, and our new Lieutenant Governor, to join the effort of creating a freer, more prosperous Iowa for all."

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig

"Governor Reynolds is a champion for Iowa's farmers, agribusinesses and our rural communities and she has made a strong selection in choosing Chris Cournoyer as Iowa's next Lieutenant Governor. As a State Senator, Chris Cournoyer was a strong supporter of Iowa agriculture, and I have no doubt that she will bring the same leadership to her new role as we work to keep Iowa moving forward. I am excited to work with Governor Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Cournoyer to grow markets for Iowa products, accelerate our conservation and water quality efforts, and make Iowa an even better place to live, work, and raise a family."

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Radio Iowa: Governor Reynolds chooses State Senator Cournoyer as Lt. Governor

Kay Henderson

Governor Kim Reynolds has chosen a state senator from Le Claire to be her lieutenant governor.

“She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty and she does the work,” Reynolds said, “and the people of Iowa couldn’t ask for more in a lieutenant governor and neither can I.”

Chris Cournoyer took the oath of office in a ceremony at the statehouse this morning. “It’s an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa’s lieutenant governor,” Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019. Iowa has not had a lieutenant governor since September 2 when Adam Gregg resigned to become CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association. Reynolds waited until after the election to begin interviewing candidates for the position. The governor said Cournoyer will support a wide range of policy priorities.

“First and foremost she’s someone that Iowans could trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to,” Reynolds said. “I have complete confidence in her character, her judgement and her ability.”

Reynolds, who was a state senator in 2010 when Governor Terry Branstad chose her as his running mate, said Cournoyer is ideally suited to join her administration. “Chris has been a state senator, a reserve deputy and a long time leader and volunteer in her rural community of Le Claire. She’s also a small business owner and an expert in technology and A.I. and what I know she considers her most important job — a mom to four children,” Reynolds said. “Even on paper, the depth of her experience stands out.”

Cournoyer, who is 54, graduated from the University of Texas with a computer science degree and worked as a consultant in a Fortune 500 firm before becoming an independent website developer. The governor said Cournoyer’s firsthand experience — including her work teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students — are major assets.

“It’s exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris’s experience in her new role,” Reynolds said. “Here’s a working mother who has known the joys and challenges of raising children while being in the workforce and owning a business.”

Cournoyer has been chairman of the Iowa Senate Technology Committee since its creation. “Growing up in the ’80s, I had a subscription to PC Magazine and a treasured dot matrix printer,” Cournoyer said. “I even did an 8th grade science fair project on Artificial Intelligence, so basically I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed.”

Cournoyer first met the governor in 2015, back when Reynolds was lieutenant governor, at a Davenport event focused on encouraging girls and young women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

“She isn’t afraid to tackle tough problems from tax reform to education freedom to mental health and so much more,” Cournoyer said. “She also has a rare gift for getting stakeholders to the table and a tenacity to championing a cause to completion.”

The ceremony for Cournoyer’s ascension to the role of lieutenant governor was held in Reynolds’ formal office. Cournoyer’s parents, three other statewide elected officials and the Republican leader of the state senate entered the room before the event began. Cournoyer who spoke briefly after the governor explained her choice, said she’s ready to advance the governor’s agenda in any way that she can.

“I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would be second in line to Iowa’s succession,” Cournoyer said. “In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves.”

Cournoyer’s first campaign was for the Pleasant Valley School Board after she had raised a safety concern — and didn’t get a response from the board. Cournoyer won her seat in the Iowa Senate in 2018. A special election will be scheduled next year to fill the vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans will hold a super majority in 2025.

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KCRG: RCSD advocates for early childhood education, meets with state lawmakers

Mollie Swayne

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Lawmakers will be back in Des Moines for the start of the 2025 legislative session in just a few weeks. On Monday, education officials on the local level shared their hopes and concerns with those lawmakers ahead of the new year.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD) School Board met with four state lawmakers to share legislative priorities. The board and members of the public brought up a lot of topics: state funding, the new attendance law, book bans, free and reduced lunch, and more. However, School Board members made it clear their top priority was funding to make early childhood education available to every child.

“Parents and the community want full day four-year-old preschool,” said Board President Cindy Garlock.

“Thank you for all of your work that you are looking at ahead with funding, hopefully, full day preschool. We need it. We need it for our kids we need it for our economy,” said Monica Frey, principal of the Truman Early Learning Center, which does currently provide full day preschool.

The lawmakers heard board members' perspectives, then discussed whether funding for early childhood education was a priority for them, too.

The only member of the majority party at the meeting said child care was a priority, but that might not mean more money for schools.

Rep. Cindy Golding (R - Linn County) said, “Early childhood— child care is one of the initiatives. We’re not exactly sure how that funding — if it’s going through public schools, or child care centers, or it’s going to businesses for reimbursement for child care, but child care is a top priority.”

Tracy Ehlert (D- NW Cedar Rapids) pointed out that child care is not the same as early childhood education.

All lawmakers encouraged constituents to reach out to them and share their thoughts.

The legislative session starts on January 13.

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KCRG: ‘It means everything’: Dubuque manufacturer plans \$7M expansion, creating 15 new jobs

Keegan Turnbough

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - 15 new manufacturing jobs could be coming to Dubuque in 2026.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creates custom pressure vessels and tanks to filter water, capture landfill gases, vacuum trucks, and more. A \$7 million expansion plan would increase its capacity and reduce logjams.

“We have to move a tank 2 or 3 times because there’s no room to put it where we want to put it,” said Universal Tank & Fabrication President Dan Davis. “If we don’t have a booth sized the way or the size we need for a particular product, we have to lay a tank down that otherwise we could leave standing up.”

Davis’ goal for the facility is to create a continuous assembly line from bending metal, welding, blasting, and painting to putting together the finished product. Accomplishing the feat requires more space.

The project would add a 28,000-square-foot facility adjacent to its current structure, moving the blasting, painting, and assembling of products to the new facility. Increasing capacity means more hands are needed to handle more business.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creating 15 new jobs comes as job cuts hit Iowa’s manufacturing sector. In the last year, the state has lost 6,100 jobs in the industry.

Greater Dubuque Development Vice President of Business Services Jason White said by tapping into a variety of markets, Universal Tank & Fabrication helps stave off reductions.

“It’s a cause for celebration,” said White. “One industry that they serve may be down but others might be up. That’s a good way [...] to mute their risk. It’s a benefit to the community to foresee that because obviously it protects jobs, and in this case, creates new investments and new jobs.”

Growing the company in opposition to statewide manufacturing trends “means everything” to Davis.

“Nobody’s recession-proof, but we try to put ourselves in a position with the type of work we produce that we can continue to move forward even when the economy is not at its best,” explained Davis. “To be able to bring more people on, maybe people that are struggling to find work or maybe got put out of a job, it means a lot.”

Davis said Universal Tank and Fabrication is getting \$730,000 in rebates and tax incentives from city, state, and regional sources to finish expansions by January 2026.

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KCRG: Trump threatens lawsuit against Des Moines Register

Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - President-elect Donald Trump is threatening legal action against additional media outlets after ABC News agreed to settle a defamation lawsuit over the weekend.

The lawsuit against ABC News was over inaccurate statements made by anchor George Stephanopoulos, claiming that Trump had been found civilly liable for raping E. Jean Carroll.

Under the settlement, ABC News agreed to pay \$15 million toward Donald Trump's presidential library, and to post an editor's note online expressing regret over the statements.

CNN reports that on Monday, Trump shifted his sights onto the Des Moines Register, over its final poll before the 2024 election that showed Trump losing to Kamala Harris.

Trump's comments regarding the possible lawsuit were made during a press conference at Mar-a-Lago.

"We need a great media, we need a fair media. It's very important," Trump said.

Trump went on to say he believes the poll results were fraudulent and that it amounted to election interference.

The poll was conducted by J. Ann Selzer.

It showed Kamala Harris was beating Donald Trump in Iowa by three points. Trump ended up winning Iowa by more than 13 points.

Selzer has since ended her election polling to move onto "other ventures and opportunities."

"The idea that I intentionally set up to deliver this response, when I've never done that before - I've had plenty of opportunity to do it. It's not my ethic," Selzer told CNN. "But to suggest without a single shred of evidence that I was in cahoots with somebody, that I was being paid by somebody, it's hard to pay too much attention to it except that they are accusing me of a crime."

Other media lawsuits Trump spoke of include one against CBS over the editing of a 60 Minutes interview with Kamala Harris, which Trump also says he believes amounted to fraud and election interference.

A third potential lawsuit Trump mentioned was against journalist Bob Woodward. Trump alleges Woodward misquoted him from the tapes of an interview, and then sold the tapes, which were meant for reporting purposes only.

“I feel I have to do this. I shouldn’t really be the one to do it. It should have been the Justice Department or somebody else,” Trump said. “But I have to do it. It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press.”

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KCRG: Inside Iowa Politics: More accurate elections with quicker results ahead?

Dave Price

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa State Capitol Bureau) Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate, a Republican, wants Iowa legislators to help him make changes which he said will help ensure that only U.S. citizens vote in elections and that Iowans can get results sooner.

Pate wants county auditors to begin counting absentee ballots at 9 a.m. on Election Day instead of waiting until later in the day. That could speed up the reporting of results.

Pate thinks that could build trust among voters, especially those who question the process when they have to wait on results.

There was a 56-point difference between Democrats and Republicans in their confidence level about the accuracy results in this national Gallup Poll released before the election. The secretary of state also wants access to a federal database that could help determine whether a registered voter is a U.S. citizen, a requirement for voting in federal elections. The Biden administration refused to allow Pate access to those records in 2024, leading Pate and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird to file a lawsuit.

Here is background on the lawsuit from Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate and Attorney General Brenna Bird vs. the Biden administration on access to federal database on voters' citizenship.

Paul is optimistic that the incoming Trump administration will be more favorable to his request. Although, he said sometimes the federal bureaucracy can be slow to change.

Pate wants Iowa lawmakers to grant him the authority to seek state and federal records that could help confirm a person's legal status.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: Drone sighting epidemic spurs Dems in Congress to urge more transparency from feds

Jacob Fischler

Members of Congress are among those calling for greater transparency from the federal government as a spate of reported drone sightings concentrated in New Jersey and New York has raised questions beyond the Northeast.

Reported sightings of drones, officially known as unmanned aerial systems, or UAS, have spiked since Nov. 18, when authorities received several reports of suspicious drone activity near critical infrastructure in New Jersey, according to an FBI official in the state who briefed reporters over the weekend.

The increased activity has worried some and led to calls from lawmakers for the federal agencies to provide more information on drone activity, even as security officials urged caution.

In a statement that described an “epidemic of non-stop drone sightings,” U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for the federal government to deploy more drone-detection systems and to share information with local authorities.

“I want it deployed widely across New York and New Jersey to help give us concrete answers on what is going on, and from where,” Schumer, a New York Democrat, said of a drone-detection system that the federal government uses. “What we need right now is data. The briefings I have had tell me there is no evidence that this is a government or foreign activity, and so, we have to answer the logical of question of: who?”

Schumer called on Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to deploy the drone-detection system and said he would cosponsor a bill that would give local law enforcement more authority to respond to drone sightings.

Drones, like planes and other users of the national airspace, are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

“We still have very few answers on where some of these drones come from and who may be operating them,” Schumer said Monday on the Senate floor. “The people of New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions and haven’t gotten many answers. We know one thing, though. Local officials now don’t have the resources nor the authority to get to the bottom of what’s happening.”

On CBS’ Sunday morning news show “Face the Nation,” Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat who is a senior member of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee with jurisdiction over the FAA, called for federal officials to brief U.S. senators.

“We need more transparency,” she said.

‘No evidence’ of threat, says DOD

U.S. Defense Department spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Monday that there was “no evidence at this time that the reported drone sightings pose a national security or public safety threat or have a foreign nexus.”

Regardless, he said he wanted to take the public’s concerns seriously, but also offered further context.

The drone industry is expanding, with more than 1 million hobbyist and commercial drones licensed by the FAA and 8,000 in use daily.

He likened the drone sightings, even those near military installations or other important sites, to drivers who may get lost and turn up in their cars at places they are not supposed to be, something he said happens regularly without incident.

“The point being is that flying drones is not illegal,” he said. “There are thousands of drones flown around the U.S. on a daily basis. So, as a result, it’s not that unusual to see drones in the sky, nor is it an indication of malicious activity or any public safety threat.”

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, noted Monday that federal investigators had not found any malicious activity and urged residents to “calm down” about drone sightings.

Many recent reports of drones, noted by non-experts, turned out to be commercial planes flying regularly scheduled nighttime routes.

More than 5,000 tips

The New Jersey-based FBI official said that the vast majority of the more than 5,000 tips his office received in the past month related to unidentified objects in the night skies have not been “actionable.”

The official, who briefed reporters along with officials from other agencies on the condition their names not be used, said the FBI was working to identify the 100 or so tips that did warrant further investigation.

“I don’t want to cause alarm and panic, but you can’t ignore the sightings that have been there, and we are concerned about those just as much as anybody else is,” the FBI official said. “We’re doing our best to find the origin of that specific — of those drone activities. But I think there has been a slight overreaction.”

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CBS News: 2 killed, suspect dead in school shooting in Madison, Wisconsin, police say
Staff

MADISON, Wis. (CBS) — Two people were killed and a suspect was found dead in a shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin, on Monday morning.

Just before 11 a.m., Madison police responded to the mass shooting at the private school located at 4901 E. Buckeye Rd. on the east side of Madison.

Madison Chief of Police Shon F. Barnes said a second-grade student called 911 at 10:57 a.m. to report the shooting.

The shooting took place inside a classroom and study hall occupied by students in various grades, Barnes said.

The shooter has been identified as 15-year-old Natalie Rupnow, a student at the school who lived in Madison and went by the name Samantha. It is believed she died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after opening fire in the school.

Police said the two people who died in the shooting were a teenage student and a teacher.

According to Pastor Chris Dolson, who was speaking at a vigil for the victims on Monday night, the teacher who was killed may have been a substitute.

"There's a woman who called in sick today. She's a teacher. And there was a substitute that came in to take her place that was shot and killed," Dolson said. "Survivor guilt kicks in when those things happen."

CBS News has not independently confirmed the teacher's identity.

Five other students and another teacher were injured. Two of the wounded students remained in critical condition with life-threatening injuries Monday night, Barnes said.

The surviving teacher and three other students were treated for non-life-threatening injuries, and two of those victims have been released, while the other two have been stabilized, Barnes said.

Barnes confirmed officers found the teenage shooting suspect at the scene apparently having shot herself, and officers fired no shots. Police said the suspect used a 9 mm pistol, and police were working to trace the gun.

Rupnow was pronounced dead while being taken to the hospital, Barnes said.

All surviving students were reunited with their loved ones in the hours after the shooting, officials said.

As police searched for a motive late Monday, the FBI was working with local law enforcement to process the scene, conduct interviews, and obtain search warrants.

CBS News Chicago is told the suspected shooter's family is cooperating with police.

"Right now, my heart is heavy for my community," Barnes said earlier Monday. "My heart is heavy for Madison, and we have to come together as a community and figure out what happened here and make sure that it doesn't happen at any other place that should be a refuge for students in our community."

Mireille Jean-Charles is the mother of three boys who attend Abundant Life Christian School. She spoke with Meryl Hubbard, a reporter for CBS affiliate WISC-TV in Madison.

"It's sad, you know, to be home and then somebody calls you and says your kids' school in lockdown—and you don't know where they are. And I was there since 11. I finally got them, and thank God they were safe," Jean-Charles said. "But the trauma—it's a lot, because I'm sure they lost friends and a teacher, which is not OK. And I don't think they will be OK for a long time, and I'm not."

As reported by WISC, school director of elementary and school relations Barbara Weirs said the school does not have metal detectors, but does follow safety protocols. Weirs said the school held a practice lockdown at the beginning of the current academic year, the station reported.

"We've joked around about how safe a 400-student-bodied school—Christian private school—is, right?" a man said. "If it can happen here, it can literally happen anywhere."

Hours after the shooting, several officers were seen removing the door from a Madison home in a search Chief Barnes said was connected to the investigation.

"Our detectives are working hard in the investigative process to find out as many answers as we can so that we can further prevent these things from happening—not only in this community, but in other communities around our country," Barnes said.

Dave Wagner is the former principal of the school.

"My heart grieves beyond words with them," Wagner said. "I know the principal. I know several of the teachers. They're going to be impacted for their life by the tragedy of this day."

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers released the following statement:

"There are no words to describe the devastation and heartbreak we feel today after the school shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison this morning."

"Kathy and I join the people of Wisconsin in praying for the families and loved ones of those whose lives were so senselessly taken and for the educators, staff, and the entire

Abundant Life school community as they grapple with the grief, trauma, and loss of this gut-wrenching tragedy. We are also praying and hoping all those injured survive and recover.

"Kathy and I are also keeping in our hearts the first responders who acted quickly and ran toward danger to help save lives. This day will no doubt weigh heavily on them, and we are grateful for their critical response efforts in answering the call when they were needed most.

"As a father, a grandfather, and as governor, it is unthinkable that a kid or an educator might wake up and go to school one morning and never come home. This should never happen, and I will never accept this as a foregone reality or stop working to change it.

"Today my focus is on supporting these families and kids and the Abundant Life community, and the state stands ready to support them and the efforts of local law enforcement through what will undoubtedly be difficult days ahead."

Gov. Evers will be ordering the flags of the United States and the state of Wisconsin to half-staff across the state immediately until sunset on Sun., Dec. 22.

Abundant Life Christian School is a private, nondenominational religious school that serves just under 400 students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

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NPR: First public comments attributed to Assad claim he never planned to leave Syria
Hadeel Al-Shalchi

DAMASCUS, Syria — Former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is believed to have issued his first remarks since opposition forces took over Syria more than a week ago, claiming his departure from the country was "neither planned nor did it occur in the final hours of the battles" against the rebel forces he calls "terrorists."

The statement attributed to Assad was posted in English on the deposed Syrian presidency's account on the Telegram messaging app, dated Dec. 16, from Moscow. The Telegram post says there had been "several unsuccessful attempts to release the statement via Arabic and international media outlets."

It claims he fought beside the army to the very end "just meters from terrorists in the most dangerous and intense battlefields."

As the rebel forces entered the capital on Dec. 8, the statement says, Assad moved to a military airbase in the port city of Latakia in coordination with his Russian allies.

The statement goes on to say that upon arrival at the base, it was clear that his army had withdrawn from all battle lines and all their positions had fallen. It says that Moscow then arranged an immediate evacuation that evening as the base came under drone attacks. The Kremlin then gave Assad asylum in Russia.

"At no point during these events did I consider stepping down or seeking refuge, nor was such proposal made by any individual or party," the statement says. "The only course of action was to continue fighting against the terrorist onslaught."

The Assad regime fell just over a week ago when rebel forces led by jihadist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, stormed Damascus. The leader of HTS is Ahmed al-Sharaa, formerly known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, who has a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head and is designated as a terrorist by the United States.

Sharaa has made some appearances since his group's victory, asking the international community to assist Syria and send aid.

World

U.S. has made contact with Syrian rebel group HTS, Blinken says
But countries are grappling with how to interact with Syria's interim leadership. The European Union set out conditions on Monday for lifting sanctions that have devastated the Syrian economy. The EU said it wants guarantees that the interim Syrian government is planning a peaceful political transition which includes minorities.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday the U.S. had made "direct contact" with HTS, without elaborating on details of the talks.

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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Morning Clips 12.17.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 17, 2024 7:33 AM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: IGOV Morning Clips 12.17.2024.docx

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IOWA NEWS:

KCCI: 'Deeply honored': Chris Cournoyer sworn in as Iowa's lieutenant governor

Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds appointed state Sen. Chris Cournoyer to be her lieutenant governor Monday, more than three months after her first and only No. 2 in elected office resigned to take over the state bankers association.

Cournoyer was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and has a background in technology, having earned a computer science degree, done website design and worked for a tech company. In the Senate, she chaired the Education Budget Committee and was vice chair of the State Government Committee.

"She has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to — qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis," Reynolds said in a statement. "I can't wait to deploy Chris' extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways

and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans.”

Cournoyer is from LeClaire, in eastern Iowa.

"I am deeply honored to join your team," Cournoyer said to Reynolds in her opening remarks after being sworn in.

"I'm profoundly honored to serve as lieutenant governor, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach the role with all the seriousness it deserves," Cournoyer said. "I couldn't be more excited to join Governor Reynolds' team and do my part to implement her bold agenda for our state."

Reynolds' initial running mate, Adam Gregg, resigned his position Sept. 3 after serving more than seven years in office, saying that "my time in public service must come to a close." The Iowa Bankers Association on the same day announced Gregg as its incoming president and CEO.

Reynolds described Gregg as "a tremendous partner."

Iowa law states that the governor must appoint someone to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term.

Reynolds told reporters in early October that she would make a decision on Gregg's successor after the 2024 election, and the end-of-the-year rollout will allow Cournoyer a few weeks to settle in before joining Reynolds at her annual condition of the state speech after the legislative session begins in January.

"We want to get it right, you know, not only for the team, but for Iowans, and so I want to be very thoughtful in how I do that," Reynolds said in October.

'Deeply honored': Iowa state Sen. Chris Cournoyer speaks after being named lieutenant governor

Up for reelection in 2026, Reynolds will likely be joined by Cournoyer on the ballot if she chooses to run again.

Reynolds, who was former Gov. Terry Branstad's lieutenant governor, became governor in 2017 when Branstad was named U.S. ambassador to China. She was elected to a full term in 2018 and was reelected in 2022.

Reynolds in 2017 had named Gregg as her "acting" lieutenant governor after her own promotion. That followed legal questions over whether the Iowa Constitution gave an elected lieutenant governor the authority to appoint her replacement if she needed to step in as governor in the event the elected governor dies, resigns, or was removed from office. Until their inauguration in 2019, Gregg was left out of the line of succession.

In November's election, Iowa voters approved a legislatively referred constitutional amendment to explicitly allow for that appointment.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds names state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as next lieutenant governor of Iowa

Brianne Pfannenstiel and Stephen Gruber-Miller

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds has named state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as her next lieutenant governor after Adam Gregg resigned the post earlier this year.

It marks the first time Iowa will have women in both top roles.

The pick comes as Reynolds prepares to deliver her priorities for the 2025 legislative session and as she gears up for an expected reelection campaign in 2026.

Cournoyer, a Republican from LeClaire, will serve out the remainder of Gregg's term, which is set to expire at the end of 2026.

Reynolds made the announcement in her formal office in the Iowa Capitol Monday morning, and Cournoyer, who resigned her Senate seat the same day, immediately took the oath of office.

Reynolds praised her new second-in-command as a "doer" who, after failing to get answers from her local school board, first entered politics to run for the seat herself.

"That's the kind of person that Chris is," Reynolds said. "Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I."

Cournoyer, who was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and reelected to a second four-year term in 2022, called the experience "surreal."

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," she said.

Cournoyer was one of Nikki Haley's most high-profile endorsers in Iowa's 2024 Republican caucuses, writing that the former United Nations ambassador is "unafraid to stand up, correct the record and talk about the tough issues."

Reynolds suggests new lieutenant governor will play a role in STEM policy, making government more efficient. A mom of four, Cournoyer previously served as president of her local school board, as an adviser on the governor's STEM Advisory Council and as a reserve sheriff deputy. She has worked as a technology consultant, and she now runs her own business as an independent website designer and developer.

"Given this firsthand experience, Chris understands that one of the most effective ways to promote innovation in our economy is to promote it in our schools," Reynolds said. "As a member of the governor's STEM Advisory Council, she's been a key ally in my administration's efforts to prepare every student for the modern economy. She's also been engaged in the issue at a local level, serving as the president of her school board, and even teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students. This wide ranging expertise at the intersection of business, innovation and education is a major asset."

The role of lieutenant governor is often ceremonial in Iowa, and the state Constitution says the lieutenant governor is in charge of whatever duties the governor assigns.

Cournoyer said Monday she looks forward to "advancing the governor's agenda in any way I possibly can."

Cournoyer was the vice chair of the Senate State Government Committee, where she helped lead Reynolds' effort to reorganize and consolidate state government and Iowa's hundreds of state boards and commissions.

She took the lead in the Senate on a law Reynolds signed this year eliminating dozens of state boards and commissions. And she served as a member of a new board created by that law: The State Government Efficiency Review Committee.

She also spoke in Reynolds' office this year at the bill signing for a law that eliminated the requirement that Iowa boards and commissions have a balance of men and women serving on them. At the signing, she said there are more women serving in a range of careers than ever before.

"As Gov. Reynolds mentioned, her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively, as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills, dovetails especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science and artificial intelligence," Cournoyer said.

Special election will be needed to fill Cournoyer's Senate vacancy
Reynolds will need to call a special election to fill her vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans hold a 34-15 majority with Cournoyer's resignation of her legislative seat. Reynolds' spokesperson would not comment on when that election would be set.

"Chris has proven herself over the last six years as a smart, capable conservative," Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver, R-Grimes, said in a statement. "During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as lieutenant governor."

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner, D-Iowa City, also offered Cournoyer her congratulations.

"I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party," she said in a statement. "Iowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new lieutenant governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process."

Position opened after Adam Gregg resigned lieutenant governor role
Gregg resigned Sept. 3 to become president and CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association — a surprise decision that took effect immediately. He had served alongside Reynolds since she assumed the governorship in 2017 and named him as her No. 2. He was elected to the post as her running mate in 2018 and again in 2022.

Gregg's decision to leave mid-term was taken as a sign by many in the political world that Reynolds would seek reelection herself, rather than stepping aside and giving him room to run for governor.

Cournoyer is now expected to run alongside Reynolds if she does decide to seek a third full term as the state's chief executive. In Iowa, the governor and lieutenant governor run on a single ticket rather than being elected separately.

Iowa has no term limits for state offices.

During his tenure, Gregg served as co-chair of the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative and as chair of the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. He earned a base salary of just over \$103,000

last year.

In November, Iowa voters passed a state constitutional amendment clarifying the state's gubernatorial line of succession. Now, if the governor leaves office, the lieutenant governor will take that person's place. The new governor can then appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill the office's new vacancy.

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KCRG: Gov. Reynolds names new Lt. Governor

Conner Hendricks

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa Capitol Bureau) - Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds announced State Senator from LeClaire, Chris Cournoyer, as her new Lt. Governor during a press conference at the State Capitol on Monday morning.

Cournoyer was officially sworn in shortly after Reynolds' announcement.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019, representing the 35th Senate District. That includes parts of Clinton, Jackson, and Scott counties.

While introducing Cournoyer, Governor Reynolds said Iowans can trust Cournoyer should she ever have to step in as Governor.

"First and foremost, she has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to—qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis," Reynolds said. "I can't wait to deploy Chris' extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans."

Aside from the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has a background in technology and education. "I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed," she said.

In the state Senate, Cournoyer was the first to chair the newly created technology committee. Reynolds says she plans to tap in to Cournoyer's background to make state government better.

"Significant opportunities still exist to find efficiencies through technology. Hereto her expertise, especially in AI, will be invaluable," Reynolds said.

Cournoyer also serves on the Governor's STEM advisory council and she says she plans to continue that work to create more apprenticeships for Iowa students.

"Her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills dovetail especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science, and artificial intelligence," Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer replaces former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who had served alongside Reynolds since 2017. He resigned in September to take a position leading the Iowa Bankers Association.

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The Gazette: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds names Sen. Chris Cournoyer lieutenant governor

Erin Murphy, Tom Barton

DES MOINES — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds describes Chris Cournoyer, her new lieutenant governor, as someone who is driven, whose character and judgment she trusts and who can help her efforts to streamline state government.

Cournoyer, 54, from Le Claire, was sworn in Monday as Iowa's 48th lieutenant governor during a ceremony in the Governor's Formal Office at the Iowa Capitol. Cournoyer, a Republican like Reynolds, had been serving in the Iowa Senate since 2019.

She succeeds former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who abruptly resigned in early September to become the incoming president and chief executive officer of the Iowa Bankers Association. The association advocates for, provides resources to and lobbies on behalf of Iowa banks.

"It's an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa's lieutenant governor," Cournoyer said Monday. "I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would ever be second in line to Iowa's succession. In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves."

Cournoyer was sworn in by Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice Susan Christensen. Reynolds, Iowa's first female governor, appointed Christensen to the court in 2018.

Neither Reynolds nor Cournoyer took questions from reporters after the ceremony.

Iowa voters in November passed a state constitutional amendment that clarifies that an appointed — rather than elected — lieutenant governor is first in line in the succession order. While the position was vacant, next in the gubernatorial line of succession was Iowa Senate President Amy Sinclair, a Republican from Allerton.

Reynolds has two years remaining on her current term. She will be up for re-election in 2026. She has not yet said whether she will seek another term.

With Cournoyer's appointment, she and Reynolds form the state's first-ever all-female governor and lieutenant governor leadership duo.

"First and foremost, she's someone that I would trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to. I have complete confidence in her character, her judgment and her ability," Reynolds said Monday. "It's these same qualities that also make her ideally suited to serve as a member of my team, where she'll support our work on a wide range of policy priorities, often drawing on her knowledge of technology and innovation. ...

"It's exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris' experience in her new role."

Cournoyer will be paid \$103,000, the salary for the position set by the Iowa Legislature.

Cournoyer resigned from her Iowa Senate seat, a Senate Republican spokesman confirmed Monday. Cournoyer had two years remaining in her second, four-year term. She represented Iowa Senate District 35, which covers Clinton County as well as slices of northern Scott and southwestern Jackson counties.

A special election will be held to fill the seat vacated by Cournoyer's move. The governor sets special election dates. A spokesman for the governor said there was no information yet on that special election date.

Cournoyer will be Reynolds' second lieutenant governor. Reynolds was herself Iowa's lieutenant governor from 2011 to 2017 under then-Gov. Terry Branstad. She ascended to the governor's office when Branstad was tabbed as U.S. ambassador to China.

Reynolds selected Gregg, who had been serving as the state's public defender. He served as lieutenant governor from 2017 to earlier this year.

During her remarks Monday, Cournoyer recalled the first time she met Reynolds, in 2015, when Reynolds was lieutenant governor. Reynolds spoke at an event in Davenport to encourage girls to engage in science, technology, engineering and mathematics — commonly known as STEM — classes and programs.

"Having someone of (Reynolds') stature in attendance was a big win for us, and I was even more excited when I heard her speak on a subject that I cared so deeply about," Cournoyer said. "She spoke with passion and understanding about how a new, hands-on, work-based learning paradigm could modernize our economy while reaching underserved students of all stripes. And just as importantly, she had bold ideas for making it happen."

In addition to serving in the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has worked as a website designer, a substitute teacher and as a reserve deputy for the Scott County Sheriff's Department. In the Senate, she served as chair of the Senate Technology Committee and vice chair of the State Government committee and an assistant majority leader. Previously, she chaired the subcommittee that writes the state's education budget.

Cournoyer first won election to the Iowa Senate in 2018, flipping the seat to Republican control, and was reelected in 2022. Before that, she served on the Pleasant Valley School Board.

During her time in the Senate, Cournoyer has supported Reynolds' priorities on tax cuts, education savings accounts, restrictions of content in schools and changes to Area Education Agencies. In recent years, Cournoyer has worked on legislation dealing with consumer data privacy, digital stalking, cybersecurity, public notices, vapor products and repealing gender balance for public boards and commissions.

During the run-up to the 2024 Republican Iowa presidential precinct caucuses, Cournoyer endorsed Republican presidential candidate and former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley. Reynolds endorsed Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Cournoyer was born in Dallas, Texas, and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor's degree in computer science. She has four children.

"She has one, final, central trait that I love, and that is she's a doer. She gets in there and she wants to make a difference," Reynolds said. "That's the kind of person that Chris is. Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I."

As lieutenant governor, Gregg led the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative, the Feeding Iowans Task Force in 2020 and the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. The working group focused on recommendations to reduce recidivism through successful offender reentry.

Gregg, in his resignation letter to Reynolds, said he was stepping down to focus more on his family. Before serving as Reynolds' first lieutenant governor, Gregg was the state's public defender. He ran unsuccessfully

for Iowa Attorney General in 2014.

The role of lieutenant governor is not statutorily defined in Iowa Code. Under the Iowa Constitution, the lieutenant governor performs duties assigned by the governor. Under Iowa law, the governor has the power to appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill a vacancy and serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Iowa voters last fall approved an amendment to the Iowa Constitution that clarified when a governor chooses a new lieutenant governor, that new lieutenant is endowed with all of the office's constitutional authority, including being placed first in the line of succession to the governor.

Previously, the Iowa Constitution was unclear about an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor's authority. A formal opinion from then-Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller in 2017 said the state constitution did not place an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor in the gubernatorial line of succession.

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DMR: DMPS recommits to 'sanctuary resolution' to help immigrant students in face of deportations

Samantha Hernandez

The Des Moines School Board is taking a stand in support of its immigrant families ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's call for mass deportations.

During the regular board meeting Tuesday, members Anna Campos and Maria Alonzo read a statement in English and Spanish declaring that the board and district officials would do everything possible to support area families.

While the board stopped short of declaring itself a "sanctuary district," it recommitted to the "sanctuary resolution" it passed in 2017 that promised "to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status," Campos said.

"The intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is creating anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status," Campos said. "We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds."

The district doesn't track undocumented students, but officials say more than 4,000 of Des Moines' 30,000 public school students were born outside of the U.S. DMPS is Iowa's largest and most diverse school district, with students of color comprising more than half its enrollment.

During Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, he promised to curb immigration, deport undocumented immigrants en masse and build a wall along the United States-Mexico border. Early in his presidency, he banned people from Muslim-majority countries from entering the country for 90 days.

During his 2024 campaign, Trump once again promised mass deportations of people who are undocumented.

On Friday, Gov. Kim Reynolds joined with 25 other Republican governors who vowed to help the incoming president carry out his plan to remove undocumented people.

This includes deploying the Iowa National Guard and law enforcement, according to a joint statement.

Reynolds – who has traveled multiple times to the U.S.-Mexico border – has previously deployed Iowa State Patrol officers and National Guard soldiers to the border.

The Des Moines School Board joins Chicago Public Schools' board of education in publicly standing behind its immigrant community. Last month, the Chicago Board of Education passed a resolution reaffirming "its commitment to protect students of various immigration statuses, gender identities and sexual orientation," according to Chalkbeat Chicago.

The Des Moines School Board felt making this statement was important, Alonzo told the Des Moines Register.

"We recognize as a board and as a district that the lives of many of our students and their families will be impacted because of immigration policy," she said.

From 2016:Yes, Trump will have broad power to crack down on immigration

DMPS school board passed 2017 'sanctuary resolution'

In February 2017, the school board approved two resolutions that gave guidance on how employees should handle requests from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE and encouraged state lawmakers to support the Bar Removal of Individuals who Dream and Grow our Economy Act or BRIDGE Act.

The "sanctuary resolution" required all requests to go through the superintendent and district legal counsel, according to a news release at the time. The resolution was also intended to "remind DMPS staff that they may not inquire about the immigration or citizenship status of students or their parents or guardians."

At the time, about 4,000 Des Moines students were born outside of the United States.

Currently, 86% of the Des Moines Public Schools' students were born in the United States, said Phil Roeder, a district spokesperson. The remaining 14% represent 101 nations.

The second resolution was in support of 5,500 Iowa students registered under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy or DACA, the 2017 news release states.

The BRIDGE Act would have provided temporary relief from deportation for DACA recipients and allowed them to work in the U.S.

"What we did eight years ago was really make a commitment that our buildings would be safe for all of our students and families," said Rob Barron, who sat on the board at the time, in an interview Thursday.

Trump has previously worked to end DACA but said in a recent interview he wants to protect recipients. However, he has also said he intends to end birthright citizenship for the children of undocumented immigrants. The U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment establishes the right to citizenship by birth.

From 2017:Des Moines creates 'sanctuary schools' for undocumented students

School districts are probably serving more undocumented or mixed immigration status families than people realize, Barron said.

"What matters more than anything else is students feel safe in their schools, and their parents feel like they can come to school and be active participants in the school community," he said. "... And there's a long-

standing precedent that schools and churches are not a place where ICE will do an immigration enforcement action. And it's a federal precedent (and) it's been bipartisan."

Alonzo: 'We are a safe space for families'

Superintendent Ian Roberts and others have been working with community partners to identify needed resources.

"We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance and their ability to learn," Campos said during Tuesday's meeting. "To address these challenges, the board is partnering with the superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families."

Alonzo believes there will be no cost to the district to offer this assistance.

Des Moines Public Schools and the board's overarching message is that families know they are not alone, she said.

"Our statement, I think, sent the message that we are a safe space for families," Alonzo told the Register. "That we stand with immigrant (and) refugee communities who might be affected by a change in policy."

The DMPS statement

Living in a democracy means embracing the peaceful transfer of power through elections, a cornerstone of our nation's history. However, the intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is (creating) anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status. We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds.

In 2017, in light of multiple federal executive actions negatively impacting immigrant families, Des Moines Public Schools passed a resolution to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status. As a district, we remain committed to ensuring equal protection and safeguarding our students from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, citizenship, immigration status, or national origin.

We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance, and their ability to learn. To address these challenges, the Board is partnering with the Superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families.

Our dedication to fostering a safe and inclusive environment remains unwavering. DMPS is committed to respecting and supporting our youth and their families, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive. Together, we uphold the values of inclusivity, respect, and understanding that are essential to our vibrant, diverse, amazing school community.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said in a statement Monday the state government is always going to be concerned about the well-being of children.

"The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit," she said. "Because of this, the state's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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KCCI: Pella school board considers budget cuts for upcoming school year, cites enrollment numbers

Ophelie Jacobson

PELLA, Iowa —

The Pella school board reviewed the superintendent's recommended reductions for the district's budget for the upcoming school year Monday night.

Pella Community School District superintendent Greg Ebeling presented ways he feels the school district can save money next year. The recommended cuts would save the district \$888,949.

"Enrollment is obviously a driver of this stuff," Ebeling said. "We know we're graduating a class of 200, we're bringing in 150. We know we got a 50-student gap."

Ebeling says school vouchers have played a role causing the drop in enrollment. Gov. Kim Reynolds' Education Savings Account Program went into effect in 2023.

The superintendent told KCCI that class sizes could increase and staff members could be shifted within the school district. However, Ebeling said he is only estimating that one to two people will lose their jobs.

"We don't love making the reductions, but in terms of actually affecting people that want to be employed here next year, it's very little," he said.

The school board set a public hearing for the budget reduction for Jan. 13. A work session is scheduled for the following week. The final budget will be up for a vote on Jan. 27.

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KCCI: Opposition group to Summit pipeline says company threatened legal action

Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

One of the most active opponents to a controversial carbon pipeline says it has been threatened with legal action.

The Sierra Club says at least six people received letters from Summit Carbon Solutions, demanding retractions of various public statements. That includes Sierra Club's conservation director Jess Mazour.

KCCI has asked the Sierra Club to provide us the letter itself. It has not responded to our request. We've also asked Summit for a statement on the letters. We have not yet received one.

The Summit Carbon Capture Pipeline would go through five states, including here in Iowa.

The company wants to store carbon dioxide delivered through the pipeline underground.

The Iowa Utilities Commission already issued a permit for the project. Just last month, the North Dakota Public Service Commission granted a route permit.

Summit is still waiting on a permit from South Dakota.

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WOI: Iowa leaders congratulate Chris Cournoyer on being sworn in as lieutenant governor

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — Congratulations are rolling in from both sides of the aisle for Iowa's newly sworn-in lieutenant governor.

Gov. Kim Reynolds announced Monday that Republican Sen. Chris Cournoyer, who currently represents District 35, will serve as lieutenant governor for the remainder of Reynolds' term.

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," Cournoyer said.

Leaders from across the state offered congratulatory messages and praised Cournoyer for her experience and knowledge. Here's what they had to say:

Attorney General Brenna Bird

"Chris Cournoyer will make an excellent Lieutenant Governor! She is tough and determined. As a State Senator, she delivered for Iowa families and strengthened our schools. Together, Gov. Reynolds and LG Cournoyer will keep Iowa moving in the right direction!"

State Auditor Rob Sand

"Congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on her appointment as Iowa's Lieutenant Governor. I am happy to work with anyone to serve Iowans."

State Treasurer Roby Smith

"I've known Chris for nearly a decade and worked closely with her during my time in the Iowa Senate. During the two years she served as Vice Chair while I was Chair of the State Government Committee, she consistently impressed me with her energy, work ethic and character. With her experience, knowledge, and skills, Chris is well positioned to serve Iowans in this important role."

Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver

"Chris has proven herself over the last 6 years as a smart, capable conservative. During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as Lieutenant Governor."

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner

"I would like to offer my congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on being named Iowa's new Lieutenant Governor. I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party. Iowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new Lieutenant Governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process. On behalf of Iowa families, our commitment to bettering our schools and easing pocketbook burdens is resolute. I encourage the Reynolds Administration, and our new Lieutenant Governor, to join the effort of creating a freer, more prosperous Iowa for all."

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig

"Governor Reynolds is a champion for Iowa's farmers, agribusinesses and our rural communities and she has made a strong selection in choosing Chris Cournoyer as Iowa's next Lieutenant Governor. As a State Senator, Chris Cournoyer was a strong supporter of Iowa agriculture, and I have no doubt that she will bring the same leadership to her new role as we work to keep Iowa moving forward. I am excited to work with Governor Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Cournoyer to grow markets for Iowa products, accelerate our conservation and water quality efforts, and make Iowa an even better place to live, work, and raise a family."

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Radio Iowa: Governor Reynolds chooses State Senator Cournoyer as Lt. Governor

Kay Henderson

Governor Kim Reynolds has chosen a state senator from Le Claire to be her lieutenant governor.

"She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty and she does the work," Reynolds said, "and the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor and neither can I."

Chris Cournoyer took the oath of office in a ceremony at the statehouse this morning. "It's an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa's lieutenant governor," Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019. Iowa has not had a lieutenant governor since September 2 when Adam Gregg resigned to become CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association. Reynolds waited until after the election to begin interviewing candidates for the position. The governor said Cournoyer will

support a wide range of policy priorities.

“First and foremost she’s someone that Iowans could trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to,” Reynolds said. “I have complete confidence in her character, her judgement and her ability.”

Reynolds, who was a state senator in 2010 when Governor Terry Branstad chose her as his running mate, said Cournoyer is ideally suited to join her administration. “Chris has been a state senator, a reserve deputy and a long time leader and volunteer in her rural community of Le Claire. She’s also a small business owner and an expert in technology and A.I. and what I know she considers her most important job — a mom to four children,” Reynolds said. “Even on paper, the depth of her experience stands out.”

Cournoyer, who is 54, graduated from the University of Texas with a computer science degree and worked as a consultant in a Fortune 500 firm before becoming an independent website developer. The governor said Cournoyer’s firsthand experience — including her work teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students — are major assets.

“It’s exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris’s experience in her new role,” Reynolds said. “Here’s a working mother who has known the joys and challenges of raising children while being in the workforce and owning a business.”

Cournoyer has been chairman of the Iowa Senate Technology Committee since its creation. “Growing up in the ’80s, I had a subscription to PC Magazine and a treasured dot matrix printer,” Cournoyer said. “I even did an 8th grade science fair project on Artificial Intelligence, so basically I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed.”

Cournoyer first met the governor in 2015, back when Reynolds was lieutenant governor, at a Davenport event focused on encouraging girls and young women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

“She isn’t afraid to tackle tough problems from tax reform to education freedom to mental health and so much more,” Cournoyer said. “She also has a rare gift for getting stakeholders to the table and a tenacity to championing a cause to completion.”

The ceremony for Cournoyer’s ascension to the role of lieutenant governor was held in Reynolds’ formal office. Cournoyer’s parents, three other statewide elected officials and the Republican leader of the state senate entered the room before the event began. Cournoyer who spoke briefly after the governor explained her choice, said she’s ready to advance the governor’s agenda in any way that she can.

“I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would be second in line to Iowa’s succession,” Cournoyer said. “In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves.”

Cournoyer’s first campaign was for the Pleasant Valley School Board after she had raised a safety concern — and didn’t get a response from the board. Cournoyer won her seat in the Iowa Senate in 2018. A special election will be scheduled next year to fill the vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans will hold a super majority in 2025.

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KCRG: RCSD advocates for early childhood education, meets with state lawmakers

Mollie Swayne

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Lawmakers will be back in Des Moines for the start of the 2025 legislative session in just a few weeks. On Monday, education officials on the local level shared their hopes and concerns with those lawmakers ahead of the new year.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD) School Board met with four state lawmakers to share legislative priorities. The board and members of the public brought up a lot of topics: state funding, the new attendance law, book bans, free and reduced lunch, and more. However, School Board members made it clear their top priority was funding to make early childhood education available to every child.

"Parents and the community want full day four-year-old preschool," said Board President Cindy Garlock.

"Thank you for all of your work that you are looking at ahead with funding, hopefully, full day preschool. We need it. We need it for our kids we need it for our economy," said Monica Frey, principal of the Truman Early Learning Center, which does currently provide full day preschool.

The lawmakers heard board members' perspectives, then discussed whether funding for early childhood education was a priority for them, too.

The only member of the majority party at the meeting said child care was a priority, but that might not mean more money for schools.

Rep. Cindy Golding (R - Linn County) said, "Early childhood— child care is one of the initiatives. We're not exactly sure how that funding — if it's going through public schools, or child care centers, or it's going to businesses for reimbursement for child care, but child care is a top priority."

Tracy Ehlert (D- NW Cedar Rapids) pointed out that child care is not the same as early childhood education.

All lawmakers encouraged constituents to reach out to them and share their thoughts.

The legislative session starts on January 13.

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KCRG: 'It means everything': Dubuque manufacturer plans \$7M expansion, creating 15 new jobs

Keegan Turnbough

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - 15 new manufacturing jobs could be coming to Dubuque in 2026.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creates custom pressure vessels and tanks to filter water, capture landfill gases, vacuum trucks, and more. A \$7 million expansion plan would increase its capacity and reduce logjams.

"We have to move a tank 2 or 3 times because there's no room to put it where we want to put it," said

Universal Tank & Fabrication President Dan Davis. "If we don't have a booth sized the way or the size we need for a particular product, we have to lay a tank down that otherwise we could leave standing up."

Davis' goal for the facility is to create a continuous assembly line from bending metal, welding, blasting, and painting to putting together the finished product. Accomplishing the feat requires more space.

The project would add a 28,000-square-foot facility adjacent to its current structure, moving the blasting, painting, and assembling of products to the new facility. Increasing capacity means more hands are needed to handle more business.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creating 15 new jobs comes as job cuts hit Iowa's manufacturing sector. In the last year, the state has lost 6,100 jobs in the industry.

Greater Dubuque Development Vice President of Business Services Jason White said by tapping into a variety of markets, Universal Tank & Fabrication helps stave off reductions.

"It's a cause for celebration," said White. "One industry that they serve may be down but others might be up. That's a good way [...] to mute their risk. It's a benefit to the community to foresee that because obviously it protects jobs, and in this case, creates new investments and new jobs."

Growing the company in opposition to statewide manufacturing trends "means everything" to Davis.

"Nobody's recession-proof, but we try to put ourselves in a position with the type of work we produce that we can continue to move forward even when the economy is not at its best," explained Davis. "To be able to bring more people on, maybe people that are struggling to find work or maybe got put out of a job, it means a lot."

Davis said Universal Tank and Fabrication is getting \$730,000 in rebates and tax incentives from city, state, and regional sources to finish expansions by January 2026.

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KCRG: Trump threatens lawsuit against Des Moines Register

Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - President-elect Donald Trump is threatening legal action against additional media outlets after ABC News agreed to settle a defamation lawsuit over the weekend.

The lawsuit against ABC News was over inaccurate statements made by anchor George Stephanopoulos, claiming that Trump had been found civilly liable for raping E. Jean Carroll.

Under the settlement, ABC News agreed to pay \$15 million toward Donald Trump's presidential library, and to post an editor's note online expressing regret over the statements.

CNN reports that on Monday, Trump shifted his sights onto the Des Moines Register, over its final poll before the 2024 election that showed Trump losing to Kamala Harris.

Trump's comments regarding the possible lawsuit were made during a press conference at Mar-a-Lago.

"We need a great media, we need a fair media. It's very important," Trump said.

Trump went on to say he believes the poll results were fraudulent and that it amounted to election interference.

The poll was conducted by J. Ann Selzer.

It showed Kamala Harris was beating Donald Trump in Iowa by three points. Trump ended up winning Iowa by more than 13 points.

Selzer has since ended her election polling to move onto "other ventures and opportunities."

"The idea that I intentionally set up to deliver this response, when I've never done that before - I've had plenty of opportunity to do it. It's not my ethic," Selzer told CNN. "But to suggest without a single shred of evidence that I was in cahoots with somebody, that I was being paid by somebody, it's hard to pay too much attention to it except that they are accusing me of a crime."

Other media lawsuits Trump spoke of include one against CBS over the editing of a 60 Minutes interview with Kamala Harris, which Trump also says he believes amounted to fraud and election interference.

A third potential lawsuit Trump mentioned was against journalist Bob Woodward. Trump alleges Woodward misquoted him from the tapes of an interview, and then sold the tapes, which were meant for reporting purposes only.

"I feel I have to do this. I shouldn't really be the one to do it. It should have been the Justice Department or somebody else," Trump said. "But I have to do it. It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press."

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KCRG: Inside Iowa Politics: More accurate elections with quicker results ahead?

Dave Price

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa State Capitol Bureau) Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate, a Republican, wants Iowa legislators to help him make changes which he said will help ensure that only U.S. citizens vote in elections and that Iowans can get results sooner.

Pate wants county auditors to begin counting absentee ballots at 9 a.m. on Election Day instead of waiting until later in the day. That could speed up the reporting of results.

Pate thinks that could build trust among voters, especially those who question the process when they have to wait on results.

There was a 56-point difference between Democrats and Republicans in their confidence level about the

accuracy results in this national Gallup Poll released before the election.

The secretary of state also wants access to a federal database that could help determine whether a registered voter is a U.S. citizen, a requirement for voting in federal elections. The Biden administration refused to allow Pate access to those records in 2024, leading Pate and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird to file a lawsuit.

Here is background on the lawsuit from Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate and Attorney General Brenna Bird vs. the Biden administration on access to federal database on voters' citizenship.

Paul is optimistic that the incoming Trump administration will be more favorable to his request. Although, he said sometimes the federal bureaucracy can be slow to change.

Pate wants Iowa lawmakers to grant him the authority to seek state and federal records that could help confirm a person's legal status.

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DMR: Who is Chris Cournoyer? What to know about the new Iowa lieutenant governor

Stephen Gruber-Miller and Brianne Pfannenstiel

Former state Sen. Chris Cournoyer is officially Iowa's newest lieutenant governor.

Cournoyer, a Republican from LeClaire, is a former lawmaker, school board member and reserve sheriff's deputy, who has a background in computer science.

At her swearing in ceremony Monday, Cournoyer called it "humbling" to take on the job as lieutenant governor.

"Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," she said.

Gov. Kim Reynolds named Cournoyer to the job after former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg resigned in September to become president and CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association.

Here's what to know about the new lieutenant governor.

Chris Cournoyer was elected twice to the Iowa Senate

Cournoyer was first elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and reelected to a second four-year term in 2022.

She represented Iowa Senate District 35, which includes Clinton County and parts of Scott and Jackson counties, including Clinton, Camanche, DeWitt, Maquoketa and LeClaire.

Cournoyer resigned her Iowa Senate seat "effective immediately" Monday morning before swearing the oath of office as lieutenant governor.

Reynolds will need to call a special election to select her replacement in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans hold a 34-15 supermajority.

The governor has not set a date for that special election.

Cournoyer has a background in technology and computer science
She chaired the Senate Technology Committee and experience in computer science.

Cournoyer holds a bachelor's degree in computer science from the University of Texas and runs a website design business. She also worked as a senior consultant in the technology division at Andersen Consulting, which is now Accenture, according to a news release from the governor's office.

She also is a member of the Governor's STEM Advisory Council and a former member of the Quad City Engineering and Science Council.

Reynolds highlighted that background in her speech Monday announcing Cournoyer as her pick for lieutenant governor.

"It's exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris' experience in her new role," Reynolds said. "Here's a working mother who has known the joys and challenges of raising children while being in the workforce and owning a business, a computer science major who was thinking about optimizing computers for user experience in the late 90s, and a woman who then went on to drive innovation her entire working life."

Cournoyer helped lead Reynolds' efforts to shrink state government
She was the vice chair of the Senate State Government Committee, where she helped lead Reynolds' effort to reorganize and consolidate state government and Iowa's hundreds of state boards and commissions.

She took the lead in the Senate on a law Reynolds signed this year eliminating dozens of state boards and commissions. And she served as a member of a new board created by that law: The State Government Efficiency Review Committee.

Chris Cournoyer speaks after being sworn in as Gov. Kim Reynolds' next lieutenant governor on Monday, Dec. 16, 2024, at the Iowa State Capitol.

She also spoke in Reynolds' office this year at the bill signing for a law that eliminated the requirement that Iowa boards and commissions have a balance of men and women serving on them. At the signing, she said there are more women serving in a range of careers than ever before.

Reynolds praised Cournoyer's role in helping her reorganize state government.

"I'm excited about today's announcement because it advances my goal of becoming ... more efficient in how we deliver services to Iowans while also providing the best possible value for taxpayers," Reynolds said Monday. "Even after implementing alignment, which Chris worked on as the vice chair of the Senate state government committee, significant opportunities still exist to find efficiencies through technology. Here too, her expertise, especially in AI, will be invaluable."

A former reserve sheriff deputy with the Scott County Sheriff's Department, Cournoyer also served on the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy Council.

Cournoyer served on the Pleasant Valley School Board
She served for five years on the Pleasant Valley School Board, including a stint as its president.

She is also a substitute teacher and works with students as a robotics and coding teacher.

In the Senate, Cournoyer served on the Education Committee and was chair of the Education Appropriations Subcommittee, which handles the budget for K-12 and higher education in Iowa.

And she was a member of the Area Education Agency Task Force, which was charged with examining the impact of a law Reynolds signed this year reorganizing the AEAs' responsibilities and funding.

"As a school board president and active substitute teacher in my district, I personally witnessed how STEM and work-based learning can bring concepts alive for students and set them on a path for long-term success," Cournoyer said Monday. "Taken together, my experience has repeatedly taught me the amazing potential of technology to transform legacy systems, grow Iowa's economy and empower students. This vision has always been at the heart of Governor Reynolds' agenda, and I couldn't be more excited to join her team and do my part to implement it on behalf of Iowans."

Cournoyer was a Nikki Haley endorser

She was one of the first prominent Iowans to endorse Nikki Haley when the former United Nations ambassador announced her campaign for president last year.

She served as Iowa State Chair for Haley's campaign ahead of the Iowa Caucuses in January and campaigned around the state for Haley, calling her "a champion for the next generation."

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DMR: New addiction recovery center in Pleasant Hill opens

F. Amanda Tugade

A new addiction treatment center in Pleasant Hill hopes to partner with community agencies and create a stronger support system for central Iowans coping with substance abuse.

One of the few medical detox facilities in the Des Moines metro, ThriveNow Recovery Center at 6132 N.E. 12th Ave. seeks to help fill the resource gap and work with law enforcement officials, mobile crisis response teams and other health care workers, said Brock Mulligan, the center's senior development and community relations coordinator. The facility opened in early December.

The center's launch comes as Polk County opens its sobering center to help those with alcoholism. The sobering center only allows for brief stays, and those interested in receiving more care and expanded programming can turn to ThriveNow, Mulligan said.

ThriveNow Recovery Center in Pleasant Hill opened in early December. The center at 6132 N.E. 12th Ave. has medical detox beds and a residential treatment program for those with substance abuse.

"We'll be one of their resources," he said.

A former site of an assisted living community, ThriveNow was renovated into a recovery center for adult men and women with 12 medical detox beds. It also offers residential treatment program stays for 28 days, Mulligan said. He added that the center accepts Medicaid and private or commercial insurance. Self-pay options also are available.

"We want to be inclusive of all different types of people," added Brandon George, chief strategy officer of Ascension Recovery Services, which oversees ThriveNow. "... We have to be able to serve everybody in the community, not just people that have money."

The Iowa Department of Public Health has reported an increase in drug and alcohol use in the state, particularly with nicotine and binge drinking. Substance-related deaths reached record highs in 2021.

Last year, Iowa ranked 35th in the country in illicit drug use and 48th in overdose deaths, the health department reported.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: Drone sighting epidemic spurs Dems in Congress to urge more transparency from feds

Jacob Fischler

Members of Congress are among those calling for greater transparency from the federal government as a spate of reported drone sightings concentrated in New Jersey and New York has raised questions beyond the Northeast.

Reported sightings of drones, officially known as unmanned aerial systems, or UAS, have spiked since Nov. 18, when authorities received several reports of suspicious drone activity near critical infrastructure in New Jersey, according to an FBI official in the state who briefed reporters over the weekend.

The increased activity has worried some and led to calls from lawmakers for the federal agencies to provide more information on drone activity, even as security officials urged caution.

In a statement that described an “epidemic of non-stop drone sightings,” U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for the federal government to deploy more drone-detection systems and to share information with local authorities.

“I want it deployed widely across New York and New Jersey to help give us concrete answers on what is going on, and from where,” Schumer, a New York Democrat, said of a drone-detection system that the federal government uses. “What we need right now is data. The briefings I have had tell me there is no evidence that this is a government or foreign activity, and so, we have to answer the logical question of: who?”

Schumer called on Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to deploy the drone-detection system and said he would cosponsor a bill that would give local law enforcement more authority to respond to drone sightings.

Drones, like planes and other users of the national airspace, are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

“We still have very few answers on where some of these drones come from and who may be operating them,” Schumer said Monday on the Senate floor. “The people of New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions and haven’t gotten many answers. We know one thing, though. Local officials now don’t have the resources nor the authority to get to the bottom of what’s happening.”

On CBS’ Sunday morning news show “Face the Nation,” Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat who is a senior member of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee with jurisdiction over the FAA, called for federal officials to brief U.S. senators.

"We need more transparency," she said.

'No evidence' of threat, says DOD

U.S. Defense Department spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Monday that there was "no evidence at this time that the reported drone sightings pose a national security or public safety threat or have a foreign nexus."

Regardless, he said he wanted to take the public's concerns seriously, but also offered further context.

The drone industry is expanding, with more than 1 million hobbyist and commercial drones licensed by the FAA and 8,000 in use daily.

He likened the drone sightings, even those near military installations or other important sites, to drivers who may get lost and turn up in their cars at places they are not supposed to be, something he said happens regularly without incident.

"The point being is that flying drones is not illegal," he said. "There are thousands of drones flown around the U.S. on a daily basis. So, as a result, it's not that unusual to see drones in the sky, nor is it an indication of malicious activity or any public safety threat."

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, noted Monday that federal investigators had not found any malicious activity and urged residents to "calm down" about drone sightings.

Many recent reports of drones, noted by non-experts, turned out to be commercial planes flying regularly scheduled nighttime routes.

More than 5,000 tips

The New Jersey-based FBI official said that the vast majority of the more than 5,000 tips his office received in the past month related to unidentified objects in the night skies have not been "actionable."

The official, who briefed reporters along with officials from other agencies on the condition their names not be used, said the FBI was working to identify the 100 or so tips that did warrant further investigation.

"I don't want to cause alarm and panic, but you can't ignore the sightings that have been there, and we are concerned about those just as much as anybody else is," the FBI official said. "We're doing our best to find the origin of that specific — of those drone activities. But I think there has been a slight overreaction."

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CBS News: 2 killed, suspect dead in school shooting in Madison, Wisconsin, police say

Staff

MADISON, Wis. (CBS) — Two people were killed and a suspect was found dead in a shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin, on Monday morning.

Just before 11 a.m., Madison police responded to the mass shooting at the private school located at 4901 E. Buckeye Rd. on the east side of Madison.

Madison Chief of Police Shon F. Barnes said a second-grade student called 911 at 10:57 a.m. to report the shooting.

The shooting took place inside a classroom and study hall occupied by students in various grades, Barnes said.

The shooter has been identified as 15-year-old Natalie Rupnow, a student at the school who lived in Madison and went by the name Samantha. It is believed she died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after opening fire in the school.

Police said the two people who died in the shooting were a teenage student and a teacher.

According to Pastor Chris Dolson, who was speaking at a vigil for the victims on Monday night, the teacher who was killed may have been a substitute.

"There's a woman who called in sick today. She's a teacher. And there was a substitute that came in to take her place that was shot and killed," Dolson said. "Survivor guilt kicks in when those things happen."

CBS News has not independently confirmed the teacher's identity.

Five other students and another teacher were injured. Two of the wounded students remained in critical condition with life-threatening injuries Monday night, Barnes said.

The surviving teacher and three other students were treated for non-life-threatening injuries, and two of those victims have been released, while the other two have been stabilized, Barnes said.

Barnes confirmed officers found the teenage shooting suspect at the scene apparently having shot herself, and officers fired no shots. Police said the suspect used a 9 mm pistol, and police were working to trace the gun.

Rupnow was pronounced dead while being taken to the hospital, Barnes said.

All surviving students were reunited with their loved ones in the hours after the shooting, officials said.

As police searched for a motive late Monday, the FBI was working with local law enforcement to process the scene, conduct interviews, and obtain search warrants.

CBS News Chicago is told the suspected shooter's family is cooperating with police.

"Right now, my heart is heavy for my community," Barnes said earlier Monday. "My heart is heavy for Madison, and we have to come together as a community and figure out what happened here and make sure that it doesn't happen at any other place that should be a refuge for students in our community."

Mireille Jean-Charles is the mother of three boys who attend Abundant Life Christian School. She spoke with Meryl Hubbard, a reporter for CBS affiliate WISC-TV in Madison.

"It's sad, you know, to be home and then somebody calls you and says your kids' school in lockdown—and you don't know where they are. And I was there since 11. I finally got them, and thank God they were safe," Jean-Charles said. "But the trauma—it's a lot, because I'm sure they lost friends and a teacher, which is not OK. And I don't think they will be OK for a long time, and I'm not."

As reported by WISC, school director of elementary and school relations Barbara Weirs said the school does not have metal detectors, but does follow safety protocols. Weirs said the school held a practice lockdown at the beginning of the current academic year, the station reported.

"We've joked around about how safe a 400-student-bodied school—Christian private school—is, right?" a man said. "If it can happen here, it can literally happen anywhere."

Hours after the shooting, several officers were seen removing the door from a Madison home in a search Chief Barnes said was connected to the investigation.

"Our detectives are working hard in the investigative process to find out as many answers as we can so that we can further prevent these things from happening—not only in this community, but in other communities around our country," Barnes said.

Dave Wagner is the former principal of the school.

"My heart grieves beyond words with them," Wagner said. "I know the principal. I know several of the teachers. They're going to be impacted for their life by the tragedy of this day.

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers released the following statement:

"There are no words to describe the devastation and heartbreak we feel today after the school shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison this morning.

"Kathy and I join the people of Wisconsin in praying for the families and loved ones of those whose lives were so senselessly taken and for the educators, staff, and the entire Abundant Life school community as they grapple with the grief, trauma, and loss of this gut-wrenching tragedy. We are also praying and hoping all those injured survive and recover.

"Kathy and I are also keeping in our hearts the first responders who acted quickly and ran toward danger to help save lives. This day will no doubt weigh heavily on them, and we are grateful for their critical response efforts in answering the call when they were needed most.

"As a father, a grandfather, and as governor, it is unthinkable that a kid or an educator might wake up and go to school one morning and never come home. This should never happen, and I will never accept this as a foregone reality or stop working to change it.

"Today my focus is on supporting these families and kids and the Abundant Life community, and the state stands ready to support them and the efforts of local law enforcement through what will undoubtedly be difficult days ahead."

Gov. Evers will be ordering the flags of the United States and the state of Wisconsin to half-staff across the state immediately until sunset on Sun., Dec. 22.

Abundant Life Christian School is a private, nondenominational religious school that serves just under 400 students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

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NPR: First public comments attributed to Assad claim he never planned to leave Syria

Hadeel Al-Shalchi

DAMASCUS, Syria — Former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is believed to have issued his first remarks since opposition forces took over Syria more than a week ago, claiming his departure from the country was "neither planned nor did it occur in the final hours of the battles" against the rebel forces he calls "terrorists."

The statement attributed to Assad was posted in English on the deposed Syrian presidency's account on the Telegram messaging app, dated Dec. 16, from Moscow. The Telegram post says there had been "several unsuccessful attempts to release the statement via Arabic and international media outlets."

It claims he fought beside the army to the very end "just meters from terrorists in the most dangerous and intense battlefields."

As the rebel forces entered the capital on Dec. 8, the statement says, Assad moved to a military airbase in the port city of Latakia in coordination with his Russian allies.

The statement goes on to say that upon arrival at the base, it was clear that his army had withdrawn from all battle lines and all their positions had fallen. It says that Moscow then arranged an immediate evacuation that evening as the base came under drone attacks. The Kremlin then gave Assad asylum in Russia.

"At no point during these events did I consider stepping down or seeking refuge, nor was such proposal made by any individual or party," the statement says. "The only course of action was to continue fighting against the terrorist onslaught."

The Assad regime fell just over a week ago when rebel forces led by jihadist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, stormed Damascus. The leader of HTS is Ahmed al-Sharaa, formerly known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, who has a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head and is designated as a terrorist by the United States.

Sharaa has made some appearances since his group's victory, asking the international community to assist Syria and send aid.

World

U.S. has made contact with Syrian rebel group HTS, Blinken says

But countries are grappling with how to interact with Syria's interim leadership. The European Union set out conditions on Monday for lifting sanctions that have devastated the Syrian economy. The EU said it wants guarantees that the interim Syrian government is planning a peaceful political transition which includes minorities.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday the U.S. had made "direct contact" with HTS, without elaborating on details of the talks.

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ABC News: Trump not eligible for immunity in New York hush money case, judge rules

Staff

The New York judge in President-elect Donald Trump's criminal hush money case ruled Monday that the Supreme Court's presidential immunity decision does not apply to that case.

Trump had sought to dismiss his criminal indictment and vacate the jury verdict on the grounds that prosecutors, during the trial last May, introduced evidence relating to Trump's official acts as president, after the Supreme Court later ruled in July that Trump is entitled to presumptive immunity from criminal prosecution for official acts undertaken while in office.

However, Judge Juan Merchan said on Monday that the evidence in Trump's hush money case related "entirely to unofficial conduct" and "poses no danger of intrusion on the authority and function of the Executive Branch."

Trump was found guilty in May on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to a hush money payment made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels in order to boost his electoral prospects in the 2016 presidential election. Judge Merchan has yet to hand down a sentence.

In his ruling Monday, Merchan found that there was "overwhelming evidence of guilt" that led the jury to convict Trump at trial.

Trump's attorneys, arguing for immunity, had emphasized the importance of former White House Communications Director Hope Hicks' testimony, including her recounting of interactions with Trump in 2018 when reporting about the alleged hush money payment to Stormy Daniels broke, to demonstrate Trump's knowledge of the payment and his preference that the story came out after the election.

Defense lawyers used a similar argument to argue that tweets from Trump -- which prosecutors used to demonstrate an alleged "pressure campaign" to prevent Trump's former attorney Michael Cohen from cooperating with authorities in 2018 -- were official communications protected by immunity because the posts "fall well within the core authority of the Nation's Chief Executive."

But Merchan on Monday rejected Trump's argument that the testimony of Hicks, Trump's Twitter posts about Cohen, and other evidence, constitute official acts.

"Just as the title of Communications Director does not bestow absolute immunity to any and all communications with Ms. Hicks, neither does mere reference to the Justice Department convert a Tweet to an official act," Merchan wrote in his ruling.

"It is therefore logical and reasonable to conclude that if the act of falsifying records to cover up the payments so that the public would not be made aware is decidedly an unofficial act, so too should the communications to further that same cover-up be unofficial," the judge wrote.

Trump has also offered another argument that he is entitled to presidential immunity because he is now president-elect, which Merchan has yet to rule on.

Last week, the Manhattan district attorney's office urged Merchan to preserve the jury's verdict and sentence Trump at some later date following his second term, but Trump's attorneys blasted that proposal as "thuggish tactics."

In a letter accompanying Monday's ruling, Merchan referenced a forthcoming filing from Trump's lawyers alleging "juror misconduct," which has yet to be made public.

Merchan wrote that Trump's argument "consists entirely of unsworn allegations," but that he will allow the president-elect's lawyers to file a redacted version of their claims.

"Thus, this Court finds that to allow the public filing of the letters without redactions and without the benefit of a hearing would only serve to undermine the integrity of these proceedings while simultaneously placing the safety of the jurors at grave risk," Merchan wrote.

The judge said that he would consider Trump's claims if he submitted a motion to throw out the case with sworn testimony backing up the allegation of juror misconduct, rather than the unsworn allegations provided by Trump's lawyers in their recent filing.

"Allegations of juror misconduct should be thoroughly investigated. However, this Court is prohibited from deciding such claims on the basis of mere hearsay and conjecture," the judge wrote.

Merchan's letter did not provide any additional context about Trump's allegation of juror misconduct, and Trump's filings have not been posted to the court's public docket.

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ABC News: Drone updates: No national security risk found after 5,000 tips, FBI and other federal agencies say
Pierre Thomas and Kevin Shalvey

The thousands of drone sightings reported over the last month in Northeastern states don't appear to be "anything anomalous," nor do they present a national security or public safety risk, federal officials said in a multiagency statement late Monday.

The FBI has received more than 5,000 tips in the last few weeks about drone sightings in New Jersey and other states, said the statement, which was released jointly by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Defense.

Those tips have resulted in about 100 leads, with federal investigators supporting state and local officials.

"Having closely examined the technical data and tips from concerned citizens, we assess that the sightings to date include a combination of lawful commercial drones, hobbyist drones, and law enforcement drones, as well as manned fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and stars mistakenly reported as drones," the joint statement said.

Uncrewed aerial drones have been lighting up the sky at night in New Jersey and nearby states for weeks, since about mid-November, leading to concern from residents and speculation online. Some had demanded answers from local and state officials for answers.

The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have deployed infrared cameras and drone detection technology to ensure the drones flying over the New Jersey and New York area aren't harmful, according to a law enforcement source. Dozens of agencies have been out daily to find answers and track down any operators acting "illegally or with nefarious intent," the FBI said recently.

The agencies are also looking at social media and other photos to determine what exactly is in the photos. Most of the photos and video depict manned aircraft, according to a law enforcement source.

But the newly released statement appeared to take a sober view of the mysterious drone sightings, noting that federal officials have yet to identify "anything anomalous and do not assess the activity to date to present a national security or public safety risk over the civilian airspace in New Jersey or other states in the northeast."

"That said, we recognize the concern among many communities," the statement said. "We continue to support state and local authorities with advanced detection technology and support of law enforcement."

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NEWS CLIPS

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

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IOWA NEWS:

KCCI: 'Deeply honored': Chris Cournoyer sworn in as Iowa's lieutenant governor Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds appointed state Sen. Chris Cournoyer to be her lieutenant governor Monday, more than three months after her first and only No. 2 in elected office resigned to take over the state bankers association.

Cournoyer was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and has a background in technology, having earned a computer science degree, done website design and worked for a tech company. In the Senate, she chaired the Education Budget Committee and was vice chair of the State Government Committee.

“She has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to — qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis,” Reynolds said in a statement. “I can’t wait to deploy Chris’ extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans.”

Cournoyer is from LeClaire, in eastern Iowa.

“I am deeply honored to join your team,” Cournoyer said to Reynolds in her opening remarks after being sworn in.

“I’m profoundly honored to serve as lieutenant governor, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach the role with all the seriousness it deserves,” Cournoyer said. “I couldn’t be more excited to join Governor Reynolds’ team and do my part to implement her bold agenda for our state.”

Reynolds’ initial running mate, Adam Gregg, resigned his position Sept. 3 after serving more than seven years in office, saying that “my time in public service must come to a close.” The Iowa Bankers Association on the same day announced Gregg as its incoming president and CEO.

Reynolds described Gregg as “a tremendous partner.”

Iowa law states that the governor must appoint someone to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term.

Reynolds told reporters in early October that she would make a decision on Gregg’s successor after the 2024 election, and the end-of-the-year rollout will allow Cournoyer a few weeks to settle in before joining Reynolds at her annual condition of the state speech after the legislative session begins in January.

“We want to get it right, you know, not only for the team, but for Iowans, and so I want to be very thoughtful in how I do that,” Reynolds said in October.

'Deeply honored': Iowa state Sen. Chris Cournoyer speaks after being named lieutenant governor

Up for reelection in 2026, Reynolds will likely be joined by Cournoyer on the ballot if she chooses to run again.

Reynolds, who was former Gov. Terry Branstad's lieutenant governor, became governor in 2017 when Branstad was named U.S. ambassador to China. She was elected to a full term in 2018 and was reelected in 2022.

Reynolds in 2017 had named Gregg as her “acting” lieutenant governor after her own promotion. That followed legal questions over whether the Iowa Constitution gave an elected lieutenant governor the authority to appoint her replacement if she needed to step in as governor in the event the elected governor dies, resigns, or was removed from office. Until their inauguration in 2019, Gregg was left out of the line of succession.

In November's election, Iowa voters approved a legislatively referred constitutional amendment to explicitly allow for that appointment.

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DMR: Gov. Kim Reynolds names state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as next lieutenant governor of Iowa

Brianne Pfannenstiel and Stephen Gruber-Miller

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds has named state Sen. Chris Cournoyer as her next lieutenant governor after Adam Gregg resigned the post earlier this year.

It marks the first time Iowa will have women in both top roles.

The pick comes as Reynolds prepares to deliver her priorities for the 2025 legislative session and as she gears up for an expected reelection campaign in 2026.

Cournoyer, a Republican from LeClaire, will serve out the remainder of Gregg's term, which is set to expire at the end of 2026.

Reynolds made the announcement in her formal office in the Iowa Capitol Monday morning, and Cournoyer, who resigned her Senate seat the same day, immediately took the oath of office.

Reynolds praised her new second-in-command as a "doer" who, after failing to get answers from her local school board, first entered politics to run for the seat herself.

"That's the kind of person that Chris is," Reynolds said. "Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I."

Cournoyer, who was elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and reelected to a second four-year term in 2022, called the experience "surreal."

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," she said.

Cournoyer was one of Nikki Haley's most high-profile endorsers in Iowa's 2024 Republican caucuses, writing that the former United Nations ambassador is "unafraid to stand up, correct the record and talk about the tough issues."

Reynolds suggests new lieutenant governor will play a role in STEM policy, making government more efficient

A mom of four, Cournoyer previously served as president of her local school board, as an adviser on the governor's STEM Advisory Council and as a reserve sheriff deputy. She has worked as a technology consultant, and she now runs her own business as an independent website designer and developer.

"Given this firsthand experience, Chris understands that one of the most effective ways to promote innovation in our economy is to promote it in our schools," Reynolds said. "As a member of the governor's STEM Advisory Council, she's been a key ally in my administration's efforts to prepare every student for the modern economy. She's also been engaged in the issue at a local level, serving as the president of her school board, and even teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students. This wide ranging expertise at the intersection of business, innovation and education is a major asset."

The role of lieutenant governor is often ceremonial in Iowa, and the state Constitution says the lieutenant governor is in charge of whatever duties the governor assigns.

Cournoyer said Monday she looks forward to "advancing the governor's agenda in any way I possibly can."

Cournoyer was the vice chair of the Senate State Government Committee, where she helped lead Reynolds' effort to reorganize and consolidate state government and Iowa's hundreds of state boards and commissions.

She took the lead in the Senate on a law Reynolds signed this year eliminating dozens of state boards and commissions. And she served as a member of a new board created by that law: The State Government Efficiency Review Committee.

She also spoke in Reynolds' office this year at the bill signing for a law that eliminated the requirement that Iowa boards and commissions have a balance of men and women serving on them. At the signing, she said there are more women serving in a range of careers than ever before.

"As Gov. Reynolds mentioned, her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively, as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills, dovetails especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science and artificial intelligence," Cournoyer said.

Special election will be needed to fill Cournoyer's Senate vacancy
Reynolds will need to call a special election to fill her vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans hold a 34-15 majority with Cournoyer's resignation of her legislative seat. Reynolds' spokesperson would not comment on when that election would be set.

"Chris has proven herself over the last six years as a smart, capable conservative," Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver, R-Grimes, said in a statement. "During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as lieutenant governor."

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner, D-Iowa City, also offered Cournoyer her congratulations.

"I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party," she said in a statement. "Iowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new lieutenant governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process."

Position opened after Adam Gregg resigned lieutenant governor role
Gregg resigned Sept. 3 to become president and CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association — a surprise decision that took effect immediately. He had served alongside Reynolds since she assumed the governorship in 2017 and named him as her No. 2. He was elected to the post as her running mate in 2018 and again in 2022.

Gregg's decision to leave mid-term was taken as a sign by many in the political world that Reynolds would seek reelection herself, rather than stepping aside and giving him room to run for governor.

Cournoyer is now expected to run alongside Reynolds if she does decide to seek a third full term as the state's chief executive. In Iowa, the governor and lieutenant governor run on a single ticket rather than being elected separately.

Iowa has no term limits for state offices.

During his tenure, Gregg served as co-chair of the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative and as chair of the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. He earned a base salary of just over \$103,000 last year.

In November, Iowa voters passed a state constitutional amendment clarifying the state's gubernatorial line of succession. Now, if the governor leaves office, the lieutenant governor will take that person's place. The new governor can then appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill the office's new vacancy.

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KCRG: Gov. Reynolds names new Lt. Governor

Conner Hendricks

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa Capitol Bureau) - Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds announced State Senator from LeClaire, Chris Cournoyer, as her new Lt. Governor during a press conference at the State Capitol on Monday morning.

Cournoyer was officially sworn in shortly after Reynolds' announcement.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019, representing the 35th Senate District. That includes parts of Clinton, Jackson, and Scott counties.

While introducing Cournoyer, Governor Reynolds said Iowans can trust Cournoyer should she ever have to step in as Governor.

“First and foremost, she has the character, judgement, and ability needed to serve as governor in case I were ever unable to—qualities that also make her ideally suited to support our work on a day-to-day basis,” Reynolds said. “I can’t wait to deploy Chris’ extensive experience on key legislative committees, including Ways and Means, and expertise in technology, innovation, and artificial intelligence on a wide range of issues important to Iowans.”

Aside from the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has a background in technology and education. “I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed,” she said.

In the state Senate, Cournoyer was the first to chair the newly created technology committee. Reynolds says she plans to tap in to Cournoyer’s background to make state government better.

“Significant opportunities still exist to find efficiencies through technology. Hereto her expertise, especially in AI, will be invaluable,” Reynolds said.

Cournoyer also serves on the Governor’s STEM advisory council and she says she plans to continue that work to create more apprenticeships for Iowa students.

“Her ongoing efforts to make government work more effectively as well as to equip our students with 21st century skills dovetail especially well with my background in K-12 education, computer science, and artificial intelligence,” Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer replaces former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who had served alongside Reynolds since 2017. He resigned in September to take a position leading the Iowa Bankers Association.

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The Gazette: Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds names Sen. Chris Cournoyer lieutenant governor

Erin Murphy, Tom Barton

DES MOINES — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds describes Chris Cournoyer, her new lieutenant governor, as someone who is driven, whose character and judgment she trusts and who can help her efforts to streamline state government.

Cournoyer, 54, from Le Claire, was sworn in Monday as Iowa's 48th lieutenant governor during a ceremony in the Governor's Formal Office at the Iowa Capitol. Cournoyer, a Republican like Reynolds, had been serving in the Iowa Senate since 2019.

She succeeds former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, who abruptly resigned in early September to become the incoming president and chief executive officer of the Iowa Bankers Association. The association advocates for, provides resources to and lobbies on behalf of Iowa banks.

"It's an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa's lieutenant governor," Cournoyer said Monday. "I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would ever be second in line to Iowa's succession. In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves."

Cournoyer was sworn in by Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice Susan Christensen. Reynolds, Iowa's first female governor, appointed Christensen to the court in 2018.

Neither Reynolds nor Cournoyer took questions from reporters after the ceremony.

Iowa voters in November passed a state constitutional amendment that clarifies that an appointed — rather than elected — lieutenant governor is first in line in the succession order. While the position was vacant, next in the gubernatorial line of succession was Iowa Senate President Amy Sinclair, a Republican from Allerton.

Reynolds has two years remaining on her current term. She will be up for re-election in 2026. She has not yet said whether she will seek another term.

With Cournoyer's appointment, she and Reynolds form the state's first-ever all-female governor and lieutenant governor leadership duo.

"First and foremost, she's someone that I would trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to. I have complete confidence in her character, her judgment and her ability," Reynolds said Monday. "It's these same qualities that also make her ideally suited to serve as a member of my team, where she'll support our work on a wide range of policy priorities, often drawing on her knowledge of technology and innovation. ...

"It's exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris' experience in her new role."

Cournoyer will be paid \$103,000, the salary for the position set by the Iowa Legislature.

Cournoyer resigned from her Iowa Senate seat, a Senate Republican spokesman confirmed Monday. Cournoyer had two years remaining in her second, four-year term. She represented Iowa Senate District 35, which covers Clinton County as well as slices of northern Scott and southwestern Jackson counties.

A special election will be held to fill the seat vacated by Cournoyer's move. The governor sets special election dates. A spokesman for the governor said there was no information yet on that special election date.

Cournoyer will be Reynolds' second lieutenant governor. Reynolds was herself Iowa's lieutenant governor from 2011 to 2017 under then-Gov. Terry Branstad. She ascended to the governor's office when Branstad was tabbed as U.S. ambassador to China.

Reynolds selected Gregg, who had been serving as the state's public defender. He served as lieutenant governor from 2017 to earlier this year.

During her remarks Monday, Cournoyer recalled the first time she met Reynolds, in 2015, when Reynolds was lieutenant governor. Reynolds spoke at an event in Davenport to encourage girls to engage in science, technology, engineering and mathematics — commonly known as STEM — classes and programs.

“Having someone of (Reynolds') stature in attendance was a big win for us, and I was even more excited when I heard her speak on a subject that I cared so deeply about,” Cournoyer said. “She spoke with passion and understanding about how a new, hands-on, work-based learning paradigm could modernize our economy while reaching underserved students of all stripes. And just as importantly, she had bold ideas for making it happen.”

In addition to serving in the Iowa Senate, Cournoyer has worked as a website designer, a substitute teacher and as a reserve deputy for the Scott County Sheriff's Department. In the Senate, she served as chair of the Senate Technology Committee and vice chair of the State Government committee and an assistant majority leader. Previously, she chaired the subcommittee that writes the state's education budget.

Cournoyer first won election to the Iowa Senate in 2018, flipping the seat to Republican control, and was reelected in 2022. Before that, she served on the Pleasant Valley School Board.

During her time in the Senate, Cournoyer has supported Reynolds' priorities on tax cuts, education savings accounts, restrictions of content in schools and changes to Area Education Agencies. In recent years, Cournoyer has worked on legislation dealing with consumer data privacy, digital stalking, cybersecurity, public notices, vapor products and repealing gender balance for public boards and commissions.

During the run-up to the 2024 Republican Iowa presidential precinct caucuses, Cournoyer endorsed Republican presidential candidate and former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley. Reynolds endorsed Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Cournoyer was born in Dallas, Texas, and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor's degree in computer science. She has four children.

“She has one, final, central trait that I love, and that is she's a doer. She gets in there and she wants to make a difference,” Reynolds said. “That's the kind of person that Chris is. Her first instinct isn't just to wonder why something isn't working right or to complain. It's actually to get in there and fix the problem herself. She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty, and she does the work. And the people of Iowa couldn't ask for more in a lieutenant governor, and neither can I.”

As lieutenant governor, Gregg led the Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative, the Feeding Iowans Task Force in 2020 and the Governor's FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform. The working group focused on recommendations to reduce recidivism through successful offender reentry.

Gregg, in his resignation letter to Reynolds, said he was stepping down to focus more on his family. Before serving as Reynolds' first lieutenant governor, Gregg was the state's public defender. He ran unsuccessfully for Iowa Attorney General in 2014.

The role of lieutenant governor is not statutorily defined in Iowa Code. Under the Iowa Constitution, the lieutenant governor performs duties assigned by the governor. Under Iowa law, the governor has the power to appoint a new lieutenant governor to fill a vacancy and serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

Iowa voters last fall approved an amendment to the Iowa Constitution that clarified when a governor chooses a new lieutenant governor, that new lieutenant is endowed with all of the office's constitutional authority, including being placed first in the line of succession to the governor.

Previously, the Iowa Constitution was unclear about an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor's authority. A formal opinion from then-Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller in 2017 said the state constitution did not place an appointed, never-elected lieutenant governor in the gubernatorial line of succession.

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DMR: DMPS recommits to 'sanctuary resolution' to help immigrant students in face of deportations

Samantha Hernandez

The Des Moines School Board is taking a stand in support of its immigrant families ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's call for mass deportations.

During the regular board meeting Tuesday, members Anna Campos and Maria Alonzo read a statement in English and Spanish declaring that the board and district officials would do everything possible to support area families.

While the board stopped short of declaring itself a "sanctuary district," it recommitted to the "sanctuary resolution" it passed in 2017 that promised "to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status," Campos said.

"The intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is creating anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status," Campos said. "We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds."

The district doesn't track undocumented students, but officials say more than 4,000 of Des Moines' 30,000 public school students were born outside of the U.S. DMPS is Iowa's largest and most diverse school district, with students of color comprising more than half its enrollment.

During Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, he promised to curb immigration, deport undocumented immigrants en masse and build a wall along the United States-Mexico border. Early in his presidency, he banned people from Muslim-majority countries from entering the country for 90 days.

During his 2024 campaign, Trump once again promised mass deportations of people who are undocumented.

On Friday, Gov. Kim Reynolds joined with 25 other Republican governors who vowed to help the incoming president carry out his plan to remove undocumented people.

This includes deploying the Iowa National Guard and law enforcement, according to a joint statement.

Reynolds – who has traveled multiple times to the U.S.-Mexico border – has previously deployed Iowa State Patrol officers and National Guard soldiers to the border.

The Des Moines School Board joins Chicago Public Schools' board of education in publicly standing behind its immigrant community. Last month, the Chicago Board of Education passed a resolution reaffirming "its commitment to protect students of various immigration statuses, gender identities and sexual orientation," according to Chalkbeat Chicago.

The Des Moines School Board felt making this statement was important, Alonzo told the Des Moines Register.

"We recognize as a board and as a district that the lives of many of our students and their families will be impacted because of immigration policy," she said.

From 2016:Yes, Trump will have broad power to crack down on immigration

DMPS school board passed 2017 'sanctuary resolution'

In February 2017, the school board approved two resolutions that gave guidance on how employees should handle requests from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE and encouraged state lawmakers to support the Bar Removal of Individuals who Dream and Grow our Economy Act or BRIDGE Act.

The "sanctuary resolution" required all requests to go through the superintendent and district legal counsel, according to a news release at the time. The resolution was also intended to "remind DMPS staff that they may not inquire about the immigration or citizenship status of students or their parents or guardians."

At the time, about 4,000 Des Moines students were born outside of the United States.

Currently, 86% of the Des Moines Public Schools' students were born in the United States, said Phil Roeder, a district spokesperson. The remaining 14% represent 101 nations.

The second resolution was in support of 5,500 Iowa students registered under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy or DACA, the 2017 news release states.

The BRIDGE Act would have provided temporary relief from deportation for DACA recipients and allowed them to work in the U.S.

"What we did eight years ago was really make a commitment that our buildings would be safe for all of our students and families," said Rob Barron, who sat on the board at the time, in an interview Thursday.

Trump has previously worked to end DACA but said in a recent interview he wants to protect recipients. However, he has also said he intends to end birthright citizenship for the children of undocumented immigrants. The U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment establishes the right to citizenship by birth.

From 2017:Des Moines creates 'sanctuary schools' for undocumented students

School districts are probably serving more undocumented or mixed immigration status families than people realize, Barron said.

"What matters more than anything else is students feel safe in their schools, and their parents feel like they can come to school and be active participants in the school community," he said. "... And there's a long-standing precedent that schools and churches are not a place

where ICE will do an immigration enforcement action. And it's a federal precedent (and) it's been bipartisan."

Alonzo: 'We are a safe space for families'

Superintendent Ian Roberts and others have been working with community partners to identify needed resources.

"We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance and their ability to learn," Campos said during Tuesday's meeting. "To address these challenges, the board is partnering with the superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families."

Alonzo believes there will be no cost to the district to offer this assistance.

Des Moines Public Schools and the board's overarching message is that families know they are not alone, she said.

"Our statement, I think, sent the message that we are a safe space for families," Alonzo told the Register. "That we stand with immigrant (and) refugee communities who might be affected by a change in policy."

The DMPS statement

Living in a democracy means embracing the peaceful transfer of power through elections, a cornerstone of our nation's history. However, the intense political rhetoric from all sides during and since the election is (creating) anxiety and uncertainty within our school community, particularly for students and families with mixed immigration status. We want to acknowledge our students and families that may have worries or concerns about what the future holds.

In 2017, in light of multiple federal executive actions negatively impacting immigrant families, Des Moines Public Schools passed a resolution to support all students and families, regardless of immigration status. As a district, we remain committed to ensuring equal protection and safeguarding our students from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, citizenship, immigration status, or national origin.

We understand that fear and uncertainty, especially concerning the potential deportation of family members, can significantly impact our students' well-being, their attendance, and their ability to learn. To address these challenges, the Board is partnering with the Superintendent to ensure information, including partnerships with organizations that offer support services and access to information and legal resources will be shared with our students and families.

Our dedication to fostering a safe and inclusive environment remains unwavering. DMPS is committed to respecting and supporting our youth and their families, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive. Together, we uphold the values of inclusivity, respect, and understanding that are essential to our vibrant, diverse, amazing school community.

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DMR: Satanic holiday celebration at Iowa Capitol 'forcibly canceled' by state, group says

Kyle Werner

The Satanic Temple of Iowa was supposed to throw a holiday celebration on Saturday — exactly one year after a statue depicting the pagan idol Baphomet was destroyed in the display at the State Capitol building in Des Moines — but the state opted to cancel the event.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa alleges the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) "forcibly canceled" the event.

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We have made every effort to work with them (Iowa DAS) to ensure a successful event, but after over two months on the official Capitol events calendar we have been informed that our event will no longer be allowed," the Satanic Temple of Iowa announced on the event's page on Facebook Friday night.

Members of the Satanic Temple of Iowa planned to sing Satanic carols, and hold a Krampus costume contest and a Satanic ritual.

"Our goal was to promote tolerance and acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, with a theme of finding a light in the darkness and welcoming the darkest nights of the year with joy and camaraderie," the post said. "We are no stranger to obstacles in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom of speech, and we will continue to fight for the rights of Satanic Temple members and our local community."

The Satanic Temple of Iowa did not respond to the Des Moines Register's request for comment Saturday.

Iowa State Capitol stewards confirmed the Capitol was open Saturday despite the ice storm and that the event was removed from the scheduled events calendar in the days before the event.

"After careful consideration of administrative rule and DAS policy, I determined the totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors and therefore denied the request," Adam Steen, the director of the Iowa DAS, said in a statement to the Register.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said in a statement Monday the state government is always going to be concerned about the well-being of children.

"The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit," she said. "Because of this, the state's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

What happened to the Satanic display in 2023? Who destroyed it?

Satanic Temple of Iowa display at the Iowa State Capitol.

The installation, permitted under state rules governing religious displays in the building, has come under debate and criticism by politicians in Iowa and nationwide. Reynolds and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis was among the politicians who joined a chorus of Republicans calling for its removal last year, while others in the GOP said that, though it is offensive, it is a protected form of free speech.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional candidate from Mississippi, was charged the following day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, after he vandalized the display. The Lauderdale, Mississippi, man told the conservative website The Sentinel that, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God, not to bureaucratic decree. And so I acted."

Michael Cassidy

"Evidence shows the defendant made statements to law enforcement and the public indicating he destroyed the property because of the victim's religion," triggering the violation of individual rights enhancement, said Lynn Hicks, a spokesman for the Polk County Attorney's Office.

Hicks said in a statement last year that based on information from the Satanic Temple, the cost to replace or repair the statue would be between \$750 and \$1,500, making its destruction an aggravated misdemeanor. The Temple later filed a damage estimate putting the cost to replace the statute at \$3,000. The state's hate-crime statute made the charge a felony, Hicks said.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Cassidy was placed on low-level probation in May, according to court documents, and was discharged on Nov. 22. He paid an \$855 civil penalty and restitution and met all probation requirements, the documents said.

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KCCI: Pella school board considers budget cuts for upcoming school year, cites enrollment numbers

Ophelie Jacobson

PELLA, Iowa —

The Pella school board reviewed the superintendent's recommended reductions for the district's budget for the upcoming school year Monday night.

Pella Community School District superintendent Greg Ebeling presented ways he feels the school district can save money next year. The recommended cuts would save the district \$888,949.

"Enrollment is obviously a driver of this stuff," Ebeling said. "We know we're graduating a class of 200, we're bringing in 150. We know we got a 50-student gap."

Ebeling says school vouchers have played a role causing the drop in enrollment. Gov. Kim Reynolds' Education Savings Account Program went into effect in 2023.

The superintendent told KCCI that class sizes could increase and staff members could be shifted within the school district. However, Ebeling said he is only estimating that one to two people will lose their jobs.

"We don't love making the reductions, but in terms of actually affecting people that want to be employed here next year, it's very little," he said.

The school board set a public hearing for the budget reduction for Jan. 13. A work session is scheduled for the following week. The final budget will be up for a vote on Jan. 27.

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KCCI: Opposition group to Summit pipeline says company threatened legal action
Staff

DES MOINES, Iowa —

One of the most active opponents to a controversial carbon pipeline says it has been threatened with legal action.

The Sierra Club says at least six people received letters from Summit Carbon Solutions, demanding retractions of various public statements. That includes Sierra Club's conservation director Jess Mazour.

KCCI has asked the Sierra Club to provide us the letter itself. It has not responded to our request. We've also asked Summit for a statement on the letters. We have not yet received one.

The Summit Carbon Capture Pipeline would go through five states, including here in Iowa.

The company wants to store carbon dioxide delivered through the pipeline underground.

The Iowa Utilities Commission already issued a permit for the project. Just last month, the North Dakota Public Service Commission granted a route permit.

Summit is still waiting on a permit from South Dakota.

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WOI: Iowa leaders congratulate Chris Cournoyer on being sworn in as lieutenant governor

Emma Brustkern

DES MOINES, Iowa — Congratulations are rolling in from both sides of the aisle for Iowa's newly sworn-in lieutenant governor.

Gov. Kim Reynolds announced Monday that Republican Sen. Chris Cournoyer, who currently represents District 35, will serve as lieutenant governor for the remainder of Reynolds' term.

"This is a humbling responsibility for me, and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," Cournoyer said.

Leaders from across the state offered congratulatory messages and praised Cournoyer for her experience and knowledge. Here's what they had to say:

Attorney General Brenna Bird

"Chris Cournoyer will make an excellent Lieutenant Governor! She is tough and determined. As a State Senator, she delivered for Iowa families and strengthened our schools. Together, Gov. Reynolds and LG Cournoyer will keep Iowa moving in the right direction!"

State Auditor Rob Sand

"Congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on her appointment as Iowa's Lieutenant Governor. I am happy to work with anyone to serve Iowans."

State Treasurer Roby Smith

"I've known Chris for nearly a decade and worked closely with her during my time in the Iowa Senate. During the two years she served as Vice Chair while I was Chair of the State Government Committee, she consistently impressed me with her energy, work ethic and character. With her experience, knowledge, and skills, Chris is well positioned to serve Iowans in this important role."

Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver

"Chris has proven herself over the last 6 years as a smart, capable conservative. During her tenure in the Iowa Senate, she was a leading advocate for legislation to secure Second Amendment rights, protections for law enforcement, historic income tax relief, and every other common sense conservative priority the Senate has advanced. She will be missed, but I am happy for her and I look forward to watching her succeed in her new role as Lieutenant Governor."

Senate Democratic Leader Janice Weiner

"I would like to offer my congratulations to Chris Cournoyer on being named Iowa's new Lieutenant Governor. I wish her the best in this new role and hope she will look for

opportunities to work cooperatively with her former colleagues in the Senate, regardless of party. Iowans deserve a government that works for their betterment. Senate Democrats stand ready to work with the new Lieutenant Governor, should she be asked to serve a role in the legislative process. On behalf of Iowa families, our commitment to bettering our schools and easing pocketbook burdens is resolute. I encourage the Reynolds Administration, and our new Lieutenant Governor, to join the effort of creating a freer, more prosperous Iowa for all."

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig

"Governor Reynolds is a champion for Iowa's farmers, agribusinesses and our rural communities and she has made a strong selection in choosing Chris Cournoyer as Iowa's next Lieutenant Governor. As a State Senator, Chris Cournoyer was a strong supporter of Iowa agriculture, and I have no doubt that she will bring the same leadership to her new role as we work to keep Iowa moving forward. I am excited to work with Governor Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Cournoyer to grow markets for Iowa products, accelerate our conservation and water quality efforts, and make Iowa an even better place to live, work, and raise a family."

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Radio Iowa: Governor Reynolds chooses State Senator Cournoyer as Lt. Governor

Kay Henderson

Governor Kim Reynolds has chosen a state senator from Le Claire to be her lieutenant governor.

“She takes responsibility, she gets her hands dirty and she does the work,” Reynolds said, “and the people of Iowa couldn’t ask for more in a lieutenant governor and neither can I.”

Chris Cournoyer took the oath of office in a ceremony at the statehouse this morning. “It’s an honor and somewhat surreal to be standing at this podium as Iowa’s lieutenant governor,” Cournoyer said.

Cournoyer has served in the Iowa Senate since 2019. Iowa has not had a lieutenant governor since September 2 when Adam Gregg resigned to become CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association. Reynolds waited until after the election to begin interviewing candidates for the position. The governor said Cournoyer will support a wide range of policy priorities.

“First and foremost she’s someone that Iowans could trust to serve as governor if I were ever unable to,” Reynolds said. “I have complete confidence in her character, her judgement and her ability.”

Reynolds, who was a state senator in 2010 when Governor Terry Branstad chose her as his running mate, said Cournoyer is ideally suited to join her administration. “Chris has been a state senator, a reserve deputy and a long time leader and volunteer in her rural community of Le Claire. She’s also a small business owner and an expert in technology and A.I. and what I know she considers her most important job — a mom to four children,” Reynolds said. “Even on paper, the depth of her experience stands out.”

Cournoyer, who is 54, graduated from the University of Texas with a computer science degree and worked as a consultant in a Fortune 500 firm before becoming an independent website developer. The governor said Cournoyer’s firsthand experience — including her work teaching robotics and coding to elementary and junior high students — are major assets.

“It’s exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris’s experience in her new role,” Reynolds said. “Here’s a working mother who has known the joys and challenges of raising children while being in the workforce and owning a business.”

Cournoyer has been chairman of the Iowa Senate Technology Committee since its creation. “Growing up in the ’80s, I had a subscription to PC Magazine and a treasured dot matrix printer,” Cournoyer said. “I even did an 8th grade science fair project on Artificial Intelligence, so basically I was a computer nerd before it was cool and not much has changed.”

Cournoyer first met the governor in 2015, back when Reynolds was lieutenant governor, at a Davenport event focused on encouraging girls and young women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

“She isn’t afraid to tackle tough problems from tax reform to education freedom to mental health and so much more,” Cournoyer said. “She also has a rare gift for getting stakeholders to the table and a tenacity to championing a cause to completion.”

The ceremony for Cournoyer’s ascension to the role of lieutenant governor was held in Reynolds’ formal office. Cournoyer’s parents, three other statewide elected officials and the Republican leader of the state senate entered the room before the event began. Cournoyer who spoke briefly after the governor explained her choice, said she’s ready to advance the governor’s agenda in any way that she can.

“I never planned on entering public office, let alone imagine that I would be second in line to Iowa’s succession,” Cournoyer said. “In other words, this is a humbling responsibility for me and Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves.”

Cournoyer’s first campaign was for the Pleasant Valley School Board after she had raised a safety concern — and didn’t get a response from the board. Cournoyer won her seat in the Iowa Senate in 2018. A special election will be scheduled next year to fill the vacancy in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans will hold a super majority in 2025.

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KCRG: RCSD advocates for early childhood education, meets with state lawmakers

Mollie Swayne

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - Lawmakers will be back in Des Moines for the start of the 2025 legislative session in just a few weeks. On Monday, education officials on the local level shared their hopes and concerns with those lawmakers ahead of the new year.

The Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD) School Board met with four state lawmakers to share legislative priorities. The board and members of the public brought up a lot of topics: state funding, the new attendance law, book bans, free and reduced lunch, and more. However, School Board members made it clear their top priority was funding to make early childhood education available to every child.

“Parents and the community want full day four-year-old preschool,” said Board President Cindy Garlock.

“Thank you for all of your work that you are looking at ahead with funding, hopefully, full day preschool. We need it. We need it for our kids we need it for our economy,” said Monica Frey, principal of the Truman Early Learning Center, which does currently provide full day preschool.

The lawmakers heard board members' perspectives, then discussed whether funding for early childhood education was a priority for them, too.

The only member of the majority party at the meeting said child care was a priority, but that might not mean more money for schools.

Rep. Cindy Golding (R - Linn County) said, “Early childhood— child care is one of the initiatives. We’re not exactly sure how that funding — if it’s going through public schools, or child care centers, or it’s going to businesses for reimbursement for child care, but child care is a top priority.”

Tracy Ehlert (D- NW Cedar Rapids) pointed out that child care is not the same as early childhood education.

All lawmakers encouraged constituents to reach out to them and share their thoughts.

The legislative session starts on January 13.

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KCRG: ‘It means everything’: Dubuque manufacturer plans \$7M expansion, creating 15 new jobs

Keegan Turnbough

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - 15 new manufacturing jobs could be coming to Dubuque in 2026.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creates custom pressure vessels and tanks to filter water, capture landfill gases, vacuum trucks, and more. A \$7 million expansion plan would increase its capacity and reduce logjams.

“We have to move a tank 2 or 3 times because there’s no room to put it where we want to put it,” said Universal Tank & Fabrication President Dan Davis. “If we don’t have a booth sized the way or the size we need for a particular product, we have to lay a tank down that otherwise we could leave standing up.”

Davis’ goal for the facility is to create a continuous assembly line from bending metal, welding, blasting, and painting to putting together the finished product. Accomplishing the feat requires more space.

The project would add a 28,000-square-foot facility adjacent to its current structure, moving the blasting, painting, and assembling of products to the new facility. Increasing capacity means more hands are needed to handle more business.

Universal Tank & Fabrication creating 15 new jobs comes as job cuts hit Iowa’s manufacturing sector. In the last year, the state has lost 6,100 jobs in the industry.

Greater Dubuque Development Vice President of Business Services Jason White said by tapping into a variety of markets, Universal Tank & Fabrication helps stave off reductions.

“It’s a cause for celebration,” said White. “One industry that they serve may be down but others might be up. That’s a good way [...] to mute their risk. It’s a benefit to the community to foresee that because obviously it protects jobs, and in this case, creates new investments and new jobs.”

Growing the company in opposition to statewide manufacturing trends “means everything” to Davis.

“Nobody’s recession-proof, but we try to put ourselves in a position with the type of work we produce that we can continue to move forward even when the economy is not at its best,” explained Davis. “To be able to bring more people on, maybe people that are struggling to find work or maybe got put out of a job, it means a lot.”

Davis said Universal Tank and Fabrication is getting \$730,000 in rebates and tax incentives from city, state, and regional sources to finish expansions by January 2026.

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KCRG: Trump threatens lawsuit against Des Moines Register

Staff

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - President-elect Donald Trump is threatening legal action against additional media outlets after ABC News agreed to settle a defamation lawsuit over the weekend.

The lawsuit against ABC News was over inaccurate statements made by anchor George Stephanopoulos, claiming that Trump had been found civilly liable for raping E. Jean Carroll.

Under the settlement, ABC News agreed to pay \$15 million toward Donald Trump's presidential library, and to post an editor's note online expressing regret over the statements.

CNN reports that on Monday, Trump shifted his sights onto the Des Moines Register, over its final poll before the 2024 election that showed Trump losing to Kamala Harris.

Trump's comments regarding the possible lawsuit were made during a press conference at Mar-a-Lago.

"We need a great media, we need a fair media. It's very important," Trump said.

Trump went on to say he believes the poll results were fraudulent and that it amounted to election interference.

The poll was conducted by J. Ann Selzer.

It showed Kamala Harris was beating Donald Trump in Iowa by three points. Trump ended up winning Iowa by more than 13 points.

Selzer has since ended her election polling to move onto "other ventures and opportunities."

"The idea that I intentionally set up to deliver this response, when I've never done that before - I've had plenty of opportunity to do it. It's not my ethic," Selzer told CNN. "But to suggest without a single shred of evidence that I was in cahoots with somebody, that I was being paid by somebody, it's hard to pay too much attention to it except that they are accusing me of a crime."

Other media lawsuits Trump spoke of include one against CBS over the editing of a 60 Minutes interview with Kamala Harris, which Trump also says he believes amounted to fraud and election interference.

A third potential lawsuit Trump mentioned was against journalist Bob Woodward. Trump alleges Woodward misquoted him from the tapes of an interview, and then sold the tapes, which were meant for reporting purposes only.

“I feel I have to do this. I shouldn’t really be the one to do it. It should have been the Justice Department or somebody else,” Trump said. “But I have to do it. It costs a lot of money to do it, but we have to straighten out the press.”

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KCRG: Inside Iowa Politics: More accurate elections with quicker results ahead?

Dave Price

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa State Capitol Bureau) Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate, a Republican, wants Iowa legislators to help him make changes which he said will help ensure that only U.S. citizens vote in elections and that Iowans can get results sooner.

Pate wants county auditors to begin counting absentee ballots at 9 a.m. on Election Day instead of waiting until later in the day. That could speed up the reporting of results.

Pate thinks that could build trust among voters, especially those who question the process when they have to wait on results.

There was a 56-point difference between Democrats and Republicans in their confidence level about the accuracy results in this national Gallup Poll released before the election. The secretary of state also wants access to a federal database that could help determine whether a registered voter is a U.S. citizen, a requirement for voting in federal elections. The Biden administration refused to allow Pate access to those records in 2024, leading Pate and Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird to file a lawsuit.

Here is background on the lawsuit from Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate and Attorney General Brenna Bird vs. the Biden administration on access to federal database on voters' citizenship.

Paul is optimistic that the incoming Trump administration will be more favorable to his request. Although, he said sometimes the federal bureaucracy can be slow to change.

Pate wants Iowa lawmakers to grant him the authority to seek state and federal records that could help confirm a person's legal status.

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DMR: Who is Chris Cournoyer? What to know about the new Iowa lieutenant governor

Stephen Gruber-Miller and Brianne Pfannenstiel

Former state Sen. Chris Cournoyer is officially Iowa's newest lieutenant governor.

Cournoyer, a Republican from LeClaire, is a former lawmaker, school board member and reserve sheriff's deputy, who has a background in computer science.

At her swearing in ceremony Monday, Cournoyer called it "humbling" to take on the job as lieutenant governor.

"Iowans can be confident that I will always approach it with the seriousness that it deserves," she said.

Gov. Kim Reynolds named Cournoyer to the job after former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg resigned in September to become president and CEO of the Iowa Bankers Association.

Here's what to know about the new lieutenant governor.

Chris Cournoyer was elected twice to the Iowa Senate
Cournoyer was first elected to the Iowa Senate in 2018 and reelected to a second four-year term in 2022.

She represented Iowa Senate District 35, which includes Clinton County and parts of Scott and Jackson counties, including Clinton, Camanche, DeWitt, Maquoketa and LeClaire.

Cournoyer resigned her Iowa Senate seat "effective immediately" Monday morning before swearing the oath of office as lieutenant governor.

Reynolds will need to call a special election to select her replacement in the Iowa Senate, where Republicans hold a 34-15 supermajority.

The governor has not set a date for that special election.

Cournoyer has a background in technology and computer science
She chaired the Senate Technology Committee and experience in computer science.

Cournoyer holds a bachelor's degree in computer science from the University of Texas and runs a website design business. She also worked as a senior consultant in the technology division at Andersen Consulting, which is now Accenture, according to a news release from the governor's office.

She also is a member of the Governor's STEM Advisory Council and a former member of the Quad City Engineering and Science Council.

Reynolds highlighted that background in her speech Monday announcing Cournoyer as her pick for lieutenant governor.

"It's exciting to think about all of the ways that we can utilize Chris' experience in her new role," Reynolds said. "Here's a working mother who has known the joys and challenges of raising children while being in the workforce and owning a business, a computer science major who was thinking about optimizing computers for user experience in the late 90s, and a woman who then went on to drive innovation her entire working life."

Cournoyer helped lead Reynolds' efforts to shrink state government. She was the vice chair of the Senate State Government Committee, where she helped lead Reynolds' effort to reorganize and consolidate state government and Iowa's hundreds of state boards and commissions.

She took the lead in the Senate on a law Reynolds signed this year eliminating dozens of state boards and commissions. And she served as a member of a new board created by that law: The State Government Efficiency Review Committee.

Chris Cournoyer speaks after being sworn in as Gov. Kim Reynolds' next lieutenant governor on Monday, Dec. 16, 2024, at the Iowa State Capitol. She also spoke in Reynolds' office this year at the bill signing for a law that eliminated the requirement that Iowa boards and commissions have a balance of men and women serving on them. At the signing, she said there are more women serving in a range of careers than ever before.

Reynolds praised Cournoyer's role in helping her reorganize state government.

"I'm excited about today's announcement because it advances my goal of becoming ... more efficient in how we deliver services to Iowans while also providing the best possible value for taxpayers," Reynolds said Monday. "Even after implementing alignment, which Chris worked on as the vice chair of the Senate state government committee, significant opportunities still exist to find efficiencies through technology. Here too, her expertise, especially in AI, will be invaluable."

A former reserve sheriff deputy with the Scott County Sheriff's Department, Cournoyer also served on the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy Council.

Cournoyer served on the Pleasant Valley School Board. She served for five years on the Pleasant Valley School Board, including a stint as its president.

She is also a substitute teacher and works with students as a robotics and coding teacher.

In the Senate, Cournoyer served on the Education Committee and was chair of the Education Appropriations Subcommittee, which handles the budget for K-12 and higher education in Iowa.

And she was a member of the Area Education Agency Task Force, which was charged with examining the impact of a law Reynolds signed this year reorganizing the AEAs' responsibilities and funding.

"As a school board president and active substitute teacher in my district, I personally witnessed how STEM and work-based learning can bring concepts alive for students and set them on a path for long-term success," Cournoyer said Monday. "Taken together, my experience has repeatedly taught me the amazing potential of technology to transform legacy systems, grow Iowa's economy and empower students. This vision has always been at the heart of Governor Reynolds' agenda, and I couldn't be more excited to join her team and do my part to implement it on behalf of Iowans."

Cournoyer was a Nikki Haley endorser

She was one of the first prominent Iowans to endorse Nikki Haley when the former United Nations ambassador announced her campaign for president last year.

She served as Iowa State Chair for Haley's campaign ahead of the Iowa Caucuses in January and campaigned around the state for Haley, calling her "a champion for the next generation."

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DMR: New addiction recovery center in Pleasant Hill opens

F. Amanda Tugade

A new addiction treatment center in Pleasant Hill hopes to partner with community agencies and create a stronger support system for central Iowans coping with substance abuse.

One of the few medical detox facilities in the Des Moines metro, ThriveNow Recovery Center at 6132 N.E. 12th Ave. seeks to help fill the resource gap and work with law enforcement officials, mobile crisis response teams and other health care workers, said Brock Mulligan, the center's senior development and community relations coordinator. The facility opened in early December.

The center's launch comes as Polk County opens its sobering center to help those with alcoholism. The sobering center only allows for brief stays, and those interested in receiving more care and expanded programming can turn to ThriveNow, Mulligan said.

ThriveNow Recovery Center in Pleasant Hill opened in early December. The center at 6132 N.E. 12th Ave. has medical detox beds and a residential treatment program for those with substance abuse.

"We'll be one of their resources," he said.

A former site of an assisted living community, ThriveNow was renovated into a recovery center for adult men and women with 12 medical detox beds. It also offers residential treatment program stays for 28 days, Mulligan said. He added that the center accepts Medicaid and private or commercial insurance. Self-pay options also are available.

"We want to be inclusive of all different types of people," added Brandon George, chief strategy officer of Ascension Recovery Services, which oversees ThriveNow. "... We have to be able to serve everybody in the community, not just people that have money."

The Iowa Department of Public Health has reported an increase in drug and alcohol use in the state, particularly with nicotine and binge drinking. Substance-related deaths reached record highs in 2021.

Last year, Iowa ranked 35th in the country in illicit drug use and 48th in overdose deaths, the health department reported.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: Drone sighting epidemic spurs Dems in Congress to urge more transparency from feds

Jacob Fischler

Members of Congress are among those calling for greater transparency from the federal government as a spate of reported drone sightings concentrated in New Jersey and New York has raised questions beyond the Northeast.

Reported sightings of drones, officially known as unmanned aerial systems, or UAS, have spiked since Nov. 18, when authorities received several reports of suspicious drone activity near critical infrastructure in New Jersey, according to an FBI official in the state who briefed reporters over the weekend.

The increased activity has worried some and led to calls from lawmakers for the federal agencies to provide more information on drone activity, even as security officials urged caution.

In a statement that described an “epidemic of non-stop drone sightings,” U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called for the federal government to deploy more drone-detection systems and to share information with local authorities.

“I want it deployed widely across New York and New Jersey to help give us concrete answers on what is going on, and from where,” Schumer, a New York Democrat, said of a drone-detection system that the federal government uses. “What we need right now is data. The briefings I have had tell me there is no evidence that this is a government or foreign activity, and so, we have to answer the logical question of: who?”

Schumer called on Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to deploy the drone-detection system and said he would cosponsor a bill that would give local law enforcement more authority to respond to drone sightings.

Drones, like planes and other users of the national airspace, are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

“We still have very few answers on where some of these drones come from and who may be operating them,” Schumer said Monday on the Senate floor. “The people of New York and New Jersey have a lot of questions and haven’t gotten many answers. We know one thing, though. Local officials now don’t have the resources nor the authority to get to the bottom of what’s happening.”

On CBS’ Sunday morning news show “Face the Nation,” Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Minnesota Democrat who is a senior member of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee with jurisdiction over the FAA, called for federal officials to brief U.S. senators.

“We need more transparency,” she said.

‘No evidence’ of threat, says DOD

U.S. Defense Department spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Monday that there was “no evidence at this time that the reported drone sightings pose a national security or public safety threat or have a foreign nexus.”

Regardless, he said he wanted to take the public’s concerns seriously, but also offered further context.

The drone industry is expanding, with more than 1 million hobbyist and commercial drones licensed by the FAA and 8,000 in use daily.

He likened the drone sightings, even those near military installations or other important sites, to drivers who may get lost and turn up in their cars at places they are not supposed to be, something he said happens regularly without incident.

“The point being is that flying drones is not illegal,” he said. “There are thousands of drones flown around the U.S. on a daily basis. So, as a result, it’s not that unusual to see drones in the sky, nor is it an indication of malicious activity or any public safety threat.”

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, noted Monday that federal investigators had not found any malicious activity and urged residents to “calm down” about drone sightings.

Many recent reports of drones, noted by non-experts, turned out to be commercial planes flying regularly scheduled nighttime routes.

More than 5,000 tips

The New Jersey-based FBI official said that the vast majority of the more than 5,000 tips his office received in the past month related to unidentified objects in the night skies have not been “actionable.”

The official, who briefed reporters along with officials from other agencies on the condition their names not be used, said the FBI was working to identify the 100 or so tips that did warrant further investigation.

“I don’t want to cause alarm and panic, but you can’t ignore the sightings that have been there, and we are concerned about those just as much as anybody else is,” the FBI official said. “We’re doing our best to find the origin of that specific — of those drone activities. But I think there has been a slight overreaction.”

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CBS News: 2 killed, suspect dead in school shooting in Madison, Wisconsin, police say
Staff

MADISON, Wis. (CBS) — Two people were killed and a suspect was found dead in a shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin, on Monday morning.

Just before 11 a.m., Madison police responded to the mass shooting at the private school located at 4901 E. Buckeye Rd. on the east side of Madison.

Madison Chief of Police Shon F. Barnes said a second-grade student called 911 at 10:57 a.m. to report the shooting.

The shooting took place inside a classroom and study hall occupied by students in various grades, Barnes said.

The shooter has been identified as 15-year-old Natalie Rupnow, a student at the school who lived in Madison and went by the name Samantha. It is believed she died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after opening fire in the school.

Police said the two people who died in the shooting were a teenage student and a teacher.

According to Pastor Chris Dolson, who was speaking at a vigil for the victims on Monday night, the teacher who was killed may have been a substitute.

"There's a woman who called in sick today. She's a teacher. And there was a substitute that came in to take her place that was shot and killed," Dolson said. "Survivor guilt kicks in when those things happen."

CBS News has not independently confirmed the teacher's identity.

Five other students and another teacher were injured. Two of the wounded students remained in critical condition with life-threatening injuries Monday night, Barnes said.

The surviving teacher and three other students were treated for non-life-threatening injuries, and two of those victims have been released, while the other two have been stabilized, Barnes said.

Barnes confirmed officers found the teenage shooting suspect at the scene apparently having shot herself, and officers fired no shots. Police said the suspect used a 9 mm pistol, and police were working to trace the gun.

Rupnow was pronounced dead while being taken to the hospital, Barnes said.

All surviving students were reunited with their loved ones in the hours after the shooting, officials said.

As police searched for a motive late Monday, the FBI was working with local law enforcement to process the scene, conduct interviews, and obtain search warrants.

CBS News Chicago is told the suspected shooter's family is cooperating with police.

"Right now, my heart is heavy for my community," Barnes said earlier Monday. "My heart is heavy for Madison, and we have to come together as a community and figure out what happened here and make sure that it doesn't happen at any other place that should be a refuge for students in our community."

Mireille Jean-Charles is the mother of three boys who attend Abundant Life Christian School. She spoke with Meryl Hubbard, a reporter for CBS affiliate WISC-TV in Madison.

"It's sad, you know, to be home and then somebody calls you and says your kids' school in lockdown—and you don't know where they are. And I was there since 11. I finally got them, and thank God they were safe," Jean-Charles said. "But the trauma—it's a lot, because I'm sure they lost friends and a teacher, which is not OK. And I don't think they will be OK for a long time, and I'm not."

As reported by WISC, school director of elementary and school relations Barbara Weirs said the school does not have metal detectors, but does follow safety protocols. Weirs said the school held a practice lockdown at the beginning of the current academic year, the station reported.

"We've joked around about how safe a 400-student-bodied school—Christian private school—is, right?" a man said. "If it can happen here, it can literally happen anywhere."

Hours after the shooting, several officers were seen removing the door from a Madison home in a search Chief Barnes said was connected to the investigation.

"Our detectives are working hard in the investigative process to find out as many answers as we can so that we can further prevent these things from happening—not only in this community, but in other communities around our country," Barnes said.

Dave Wagner is the former principal of the school.

"My heart grieves beyond words with them," Wagner said. "I know the principal. I know several of the teachers. They're going to be impacted for their life by the tragedy of this day."

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers released the following statement:

"There are no words to describe the devastation and heartbreak we feel today after the school shooting at Abundant Life Christian School in Madison this morning."

"Kathy and I join the people of Wisconsin in praying for the families and loved ones of those whose lives were so senselessly taken and for the educators, staff, and the entire

Abundant Life school community as they grapple with the grief, trauma, and loss of this gut-wrenching tragedy. We are also praying and hoping all those injured survive and recover.

"Kathy and I are also keeping in our hearts the first responders who acted quickly and ran toward danger to help save lives. This day will no doubt weigh heavily on them, and we are grateful for their critical response efforts in answering the call when they were needed most.

"As a father, a grandfather, and as governor, it is unthinkable that a kid or an educator might wake up and go to school one morning and never come home. This should never happen, and I will never accept this as a foregone reality or stop working to change it.

"Today my focus is on supporting these families and kids and the Abundant Life community, and the state stands ready to support them and the efforts of local law enforcement through what will undoubtedly be difficult days ahead."

Gov. Evers will be ordering the flags of the United States and the state of Wisconsin to half-staff across the state immediately until sunset on Sun., Dec. 22.

Abundant Life Christian School is a private, nondenominational religious school that serves just under 400 students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

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NPR: First public comments attributed to Assad claim he never planned to leave Syria
Hadeel Al-Shalchi

DAMASCUS, Syria — Former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is believed to have issued his first remarks since opposition forces took over Syria more than a week ago, claiming his departure from the country was "neither planned nor did it occur in the final hours of the battles" against the rebel forces he calls "terrorists."

The statement attributed to Assad was posted in English on the deposed Syrian presidency's account on the Telegram messaging app, dated Dec. 16, from Moscow. The Telegram post says there had been "several unsuccessful attempts to release the statement via Arabic and international media outlets."

It claims he fought beside the army to the very end "just meters from terrorists in the most dangerous and intense battlefields."

As the rebel forces entered the capital on Dec. 8, the statement says, Assad moved to a military airbase in the port city of Latakia in coordination with his Russian allies.

The statement goes on to say that upon arrival at the base, it was clear that his army had withdrawn from all battle lines and all their positions had fallen. It says that Moscow then arranged an immediate evacuation that evening as the base came under drone attacks. The Kremlin then gave Assad asylum in Russia.

"At no point during these events did I consider stepping down or seeking refuge, nor was such proposal made by any individual or party," the statement says. "The only course of action was to continue fighting against the terrorist onslaught."

The Assad regime fell just over a week ago when rebel forces led by jihadist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, stormed Damascus. The leader of HTS is Ahmed al-Sharaa, formerly known by his nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, who has a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head and is designated as a terrorist by the United States.

Sharaa has made some appearances since his group's victory, asking the international community to assist Syria and send aid.

World

U.S. has made contact with Syrian rebel group HTS, Blinken says
But countries are grappling with how to interact with Syria's interim leadership. The European Union set out conditions on Monday for lifting sanctions that have devastated the Syrian economy. The EU said it wants guarantees that the interim Syrian government is planning a peaceful political transition which includes minorities.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Saturday the U.S. had made "direct contact" with HTS, without elaborating on details of the talks.

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ABC News: Trump not eligible for immunity in New York hush money case, judge rules

Staff

The New York judge in President-elect Donald Trump's criminal hush money case ruled Monday that the Supreme Court's presidential immunity decision does not apply to that case.

Trump had sought to dismiss his criminal indictment and vacate the jury verdict on the grounds that prosecutors, during the trial last May, introduced evidence relating to Trump's official acts as president, after the Supreme Court later ruled in July that Trump is entitled to presumptive immunity from criminal prosecution for official acts undertaken while in office.

However, Judge Juan Merchan said on Monday that the evidence in Trump's hush money case related "entirely to unofficial conduct" and "poses no danger of intrusion on the authority and function of the Executive Branch."

Trump was found guilty in May on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to a hush money payment made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels in order to boost his electoral prospects in the 2016 presidential election. Judge Merchan has yet to hand down a sentence.

In his ruling Monday, Merchan found that there was "overwhelming evidence of guilt" that led the jury to convict Trump at trial.

Trump's attorneys, arguing for immunity, had emphasized the importance of former White House Communications Director Hope Hicks' testimony, including her recounting of interactions with Trump in 2018 when reporting about the alleged hush money payment to Stormy Daniels broke, to demonstrate Trump's knowledge of the payment and his preference that the story came out after the election.

Defense lawyers used a similar argument to argue that tweets from Trump -- which prosecutors used to demonstrate an alleged "pressure campaign" to prevent Trump's former attorney Michael Cohen from cooperating with authorities in 2018 -- were official communications protected by immunity because the posts "fall well within the core authority of the Nation's Chief Executive."

But Merchan on Monday rejected Trump's argument that the testimony of Hicks, Trump's Twitter posts about Cohen, and other evidence, constitute official acts.

"Just as the title of Communications Director does not bestow absolute immunity to any and all communications with Ms. Hicks, neither does mere reference to the Justice Department convert a Tweet to an official act," Merchan wrote in his ruling.

"It is therefore logical and reasonable to conclude that if the act of falsifying records to cover up the payments so that the public would not be made aware is decidedly an unofficial

act, so too should the communications to further that same cover-up be unofficial," the judge wrote.

Trump has also offered another argument that he is entitled to presidential immunity because he is now president-elect, which Merchan has yet to rule on.

Last week, the Manhattan district attorney's office urged Merchan to preserve the jury's verdict and sentence Trump at some later date following his second term, but Trump's attorneys blasted that proposal as "thuggish tactics."

In a letter accompanying Monday's ruling, Merchan referenced a forthcoming filing from Trump's lawyers alleging "juror misconduct," which has yet to be made public.

Merchan wrote that Trump's argument "consists entirely of unsworn allegations," but that he will allow the president-elect's lawyers to file a redacted version of their claims.

"Thus, this Court finds that to allow the public filing of the letters without redactions and without the benefit of a hearing would only serve to undermine the integrity of these proceedings while simultaneously placing the safety of the jurors at grave risk," Merchan wrote.

The judge said that he would consider Trump's claims if he submitted a motion to throw out the case with sworn testimony backing up the allegation of juror misconduct, rather than the unsworn allegations provided by Trump's lawyers in their recent filing.

"Allegations of juror misconduct should be thoroughly investigated. However, this Court is prohibited from deciding such claims on the basis of mere hearsay and conjecture," the judge wrote.

Merchan's letter did not provide any additional context about Trump's allegation of juror misconduct, and Trump's filings have not been posted to the court's public docket.

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ABC News: Drone updates: No national security risk found after 5,000 tips, FBI and other federal agencies say

Pierre Thomas and Kevin Shalvey

The thousands of drone sightings reported over the last month in Northeastern states don't appear to be "anything anomalous," nor do they present a national security or public safety risk, federal officials said in a multiagency statement late Monday.

The FBI has received more than 5,000 tips in the last few weeks about drone sightings in New Jersey and other states, said the statement, which was released jointly by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Defense.

Those tips have resulted in about 100 leads, with federal investigators supporting state and local officials.

"Having closely examined the technical data and tips from concerned citizens, we assess that the sightings to date include a combination of lawful commercial drones, hobbyist drones, and law enforcement drones, as well as manned fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and stars mistakenly reported as drones," the joint statement said.

Uncrewed aerial drones have been lighting up the sky at night in New Jersey and nearby states for weeks, since about mid-November, leading to concern from residents and speculation online. Some had demanded answers from local and state officials for answers.

The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have deployed infrared cameras and drone detection technology to ensure the drones flying over the New Jersey and New York area aren't harmful, according to a law enforcement source. Dozens of agencies have been out daily to find answers and track down any operators acting "illegally or with nefarious intent," the FBI said recently.

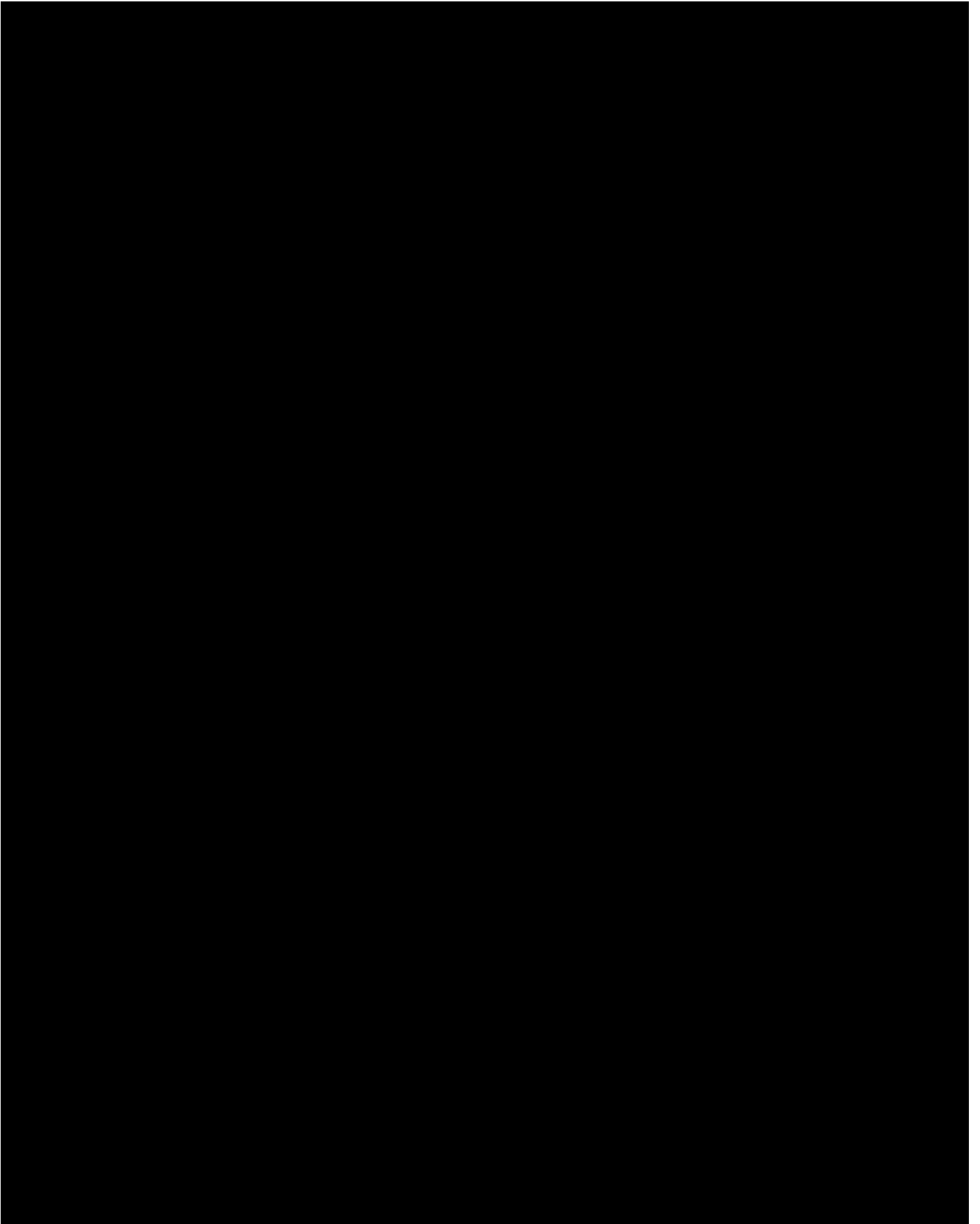
The agencies are also looking at social media and other photos to determine what exactly is in the photos. Most of the photos and video depict manned aircraft, according to a law enforcement source.

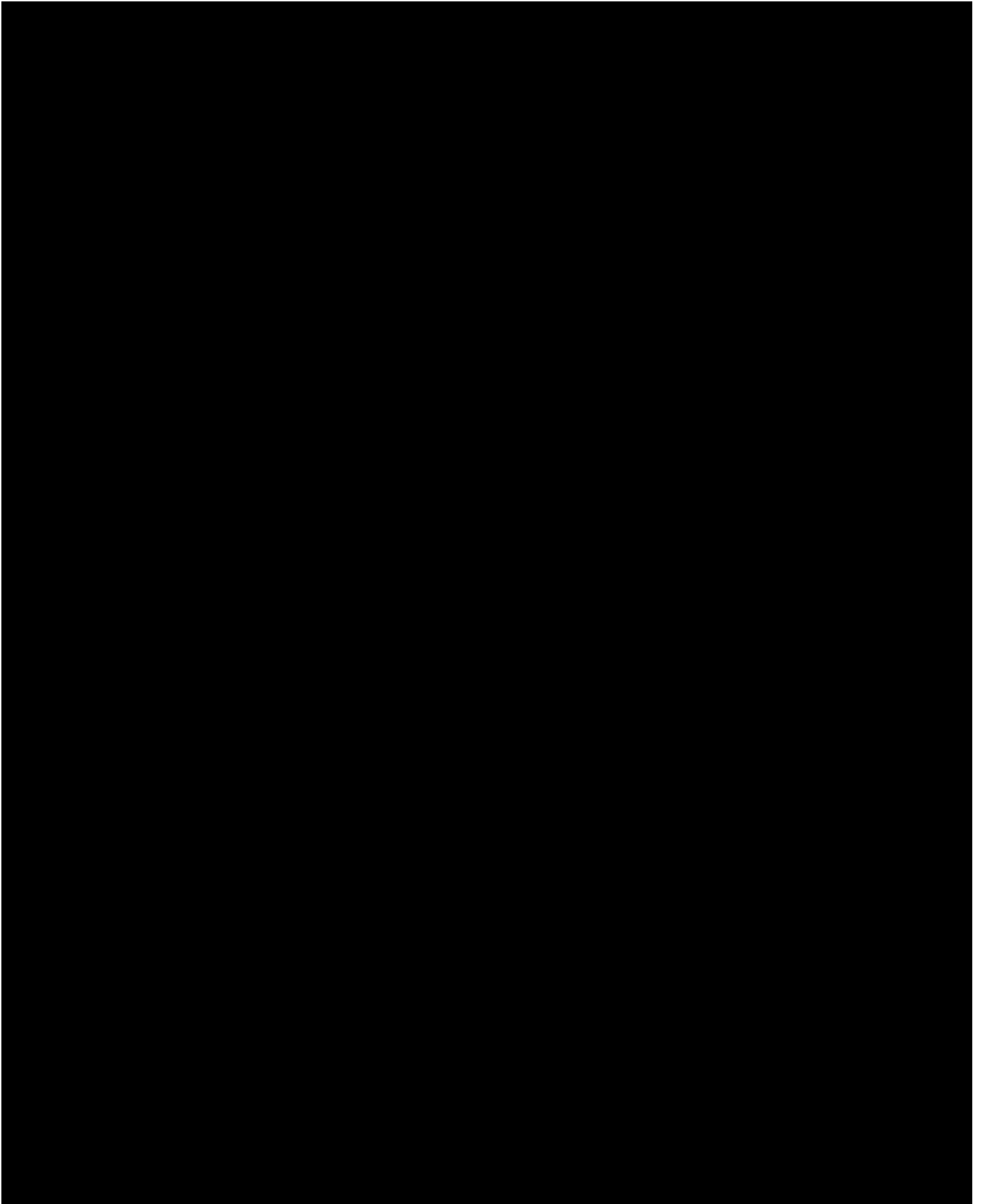
But the newly released statement appeared to take a sober view of the mysterious drone sightings, noting that federal officials have yet to identify "anything anomalous and do not assess the activity to date to present a national security or public safety risk over the civilian airspace in New Jersey or other states in the northeast."

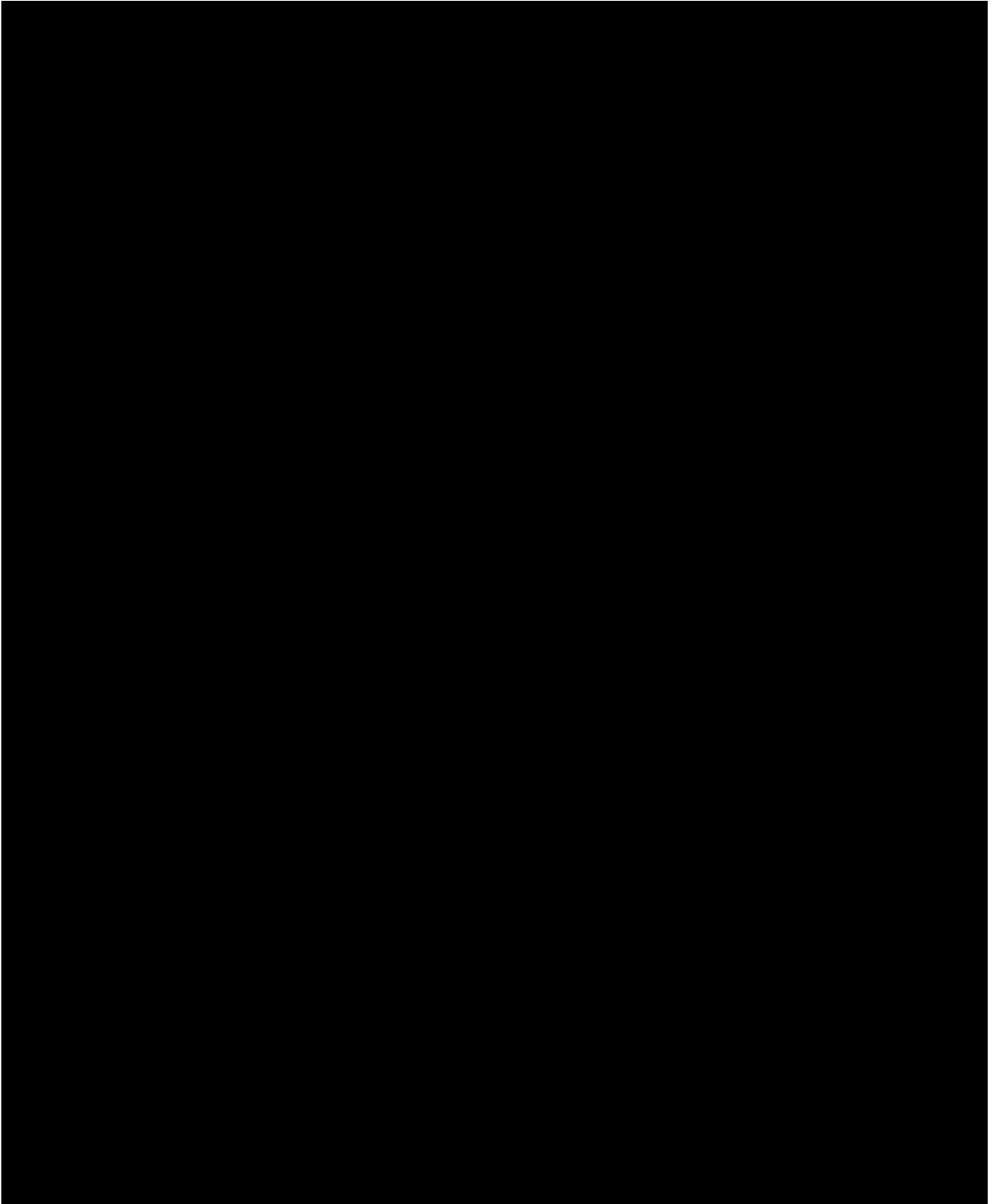
"That said, we recognize the concern among many communities," the statement said. "We continue to support state and local authorities with advanced detection technology and support of law enforcement."

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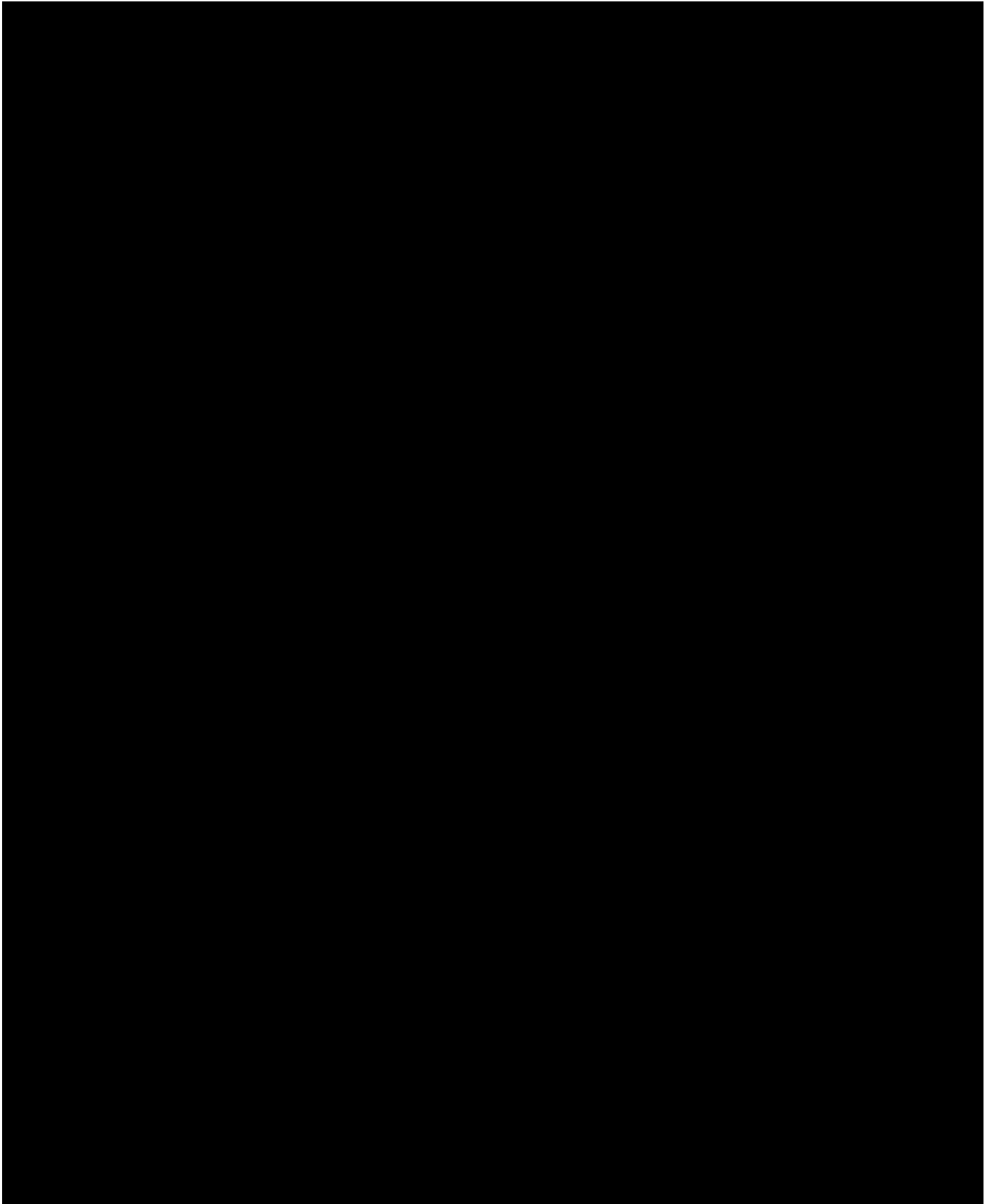
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Sent: December 18, 2024 3:09 PM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: 2024.12.18 Additional Media prep doc.docx

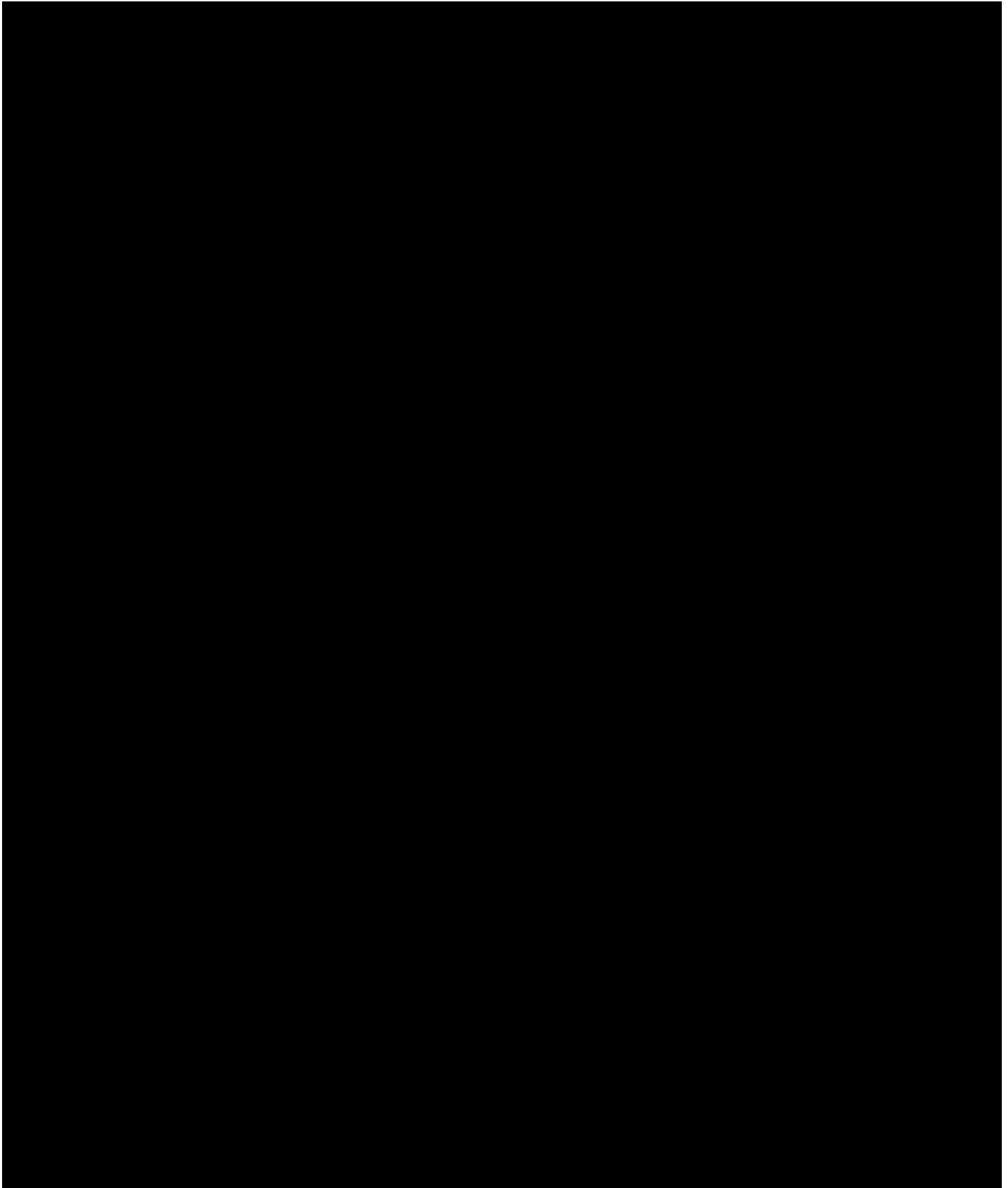


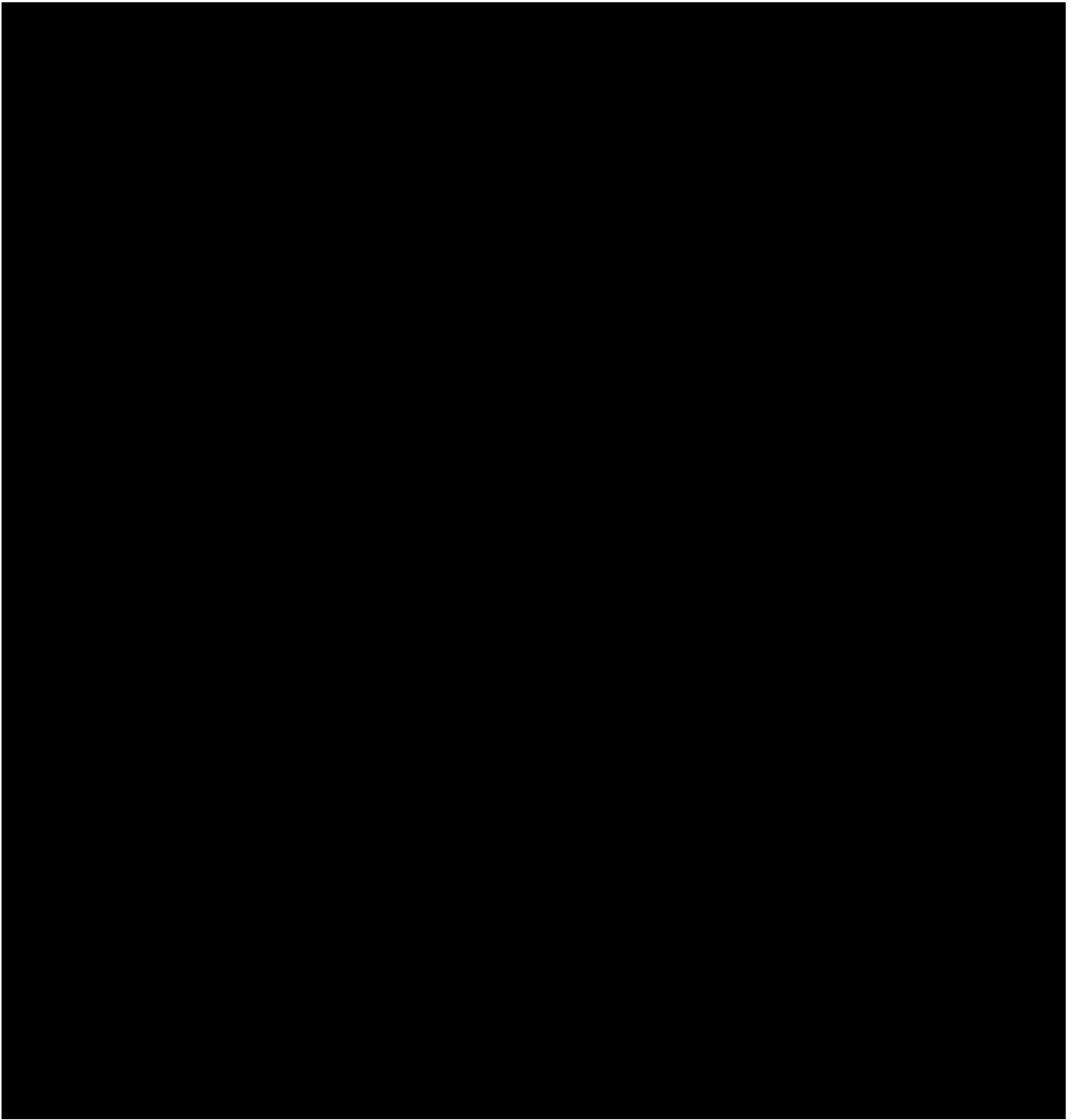




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Subject: 2024.12.18 Additional Media prep doc--EDITED
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Sent: December 18, 2024 3:22 PM (UTC-06:00)
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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: IGOV Morning Clips 12.19.2024
To: IGOV Reynolds All Staff; Paulsen, Kraig; Winters, Tammy; Brandt, Tess; cstrawn@myomnitel.com
Sent: December 19, 2024 7:23 AM (UTC-06:00)
Attached: IGOV Morning Clips 12.19.2024.docx

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IOWA NEWS:

DMR: New Iowa vaping law unconstitutionally favors 'Big Tobacco,' retailers claim in new lawsuit

William Morris

A group of e-cigarette retailers and manufacturers are suing to block new Iowa regulations they say would eliminate "over 99%" of vaping products currently offered for sale in the state and force many smoke and vape shops out of business.

The subject of the lawsuit, led by an industry group called Iowans for Alternatives to Smoking and Tobacco, is a new state law, House File 2677. The "vapor products directory" bill was passed during the 2024 legislative session and imposes fines on makers and sellers of vape products that lack U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval.

The plaintiffs say that rule violates the U.S. Constitution because Congress gave the FDA the exclusive authority to enforce its drug safety mandates, and because the law includes exceptions for some products derived from tobacco, but not for similar products containing nicotine from other sources.

Heather Glenn, president of IFAST and owner of Des Moines store Route 69 Vapor, a plaintiff in the suit, called the new rules "Big Tobacco's political manipulation."

"We are being legislated out of existence by the regulatory effects of HF 2677," she said in a statement. "Dozens of Iowa businesses are on the verge of being shuttered and their hard-working employees and their families will suffer the financial consequences of this legislative sop to Big Tobacco."

The plaintiffs allege the bill included language supported by lobbyists for major tobacco companies, who make vaping products covered by the bill's exceptions, while the majority of their competitors' products are not. The complaint also notes that anti-smoking stalwart American Cancer Society Action Network registered to lobby against the bill, which nonetheless passed and was signed into law in May.

They also argue in their petition that the FDA has intentionally declined to go after vaping products that are sold while their approval applications are pending, as doing so might inadvertently force smokers back to more-dangerous cigarettes. And they note that the FDA could change its current enforcement priorities when President-elect Donald Trump takes office in January, just two weeks before the Iowa Department of Revenue intends to begin enforcing the new law Feb. 3.

The suit seeks an injunction blocking the law and declaring it unconstitutional prior to that date.

The Iowa Attorney General's Office declined to comment.

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WHO13: Iowa congressional delegation members frustrated with funding bill

Zach Fisher

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa's six congressional delegation members are awaiting a vote on a bill that would extend government funding and avoid a government shutdown. The concern from those six members is what's within a 1,500 page continuous resolution.

United States Senator Chuck Grassley during his weekly media availability highlighted his concern with the government potentially shutting down.

"I don't want a government shutdown. I don't think we'll have a government shutdown, and I'm sure we won't have one when it comes to a vote in the United States Senate. I know it's a little closer in the House of Representatives, but that's the way it is," said Grassley (R). The Senate waits for some type of funding bill to come out of the U.S. House.

Wednesday Republican house lawmakers were sorting through the massive bill that would include \$10 billion in direct payments to farmers, \$21 billion in agriculture disaster aid, a one year extension of the 2018 farm bill and year round E-15.

Accessible playground coming to Iowa State Fairgrounds

Congressman Zach Nunn's office tells WHO 13 News that those are portions of the bill that is supported by Congressman Nunn, but the 1,500 page bill includes some things that frustrate him and other lawmakers, specifically mentioning the portion of the bill that increases pay for those elected.

Senator Joni Ernst expressed her displeasure with the bill that was introduced in a post on social media Wednesday.

"Congress deserves a lump of coal for failing to do its job and putting special interests ahead of taxpayers," Ernst wrote in part. In a follow up post Sen. Ernst showed support for Iowa farmers, saying that a farm bill shouldn't be held hostage by the massive spending package.

If there is not some type of resolution passed before the Friday deadline, there will be some aspects of the federal government shut down on Saturday.

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WOI: State lawmakers plan to tackle inflation and education as top priorities

Connor O'Neal

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa lawmakers met at the State Capitol this week to discuss each party's legislative priorities for the upcoming session, which begins Monday, Jan. 13.

At the top of the list for Democrats and Republicans is addressing the economy, and the impact inflation has had at a state level.

House Republicans also want to improve the state's education system. Speaker of the House Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford, recently created the House Higher Education Committee to determine if the state is getting the value it wants from schools, in the content it teaches and "to fill workforce needs."

"I think with the workforce challenges that we are facing, some of the 'woke' policies we're seeing on campuses, I think we need to have more of a focus on what that looks like from the workforce standpoint," he said.

House Democrats instead want to cut back on the education savings account program -- which provides money for families to attend private schools.

"We're going to make sure that we are putting them first, and we're going to be pushing hard to ensure that public money goes to public schools," House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst, D-Polk County said. "Fighting back against efforts to continue to fund, in an unsustainable way, private schools with your tax dollars."

Konfrst added Democrats want to raise wages for Iowans and legalize marijuana.

However, Grassley said Republicans have no interest in legalizing marijuana this session, despite it being fully legal in three of Iowa's neighboring states.

Republicans are also focused on reforming the state's property tax system through multiple pieces of legislation.

Grassley told Local 5 News: "I think where we're kind of on the path to is you'll see the House introduce a few bills, because I think what we actually have to have happen is, we have to have everyone come to the table. In the past whenever we've talked about property taxes, it feels like the local governments and the state are being pitted against one another."

Republicans are coming into this session with a two-thirds majority, however, Konfrst said Democrats aren't going to "sit back and watch," and are instead, "ready to fight."

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Radio Iowa: U.S. Rep. Nunn says public needs answers on drone sightings

Kay Henderson

Iowa Congressman Zach Nunn, a Republican from Bondurant who's a colonel in the Air Force Reserves, says the American public needs real answers to repeated reports of drone sightings.

"I'd like to end the hysteria, but I believe that comes from clear leadership in the White House," Nunn says. "In the last month, we clearly have not received that."

President Biden said this week there's nothing nefarious about drone sightings on the east coast. President-elect Trump has said something strange is going on and he is staying away from his New Jersey golf club as a precaution.

"We are living in a post-9/11 world where if you see something, you should say something," Nunn says. "Challengingly...we have a FAA who is pointing fingers at the Department of Defense who is pointing fingers at the Department of Homeland Security who is pointing fingers at the FBI (and) we have the same White House that couldn't tell us that a Chinese-made balloon is floating over the country at the beginning of the year is now ending the year with being a little too coy on what's happening with drones flying over New Jersey."

The U.S. Coast Guard as well as New Jersey law enforcement agencies have confirmed the sightings there. "It's been verified by the governor and frankly kids on the Jersey Shore are seeing this stuff and we can't get a straight answer out of the White House," Nunn says, "and now it's happening in other places across the country."

A White House spokesman says there is no national security threat and it appears to be normal, legal activity. "I will agree with the White House that we've got more than a million drones operating across our country, but here's what I also know: I know the majority of these drones, particularly the commercial drones, are made in China," Nunn says. "Elements, particularly in Iran, have used drones in an aggressive way to attack not only the State of Israel, but killed three U.S. military members in Syria earlier this year."

Nunn says the U.S. should have a domestic drone production program, so the country isn't dependent on drone technology that today comes from China and eastern Europe. Nunn, who was an airborne intelligence officer in the Air Force, also led an Iowa National Guard Intelligence Squadron in the past decade.

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Iowa Public Radio: Judicial branch audit says \$27.6 million went to wrong state funds due to IT errors

Katarina Sostaric

State Auditor Rob Sand released an audit report Tuesday that says the Iowa Judicial Branch distributed \$27.6 million of court debt collections to the wrong state fund over four years, shorting other state and local funds in the process.

The problem was caused by computer programming errors at the judicial branch. Some Republican officials have accused Sand, the only statewide elected Democrat, of failing to address the financial irregularities when his office was notified of a potential problem in 2022.

The claim that we didn't follow up is just not true.

State Auditor Rob Sand

Sand said his office has been in contact with judicial branch officials about the programming errors since that time, and was waiting for the judicial branch to provide final numbers that could be included in the audit for fiscal year 2023. He accused Republican officials of "making stuff up" about his office, and said they should apologize to his staff.

"The claim that we didn't follow up is just not true," Sand said. "We have remained actively engaged with the judicial branch. We worked with the judicial branch in settling on a plan to hire computer coding experts to address this issue, and duplicating that again obviously would have been a waste of tax money."

Judicial branch says it has fixed the IT errors

The audit report includes a statement from the Iowa Judicial Branch, which says officials believe they have fixed the programming errors that sent \$27.6 million of court debt collections — about 4.68% of collections from fiscal years 2021-2024 — to the wrong funds and shorted state and local funds by the same amount.

The biggest financial impacts were to the Road Use Tax Fund, which was shorted more than \$10 million, and the Victim Compensation Fund, which was shorted more than \$7 million.

The judicial branch said it made programming changes on Nov. 22 that will go through a third-party review to make sure they are correctly distributing funds in compliance with Iowa law.

The judicial branch also stated it has corrected financial distributions made since July 1, 2024, which was the beginning of the current fiscal year. But they are not able to fix funding mistakes from past fiscal years without action from the Legislature.

"We are interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders to correct all misallocations from FY21 through FY24," the judicial branch response in the audit report states.

Sand said the numbers presented in the audit report, which his office received Oct. 23, represent the judicial branch's final numbers of how much various accounts have been overfunded and underfunded.

"Now that we know that, the Legislature can make those adjustments," Sand said. "But there was no way that we could have done that prior to the judicial branch actually providing those numbers."

Sand's office is also set to review the judicial branch's calculations to ensure the numbers presented in Tuesday's report are accurate.

GOP officials want more scrutiny of misallocated funds

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen continued to criticize Sand's handling of the matter Tuesday after the audit was released. He said he was not satisfied with the audit report, and that Sand's office would need to verify and document the judicial branch's calculations in the follow-up review.

This clearly is something that we as a state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled.

Kraig Paulsen, director of the Iowa Department of Management

Paulsen said lawmakers should investigate the matter, and Iowans deserve an apology.

"This clearly is something that we as a state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled, nor do I think we met their expectations," he said. "And I think in particular...they should have been notified sooner, and we should have been in finding out what was right and what was wrong sooner."

Paulsen disagreed with Sand's assertion that the auditor's office was required by state law to keep the information it received about financial irregularities in the judicial branch confidential. He also pushed back on Sand's claim that the Department of Management was first to discover the problem.

Sand provided an email from a DOM employee dated July 26, 2022, that raised questions about a drop in revenue in the Road Use Tax Fund. But Paulsen said while his office saw a change in that fund, they did not understand the magnitude of the problem or have access to the information that would allow them to find the problem.

House Speaker Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford, has also criticized Sand's response to the misallocated funds.

Grassley's spokesperson, Melissa Saitz, said in a statement that it took scrutiny from Republican lawmakers and the executive branch for Sand to release audit reports that mention the problem.

"This report, however, far from answers all our questions," she said. "Iowa House Republicans just learned about this issue in September and are still working to understand the full implications. We look forward to working this session to get our questions answered and this issue rectified."

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Iowa Soybean partners with state for water quality efforts

Cami Koons

A public-private partnership between the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa Soybean Association and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will invest over \$2.3 million to install nutrient-reducing practices in priority Iowa watersheds.

The majority of the funding will come from IDALS for outreach and to farmers and landowners who will then work with conservation staff to implement practices like saturated buffers, oxbows and perennial cover. The \$1.4 million put up by IDALS will also support design and engineering costs.

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig announced the project Wednesday at the Iowa Soybean

Association's Winter Policy Conference.

"This project, and others like it, prove collaborating is key to making meaningful progress," Naig said in a statement. "If you are a farmer or landowner located within the project area, I would invite you to consider how you can incorporate some of these water quality practices on your land."

According to a press release from IDALS, the partnership will prioritize the watersheds of North Raccoon River, Boone River, Skunk River, Middle Cedar River and Turkey River.

Christie Wiebbecke, the chief officer for Iowa Soybean Association's research and conservation said the association was "grateful" for the "support and partnership" from IDALS and USFWS.

The goal of the initial three-year agreement is to install at least 21 saturated buffers, 900 acres of perennial cover and 30 multi-purpose oxbows, which restore curves to a stream and help to capture nutrients from water that drains into a stream.

The press release from IDALS called these "science-based" practices that improve soil health and protect water quality.

According to a report from Iowa Soybean Association, tile drainage routed through a restored oxbow can remove 50%-95% of nitrate from the water before it runs off into the rest of the stream.

The practices follow the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, which is part of a multistate effort through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to reduce nutrient runoff from agricultural fields into the Mississippi River watershed, and thus reduce the dead-zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

Andrew DiAllesandro, the USFWS private lands coordinator for Iowa, stressed the importance of collaboration in creating a "lasting legacy" for Iowa resources and communities.

"This public-private partnership will be instrumental in delivering impactful water quality and wildlife habitat conservation practices across Iowa and will be a model for partnership efforts moving forward," DiAllesandro said in the press release.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Iowa Western Community College receives EPA grant for job training

Brooklyn Draisey

Iowa Western Community College will recruit and train people to safely deconstruct buildings and return contaminated areas to spaces people can safely inhabit with a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA announced in a news release that Iowa Western Community College, based in Council Bluffs, received a \$478,474 grant through the Brownfields Job Training Program, which helps organizations prepare and employ people to rehabilitate spaces where the environment is thought or confirmed to have been contaminated.

Matt Mancuso, vice president of business and community education, said in an interview the college will use these funds to recruit and train as many as 96 students over the next four years and help them find work in Council Bluffs, North Omaha and the surrounding area on brownfield sites.

"It's exciting for both Iowa Western and the community to have this type of training," Mancuso said.

The EPA has tasked Iowa Western with recruiting underemployed or unemployed individuals in order to bolster the workforce, Mancuso said, and program participants will receive a stipend. The final year of the five-year grant will be spent following up with graduates to see where they are and if they're still employed.

Those going through the four-week training will learn about safe deconstruction of buildings, Mancuso said, as well as procedures for dealing with lead paint and asbestos and OSHA standards. The college developed the curriculum after speaking with Council Bluffs officials to learn what would be most valuable to the community.

Participants can leave the training with up to five federal certifications, and almost 70 will be placed in environmental job positions, according to the release. Mancuso said there are brownfields sites all over the U.S., including Council Bluffs, but even those who don't specifically work on a site will have skills that are in high demand.

Mancuso said he hopes the program will be a game-changer for both the students and the organizations and businesses the college serves.

"Today's announcement is a key step in revitalizing communities and transforming underutilized Midwestern spaces," said EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister in the release. "We congratulate the selected organizations and eagerly look forward to working together to develop a skilled workforce in environmental jobs."

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KCRG: Shutting down parts of federal government costs money, Sen. Grassley warns

Dave Price

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa State Capitol Bureau) - Do not count U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, among those in his party threatening to shut down parts of the federal government amid budget fights.

"I don't want a government shutdown," Grassley said when asked by Gray Media Iowa Wednesday afternoon about the temporary budget compromise proposal Congress had been discussing.

Congress failed to pass a traditional budget earlier this year and instead agreed to a temporary spending bill. But that short-term solution expires this Friday. Without new funding, some parts of the federal government may have to temporarily pause.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers have been working on another temporary spending plan that could fund federal operations until March. It would continue current spending levels and add funding commitments.

The Associated Press laid out some of the additions that were added to the proposal, which includes a 3.8% raise for members of Congress. That would bring the first raise since 2009.

Elon Musk -- the billionaire businessman who spent an estimated \$200 million to help get Donald Trump

elected president and now works with the incoming Trump administration to reduce federal spending -- told Republicans to oppose the compromise spending proposal and said that anyone who supports it should lose their seats in two years.

Grassley said that failing to reach compromise on another spending agreement and temporarily shutting down some federal services and agencies will cost additional money.

"It costs money to shut down the government. It costs money to open up the government. It even costs money this week to plan if there is going to be a shutdown of government," Grassley said.

Late Wednesday afternoon, Trump spoke out publicly against the bipartisan agreement that a group of Congressional lawmakers released the day before. And he demanded that an agreement to raise the federal government's debt ceiling also be included in a final proposal, even though that issue could have waited until next year when he takes over as president.

By Wednesday evening, the spending plan that a group of bipartisan lawmakers released a day earlier was dead, according to House Majority Leader Steve Scalise.

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KCRG: Two new dispensaries expected to help fund infrastructure upgrades in East Dubuque

Keegan Turnbough

EAST DUBUQUE, Illinois (KCRG) - Two new dispensaries are opening in East Dubuque in the next two months.

The Dispensary, located at 1709 Highway 35 North, has enjoyed being the community's only cannabis shop for the last three years. East Dubuque City Manager Bob Seitz said the business generates around \$45,000 monthly for the city in cannabis and sales taxes.

Seitz said he expects the city's revenue to increase with the addition of two more cannabis shops. NuEra Cannabis plans to open a store at 20170 U.S. Highway 20 West by the end of the month, while Bridge City Collective will launch a dispensary at 122 Sinsinawa Avenue by the end of January.

"We haven't counted this in our budget," said Seitz. "We can direct that money to buy down debt and improve infrastructure, going to water mains and things that have been neglected by the city for many years."

According to Seitz, Bridge City Collective's dispensary will be the first new building in the city's downtown core in about 15 years, and the first of several multi-million dollar projects in the area, including remodeling the city's 140-year-old police and fire station.

"It's going to be a complete revival of our business district from a tax revenue standpoint, but mainly updating the city, making it look great and improving pride among people in the city," said Seitz.

Bridge City Collective President David Alport said the cannabis store chain, based out of Portland, Oregon, is invested in adding to the "growth and vibrancy of the downtown area."

“The thing that sets us apart is we’re really trying to be a part of the community there in downtown East Dubuque, so it’s more than just opening up a store somewhere along a corridor,” said Alport, noting its building also features a public outdoor space.

NuEra Cannabis Marketing Director Jonah Rapinio said the Illinois-based cannabis store chain differentiates itself from the market because of its medicinal roots.

“We really understand that people, even when they’re purchasing as adults and use for recreation, a lot of people are using it medicinally to help them with that back pain or as an alternative to sleep medication,” said Rapinio. “We really try to be very sensitive and empathetic for what people are looking for because we know that not everybody is looking for that recreational experience.”

TV9 asked both Alport and Rapinio about joining a competitive market in the tri-state area.

“It can only make us stronger and it also really only helps the consumer, where there’s not a monopoly happening. Where there’s options and they’ve got choices,” noted Rapinio. “Then we’ve got to make sure we’re always doing the best that we can to attract and bring those people in and give them the best possible experience.”

“We welcome our neighbors in the community in the cannabis space and for us, we’ll just keep our head down and do what we do best, and that’s offer something that’s unique as far as a welcoming space,” said Alport.

After several years of working with NuEra Cannabis and Bridge City Collective, Seitz said it’s exciting to see the finish line near.

“It’s always a challenge getting people across the line and this has been several years for each of these businesses,” explained Seitz. “It’s a big sense of accomplishment. It’s great for the future of the city, but it’s also the investment that comes into the city and I think opens up the city to more investment in the future.”

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KCRG: 'No more backfills': Advocates press Gov. Reynolds on tax reform

Conner Hendricks

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa Capitol Bureau) - Wednesday, lobbyists and trade groups weighed in on what they want Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds to prioritize in her next budget.

17 people spoke during the governor’s one-hour public hearing. Property taxes were the biggest topic.

Chris Hagenow with Iowans for Tax Relief wants state lawmakers to eliminate local leaders from raising property taxes by more than two percent in a year.

“We think it’s appropriate to put in some spending limitations this year. And I know that will be met with significant resistance but it’s time,” he said.

Hagenow adds that he doesn’t want legislators to offset potential local revenue loss.

"No more checks. No more backfills. Is that it's time for them to start bending the cost curve down at the local level," he said. "I don't think that it is responsible for the state to pick up part of the tab in this effort towards property tax relief. Is that the state should not be subsidizing the ongoing growth in local government spending."

One thing lawmakers will have to focus on when crafting these cuts is how they'll affect different communities based on size. A flat cap on growth may affect a small town differently than it would a larger city due to the sizes of their tax bases.

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Iowa News Now: UI Athletics to retire Caitlin Clark's #22 jersey, celebrating her historic achievements

Staff

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Caitlin Clark's #22 jersey will be retired in a ceremony on Feb. 2, 2025 inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

In a press release UI Athletics, says the retirement honors Clark's, "legacy, achievement and undeniable impact."

"I'm forever proud to be a Hawkeye and Iowa holds a special place in my heart that is bigger than just basketball," Clark said. "It means the world to me to receive this honor and to celebrate it with my family, friends and alumni. It will be a great feeling to look up in the rafters and see my jersey alongside those that I've admired for so long."

Clark will be in attendance for the game against USC on Feb. 2, 2025. Tipoff is set for 12:30 p.m. and the contest will air on FOX28 and the Hawkeye Radio Network.

"Caitlin Clark has not only redefined excellence on the court but has also inspired countless young athletes to pursue their dreams with passion and determination," said Beth Goetz, Henry B. and Patricia B. Tippie Director of Athletics Chair. "Her remarkable achievements have left an indelible mark on the University of Iowa and the world of women's basketball. Retiring her number is a testament to her extraordinary contributions and a celebration of her legacy that will continue to inspire future generations. Hawkeye fans are eager to say thank you for so many incredible moments."

Cheapest tickets for the Iowa game Wednesday morning were around \$200 a piece. After the announcement, the cheapest priced tickets on Seat Geek clocked in at \$803.

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Daily Nonpareil: Council Bluffs students have fun while learning about technology through coding

Timothy Rohwer

The importance of technology can be found everywhere for today's and tomorrow's students.

"Technology is everywhere and it's not going away," said Jayme Busch, an official with AIM Institute of Omaha. "It's in cars, phones, televisions, Chromebooks."

But, while learning of technology may be important, it doesn't mean it can't be fun.

That was true Tuesday when Busch and other AIM officials visited Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Council Bluffs to host an Hour of Code, introducing students to coding opportunities with artificial intelligence and non-AI components.

Charles Kaup, AIM's director of youth academics, defined coding as building computer programs from scratch.

"It's building apps, building websites, programming robots," said Busch, who also serves as AIM's southwest Iowa outreach coordinator. "It's like putting pieces of a puzzle together."

The Hour of Code activities took part throughout the day during the students' science classes. Altogether, nearly 900 students took part in coding activities in various games.

"We're trying to give the kids the basics of coding," Busch said. "It's spun in a way to involve interactive learning that is fun. You can't continue the game until you code it."

Teacher Katrina Fitch said, "Some have done it in the past, others haven't."

In one sixth grade class, when Kaup asked how many were familiar with coding, more than half of the students raised their hands.

"It always surprises me how many kids have done this already," he said afterwards.

Sixth grader Rylan Allen said, "I started in the second grade."

During the classes, the students were given a choice of numerous games to code.

"I feel like it is putting a puzzle together to do what you want it to do," Busch said.

The students were also encouraged with work with others.

"Everybody learns better when you're talking together," Kaup said.

The classes ended with students filling out a survey on the project.

Allen said he has long liked computers and coding.

"I tried it and just got into it," he said. "The more I do it, it becomes easier."

Major Young, another sixth grader, added, "It helps me understand things more."

Tuesday's event was a collaboration between the AIM Institute and the Council Bluffs Community School District. Hour of Code is a global movement to inspire children to learn more and to feel empowered toward technology, Busch said.

Locally, the AIM Institute, a nonprofit organization, works to fill the growing gap in the tech workforce by training new tech talent and upskilling existing tech workers.

“The goal of this program is to give access to everyone,” Kaup said. “In Iowa, there is a huge demand for these coding jobs.”

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Daily Nonpareil: Minden continues to find progress in rebuilding after tornado disaster

Hailey Peck

Minden continues to progress in rebuilding after the devastating tornado that hit the community in April.

The Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors received a progress update from Bethany Wilcoxon, senior adviser for McClure and Associates.

The city has received multiple grants to help with the rebuild. Wilcoxon noted that the group is working with the Iowa Economic Development Authority for the state’s Emergency Community Catalyst Building Remediation Grant.

Minden was awarded \$500,000, which is going into a couple of key buildings like the meat market, the pharmacy, the former bowling alley, the grocery store and the post office. Wilcoxon said that the only hold-up is the business's insurance.

Minden was also selected for the Iowa Rural Development Council’s Rural Business Initiatives. Minden was one of four communities selected.

“The cool thing about this is that we can give money to the small businesses but we can also tap into other partners from around the state to provide technical assistance,” Wilcoxon said.

Other funding opportunities for Minden include a Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery grant valued at \$1.1 million and funding from the Community Foundation of Western Iowa.

Minden is also seeking \$1.3 million in water distribution system improvements and a new well, 80% of which would be covered by the Iowa Economic Development Authority.

“We anticipate funding would be awarded at the end of the year or early next year and then construction would start in the spring,” Wilcoxon said.

Wilcoxon also mentioned that master planning for a community recreation center has begun.

As Minden continues to be rebuilt, Wilcoxon said they will continue to apply for public and private funding. A temporary development moratorium is in effect while decisions about what downtown should look like are made. The moratorium is expected to last until March.

“The resilience of these communities, I really think that's what spurred Minden's success to date,” Wilcoxon said. “I’m really excited with how they’re progressing.”

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Radio Iowa: Iowa's governor asks new lieutenant governor to focus on STEM, A.I.

Kay Henderson

Arkansas, Massachusetts and now Iowa are the only three states that have two women at the top of state government.

During an interview with Radio Iowa on Wednesday, Governor Kim Reynolds said Chris Cournoyer brings a long list of skills and attributes to the role of lieutenant governor and she didn't limit her search for a lieutenant governor to women.

"It wasn't intentional, I'll say that. Neither is my strong-willed team that I have at the Capitol or my cabinet that's led by a lot of strong, capable, intelligent women as well," Reynolds said. "Chris just checked a lot of boxes and she really complements what we're trying to do here."

Reynolds has asked Cournoyer to review state-led efforts over the past 11 years to encourage students to seek careers in science, technology, engineering and math and update the programs for the next decade. Cournoyer has led STEM efforts in the Quad Cities and has taught robotics and computer coding.

"Kids aren't afraid of technology and so when they bring these STEM programs into the schools, they just really embrace it," said Cournoyer, who joined Reynolds in the governor's formal office for a joint interview with Radio Iowa.

The governor said Cournoyer's background in computer programming and artificial intelligence will be another asset in efforts to modernize state government operations.

"We want to make sure we're bringing AI to state government," Reynolds said, "but we want to make sure we're doing it responsibly and we're doing it right."

Cournoyer is among legislators from around the country who recently served on a task force on cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Cournoyer said there has to be a human component to A.I., to monitor the data that's collected and ensure the outcomes aren't skewed. "And then we really want to make sure that when we're looking at data and how we're running those algorithms and developing them that we're doing it in a very ethical manner," Cournoyer added.

Reynolds described herself and Cournoyer as "competitive people" — both mentioned they played girls sports in high school, but when asked about a run for re-election in 2026, Reynolds said she hasn't decided whether the Reynolds-Cournoyer team will be on Iowa's ballot.

"Honestly, right now I'm trying to get through Christmas, figure out what the (state) budget looks like for the next legislative cycle," Reynolds said. "I'm very excited about some of the things that we're working on."

Reynolds will deliver the annual "Condition of the State" address to legislators on January 14 and release details of her 2025 policy agenda.

For the past 15 weeks, Iowa did not have a lieutenant governor. Reynolds waited until after the November election to begin the search to replace Adam Gregg, who resigned as lieutenant governor on September 2. Reynolds told Radio Iowa she's "had my eye on Chris" for a while and she described Cournoyer as the type of :get-it-done: person who's a good fit for her governing team.

"It's just a really added bonus that she's also a woman and we'll continue to be role models for young girls all across the state," Reynolds said.

Cournoyer added: "I've had so many role models in my life, Governor Reynolds being one who has just really inspired me and I'll take that responsibility very seriously, knowing that somebody might be watching how I conduct myself and making sure that I'm doing that with high standards."

Cournoyer has been a state senator for the past six years, but resigned Monday morning just before being sworn in as lieutenant governor. The governor has not yet set the date for a special election in the state senate district the includes Le Claire, where Cournoyer lives, as well as the cities of Clinton, Maquoketa and DeWitt.

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DMR: How a 'computer nerd' and substitute teacher earned her spot as Iowa's lieutenant governor

Brianne Pfannenstiel

Chris Cournoyer was substitute teaching in a fourth-grade classroom on a day when students were learning about Iowa history, including the state's governor, the state tree and the state rock.

At the time, the Iowa Legislature had just declined to pass a bill making the honeybee the state insect, so Cournoyer got the students to vote on which insect they believed should represent Iowa and craft a letter about it to Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds.

This week, as she sat next to Reynolds in her formal office looking back on that moment, Cournoyer said it's "very surreal" to think that students in other Iowa classrooms might now be learning her name as the state's new lieutenant governor.

But now that Cournoyer has officially taken the oath of office, the former state senator, mother of four, self-proclaimed "computer nerd" and substitute teacher said she's ready to "get to work."

She said when Reynolds officially offered her the job, she was prepared.

"I had come to the Capitol that day and we just had some final conversations about what the job entailed and what the expectations were," Cournoyer told the Des Moines Register in an interview. "And then she said, 'It's yours if you want it.' And she said, 'Do you want to take some time to talk to your family?' And I said, 'No, we've already talked. I've talked to my family. We're all in, and I'm in, so let's go.'"

Reynolds said she thrives on that "doer" mentality, relates to Cournoyer's competitive instincts and is looking forward to tapping her experience with technology, artificial intelligence and STEM learning, which focuses on science, technology, engineering and math.

"She was somebody that came to mind right away as somebody that I really wanted to sit down and visit with," Reynolds told the Register. "You know, we've talked to other people too, but, you know, she was really somebody that I had identified early on in the process."

Iowa is one of few states with women leading as governor, lieutenant governor

Iowa is now one of only a few states in the country to have ever had women concurrently serving as governor and lieutenant governor.

Massachusetts and Arkansas became the first states to put women in both of their top executive offices in 2022.

Now, Iowa joins them.

Reynolds said she didn't set out to select a woman for the job and picked the person she thought was the best fit.

But she said she is proud to have surrounded herself with "really bright, intelligent, strong, compassionate women that are balancing family and work and policy and making a difference" throughout her office and cabinet.

"We see a problem, we address a problem, and then we move on to the next one," she said of women who are used to juggling many different roles.

Reynolds said it's important for girls to have role models at high levels, but she didn't "truly, honestly realize how important it was" until she became governor.

Now, when young girls visit her office, she puts them in the big red executive chair behind her desk.

"I sit them in a chair and just say, 'You can be whatever you want to be,'" Reynolds said. "And that might be a mom or a teacher or an astronaut or the next governor of this great state, or president of the United States, but you get to decide that."

Cournoyer said she's used to being in male-dominated spaces, noting that there weren't many other girls or young women getting into technology or programming at the time she was exploring those fields.

"I really had to work harder to prove myself to my male counterparts," she said. "I think that made me a better programmer, really, because I had to work a little harder to prove that I was just as good as anybody else. And that was something that my father always told me, that, you know, you can do anything a boy can do. And so I just kind of had that mindset that, you know, if I just work hard, I can do anything I set my mind to."

Cournoyer has helped to oversee legislation that removed gender balance requirements on state boards and commissions. At the time, she said the need is outdated and women are holding leadership roles more than ever before.

She said this week that her appointment to the lieutenant governor position helps prove her point.

"We're going to normalize this, and it's just not going to be an issue in the future," Cournoyer said.

Will Kim Reynolds seek reelection with new lieutenant governor by her side?

Reynolds would not say whether she intends to seek reelection with her new lieutenant governor in 2026 when their terms expire.

"Honestly, right now, I'm focused on preparing for the next legislative session," Reynolds said.

She said she's looking forward to working with incoming Republican President-elect Donald Trump, who she supported after first endorsing Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

"He really works well with the states. He really defers to the states," Reynolds said. "I think there's a tremendous amount of opportunity to do block grants and to really — we did DOGE before DOGE was cool."

The new Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, is set to focus on slashing government waste and spending. It's being headed by tech mogul Elon Musk and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and is championed by Iowa's U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst in Congress.

Chris Cournoyer is sworn in as Iowa's next lieutenant governor on Monday, Dec. 16, 2024, at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We'll announce at some point ... what we're going to do," Reynolds said of her reelection prospects. "But right now I'm really focused on this next legislative session — and a new puppy! I'm focused on that and trying to get her trained."

Reynolds recently adopted a labradoodle puppy she named Rosie.

School safety issues drove Chris Cournoyer to run for school board
Cournoyer said she got her first taste of politics after the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012. Her twin boys were first graders at the time — the same age as some of the victims.

She wanted to know what her school was doing to enhance safety measures and couldn't get an answer from her school board representative. So she decided to run and ultimately replaced him on the board.

"A friend of mine said, 'Well, if you don't think he's doing a good job, you should run for it,'" she said. "And I thought, 'Oh, no, I can't. I'm not doing that.' I didn't really have any ambition to do that. But, you know, the more I really thought about it and talked to my family about it, they said, 'You know what, if not you, who?'"

She said she worked to understand her role on the school board and enact good policy.

"You're not there to fire math teachers or basketball coaches," she said. "You're there to really set good policy that, you know, supports students being successful after graduation and be a good steward of taxpayer dollars. So I took that job very seriously, and then I started paying attention to other issues that were important to me."

Cournoyer later was elected school president and served for two years before she was approached to run for the state Senate.

"I was a little resistant to that as well," she said. "My vision — and how politics was portrayed to me — was that it was just always fighting. But I was convinced that I could do more for education and issues that were important to me at the state level, and they certainly were right about that."

New lieutenant governor has technology and education background

In addition to serving on her local school board, Cournoyer has also spent time working directly with students in technology related after-school programs.

When one of her sons wanted to get into robotics, Cournoyer said the only answer was to step up and lead a FIRST LEGO League robotics team.

Then she decided to branch out, starting an after-school robotics program for elementary students and an "hour of code" program. She later coached a Girls in STEM high school team that developed an app.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Reynolds expanded the rules around who qualified to substitute teach in the state. Cournoyer said that allowed her to gain the qualification and move into substitute teaching.

"It's really a great gig, and it's given me an opportunity to get into the classrooms and see what kind of really great things are going on in our schools at the front lines," Cournoyer said.

She said it's allowed her to share first-hand perspectives of how schools are operating as the Legislature considers education policy changes.

Cournoyer said her interest in technology and coding came from her father, who took an early interest in technology while at the University of Iowa and helped nurture that same interest in his daughter.

When other kids were typing their school assignments on a typewriter, Cournoyer said she had keyboarded them and printed them with a dot matrix printer. In grade school, she took a class at the community college, and her high school offered a programming class in the 1980s that was "pretty ahead of its time."

"It's something that I obviously had an acumen for, and it was something that my dad and I did together."

Over the years, Reynolds has been an advocate for STEM education. She said one of the reasons she remains passionate about it is because it can expose young girls to concepts they might not otherwise engage with.

"A lot of times girls don't think that that's an area that they would be good at, or they would even like," Reynolds said. "And so the more that we can expose them early on, that really drives that passion, and they see that they can do it, and it really opens up so many opportunities for them. So I love that she can continue to tell that story."

As lieutenant governor, Chris Cournoyer will look at future of STEM Advisory Council

Reynolds said Cournoyer's portfolio of duties and policy initiatives will evolve as they put together their governing agenda for the next year. But she said she hopes Cournoyer will take on a leadership role in reorienting the governor's STEM Advisory Council to be more forward looking.

"We really have raised the awareness of STEM, but it's been in existence for 11 years," Reynolds said of the group. "So we need to really take a look at what it looks like going forward. And so I'd like her to really take the STEM Advisory Council and take a look at what the next 11 years looks like. How do we restructure it? How do we be more intentional? How do we align it with what we're doing already here in the state, with workforce and innovation, and what do those new jobs look like?"

Iowa lieutenant governor Chris Cournoyer stands for a portrait on Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, at the Iowa state Capitol.

She said she also hopes to have Cournoyer help lead some initiatives around using artificial intelligence in state government.

"We want to make sure that we're taking advantage of the opportunities that (AI) brings to state government, but we also want to make sure that we're being very careful in how we implement it," Reynolds said. "Every state is looking at it, and I really think that that's an opportunity for her to step into that and really kind of help — we'll work together on it — but help kind of direct what that looks like, and how we start to build that out in the state of Iowa."

She said the pair will also be focused on issues such as maternal health care in 2025. Reynolds is interested in Cournoyer's experience as a small business owner. And, she said, they'll continue to focus on education.

Cournoyer has received some criticism from the Iowa Standard, a right-wing blog favoring socially conservative policies. The blog has accused Cournoyer of being too cozy with LGBTQ groups in the state, including Iowa Safe Schools, attending a fundraiser for the group. She has also spoken about the need to ban

conversion therapy for LGBTQ youth.

"I got up and spoke about how, you know, as a former school board member, it is extremely important to me that all kids feel safe at school," Cournoyer said. "And we've come a long way in terms of anti-bullying programs and mental health supports and school resource officers and things that we can do to fortify the buildings to make them safer. Because if kids don't feel safe at school, they can't learn."

Reynolds said she would urge Republicans to look at Cournoyer's record as a whole.

"She's been a strong supporter in every major priority that I have put forward, from cutting taxes five times in the last six years to reducing the size and scope of government ... to protecting girls sports, to protecting their safe spaces, protecting life. She has been an advocate and a supporter of all of those pieces of legislation."

Reynolds said she's confident that Cournoyer will be a strong advocate for her agenda moving forward.

"I have full confidence in the lieutenant governor," she said. "She'll be a great advocate."

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Iowa News Now: Iowa groups share 2025 legislative priorities with Gov. Reynolds, includes maternal care
Skylar Tallal

DES Moines, Iowa — On Wednesday, Iowa organizations let Governor Kim Reynolds know what priorities they would like to see her fund next legislative session.

Heading in to 2025, experts predict the state will make less money than they spent this past year. While that means lawmakers could have less revenue to work with, there's still a \$2 billion budget surplus and other reserve funds they could dip into.

Many Iowa organizations praised Gov. Reynolds' conservative spending policies during the governor's budget meeting Wednesday, along with the income tax cuts that are playing a major role in the recent state budget predictions showing a decrease in revenue next year.

Property tax cuts are already on Republican lawmakers' agenda for the 2025 legislative session. Some Iowans laid out what they hope to see and claimed local governments are spending too much.

"We think it's appropriate to put in some spending limitations this year and I know that will be met with significant resistance but it's time," Chris Hagenow the president for Iowans for Tax Relief said. "And we would start by suggesting a 2% spending cap on all communities."

Agriculture groups asked the governor to fund more programs to combat foreign animal diseases like the recent surge in bird flu cases impacting farmers across the state and nation. That request came on the same day as a state of emergency declaration over the outbreak in California.

Meanwhile, Iowa representatives are hoping to see even more investments in healthcare, specifically in rural areas, and addressing maternal medical care and a shortage of OBGYN's. It's something Gov. Reynolds said

will continue to be one of her top priorities next session.

"As you know, Iowa's faced with significant declines in labor and delivery services and we've seen that over the past couple of decades," Allen Anderson the president and CEO of St. Anthony Regional Hospital said. "We continue to see that decline and have some stories that, to tell. But that trend is particularly concerning in our rural communities."

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KCCI: KCCI sits down with Gov. Reynolds, Lt. Gov. Cournoyer in first television interview together

Laura Terrell, Kayla James

DES MOINES, Iowa —

Recently appointed Iowa Lt. Gov. Chris Cournoyer says she is ready to lead the state alongside Gov. Kim Reynolds. Reynolds appointed Cournoyer to the position Monday. This comes a little more than three months after former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg resigned.

Both Reynolds and Cournoyer sat down with KCCI Wednesday for their first television interview together, where the governor says Cournoyer is the right person for the job because of her expertise in business, innovation and technology.

Cournoyer is a mother of four children. She's also a fifth-generation Iowan from LeClaire in eastern Iowa. The lieutenant governor says she's honored to be second in command of the state.

Cournoyer began serving in the Iowa Senate in 2019.

"I have been very supportive of the governor's agenda since I've been in the Senate. I think we align very, very well there. You know, my school board background, I've done a lot of education bills. I think my experience as a school board member, as well as a substitute teacher, I've brought a lot of good insights," said Cournoyer, who also mentioned her children are in the K-12 system. "I think I've had some good contributions to the legislation that we've brought forward, but also with my technology background and my business background."

Cournoyer told KCCI she never had an interest in politics until 2012 when the Sandy Hook shooting occurred. She had children in the first grade at the time.

According to Cournoyer, the tragedy shaped her passion for school safety.

"We've certainly come a long way since December of 2012 in terms of just the physical security of schools, but also adding SROs, mental health, anti-bullying and so many programs that I think are important to make sure our kids are safe at school," said Cournoyer. "Because if you don't feel safe, you can't learn. That's really been an ongoing priority of mine."

Reynolds says energy, infrastructure and maternal health will be some of the big priorities in 2025. The governor believes her newly appointed lieutenant governor will help further those priorities.

"I love the fact that she's a business owner, so she has experience in the private sector as well as state

government. She's a get-it-done kind of person," said Reynolds. "When you combine all of that, that's somebody that I was very excited about having a part of my team. We're both very competitive. We love getting in there and making a difference, and really trying to make things better, leaving it a little bit better than we found it."

Reynolds says she's working with Senate leadership to call a special election to replace Cournoyer's Senate seat. A date has not been set yet.

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DMR: Satanic Temple demands Iowa reschedule 'forcibly canceled' holiday event in state Capitol

Sabine Martin

The Satanic Temple is threatening possible legal action against the Iowa Department of Administrative Services after the agency refused to approve the religious group's holiday celebration in the Capitol building, arguing it would have been "harmful to minors."

The Temple's legal representative sent a letter to the state Monday demanding the proposed Dec. 14 event be rescheduled for this Saturday or work to "facilitate my client's free expression and avoid potential litigation."

"This letter arises from a potential legal dispute in which you prohibited my client's holiday event from equal access to state facilities on equal terms as other religious events," Satanic Temple's general counsel Matt Kezhaya wrote in the letter obtained by the Des Moines Register.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa said in a post on Facebook Friday evening that the Iowa Department of Administrative Services "forcibly canceled" its Dec. 14 event.

Adam Steen, Iowa Department of Administrative Services director, said in a statement to the Register he denied the event after determining the "totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors."

Christopher Sikich, Iowa Department of Administrative Services public information officer, said Monday the department has "no further comment on this matter."

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said in a statement Monday the state government is always going to be concerned about the well-being of children. She called for Iowans to pray over the Capitol building last year while a satanic display was up.

"The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit," she said. "Because of this, the state's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

Satanic Temple says state created a 'false narrative' that sticks included in costume contest would hit children

Documents obtained by the Register shed more light on the Satanic Temple's request and its attempts to

negotiate a resolution that would allow its event to proceed.

The Satanic Temple described the event as a "family-friendly one-day event celebrating the holiday season" with Satanic holiday carols, an all-ages Krampus costume contest, a large Satanic altar and display, an ornament-making station and a Satanic ritual, according to the Temple's Oct. 7 Capitol event application.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa planned its holiday celebration one year after a Tennessee man was charged with a felony for vandalizing a display in the Iowa Capitol building depicting the horned deity Baphomet. The refusal of the event also comes after a Satanic Temple display was destroyed in the New Hampshire State Capitol this week.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized.

Before the state refused the event, emails were exchanged between officials at the Department of Administrative Services and the Satanic Temple of Iowa exploring details of the holiday celebration.

A Capitol Complex events coordinator Dec. 3 sent an email requesting the Satanic Temple of Iowa specify what carols would be sung, what images would be depicted on the ornaments and coloring pages, and provide details and images about the costume contest and ritual.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa sent the Iowa Department of Administrative Services a photo of people dressed in Krampus costumes as an example of anticipated attire at the event's contest in response to a Dec. 3 email. The Satanic Temple of Iowa provided a photo of people dressed in Krampus costumes as an example of anticipated attire at the event's contest in response to the Dec. 3 email, Kezhaya wrote.

Krampus is an anthropomorphic figure with horns, originated in European Alpine folklore, who travels with St. Nicholas and punishes those who have misbehaved by swatting them with a "birch rod."

People dressed as 'Krampus' take part in the traditional parade of Krampus night (Krampusnacht) in Kiefersfelden, Bavaria, southern Germany, on December 5, 2024.

Kezhaya wrote in the letter that the email exchange concludes the decision to refuse the event was "'content-based,' which is subject to the strictest judicial scrutiny," citing the case U.S. Supreme Court case Reed v. Town of Gilbert, Ariz.

In another email exchange between both parties on Dec. 10, Steen wrote that the request to hold the event was refused under Administrative Rule 100.4(5) and the department's section 5.15 of its memorandum of understanding. Essentially, the state argued that costumed characters brandishing sticks would harm children.

"The cumulative circumstances that occur within the State Capitol building, including the presence of minors, coupled with the anticipation of costumes with sticks used as weapons on children, positions the event to be harmful to minors contrary to MOU section 5.15," Steen wrote.

Kezhaya countered that the costume event would not have entailed hitting children and the stick are simply part of a traditional costume, for "appearance only." Kezhaya wrote the Satanic Temple of Iowa struck the costume event after the state raised questions, but to no avail.

"Nor does the photograph you referenced depict children being hit," Kezhaya wrote. "You simply concocted a false narrative about the contents of my client's speech and then used your lie as a basis to deny the application."

What the rules say

Section 5.15 prohibits obscene materials and gratuitous violence or gore in the Capitol, since it is often a destination for children.

"Gratuitous violence or gore," includes depictions of severe bodily injury or blood, organs or other bodily fluids. The Satanic Temple contends its event would not violate any of those provisions.

Kezhaya told the Register that shielding the public's viewpoints from information or religions they might not agree with does not promote a market of free ideas.

"It's common for individuals to react in extreme ways when they're confronted with ideas that they don't like, and it's a whole other thing when a government tries to either facilitate that by, for example, speaking out against TST (The Satanic Temple) as a religion, or validity as a religion," Kezhaya said.

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The Gazette: Grant Wood AEA Chief Administrator John Speer retiring

Grace King

CEDAR RAPIDS — John Speer, who led the Grant Wood Area Education Agency through controversial changes approved by Iowa lawmakers earlier this year, is retiring as chief administrator from the organization this summer.

Speer, 53, said he's known for the last few years retirement was on the horizon for him after more than six years as chief administrator. His last day will be June 30.

"One of my lasting legacies I hope is that I left places better than when I arrived, that I treated people with care, respect and professionalism," Speer said. "I'll miss the people I work with. I'll miss the students."

As chief administrator of Grant Wood AEA, Speer oversees the delivery of services to thousands of students and hundreds of educators in a seven-county region. Grant Wood AEA is one of nine agencies across the state that assist students with disabilities and delivers general education and media services to educators. There are 74,000 students in the Grant Wood AEA region, which includes Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn and Washington counties.

The Grant Wood AEA board is responsible for appointing a new chief administrator. Speer was paid a base salary of \$227,041 a year, and earned additional compensation of \$28,963 and benefits.

Board President Randy Bauer said the board would appoint an interim or share a chief administrator with another AEA while its searches for a new leader. Bauer said the board is considering using a search firm if it decides to hire from outside the agency.

Speer laid out a "vision" with "clear direction and measurable goals" when he joined the AEA, Bauer said. These goals include:

Increasing academic performance of all students through innovative practices and equitable use of resources; All third-graders be proficient in reading, all fifth-graders be proficient in math, and learning gaps in reading and math between students in special education and not in special education be reduced;

Increase students' sense of physical and emotional safety in school;
Increase students' access to mental health supports in school;
And increase the number of adults equipped to support the well-being of students in school.

"John has a passion for people and a passion for improvement," Bauer said. "We're really happy for him and wish him well in retirement."

Changes made by lawmakers 'challenging'

Major changes were made to the AEAs during the 2024 legislative session through House File 2612. The compromise was less than what Gov. Kim Reynolds proposed, but she said the new law would improve transparency over the cost of AEA services.

Speer said the changes have been "very challenging."

"What we've tried to do is take the current situation and intended outcome of the legislation and do the best we can to make sure Grant Wood AEA continues to be a vibrant, well-thought of and necessary organization. I think we've accomplished that. We're on our way to stabilizing as a system," Speer said.

As the next legislative session approaches in January, Speer said he hopes lawmakers would give AEAs time to enact the changes made under the 2024 law.

For the first year of the law, Iowa school districts are receiving 60 percent of the funds for media services and education services that used to go to the AEAs. They can choose to use that with the AEAs, or with an outside party, and the money can be spent on any general fund purpose.

Once the new law is fully implemented in its second year, 10 percent of state funding for special education services will remain with districts for them to use, while 90 percent will continue to flow directly to the AEAs.

Also in the second year, all state funding for other education services and media services will go directly to schools — which could use that money with AEAs or get services from another entity.

Previously, federal and state special education funding went directly to the agencies. AEAs also receive property tax funding for media services and other education services for schools in their region.

A long career as an educator

Speer began his career as an educator in 1994 after graduating with a bachelor's degree from the University of Northern Iowa. He worked as a high school teacher and has served as superintendent of Allamakee, Ballard and the College Community school districts.

At each district, he oversaw the completion of "critically needed" construction projects, he said

"I have had the unbelievable good luck of working with great professionals and unbelievable people," Speer said. "I've made incredible friendships over the years."

After six years at College Community, he was hired as Grant Wood AEA's chief administrator, a role he began in July 2018.

Speer said his time as an administrator in K-12 education is "closing," but he's looking forward to other opportunities.

"I think I have a lot to contribute in the area of education," Speer said. "I'll gauge the landscape here this spring and early summer, and determine the next chapter in my professional career."

Speer said he has no intention to leave Iowa or the Corridor. It's where he grew up. One thing he could see himself doing more of is coaching and refereeing — especially basketball and volleyball. "Both sports are desperate for officials," he said.

Speer said he is "hopeful" for the future of K-12 education in Iowa. "I would caution that great schools don't happen without reasonable funding," he said.

Leaving a 'footprint' on education

Cindy Yelick, chief administrator of Heartland AEA, said Speer is focused on "making improvements that benefit all kids in the Grant Wood region and across the state."

Heartland AEA serves more than 80 public school districts and accredited non-public schools in central Iowa, including Des Moines.

"He's really been a leader among the chiefs group. He provided some great strategic vision and a great perspective. He did great work to improve the financial health of the system," Yelick said.

"I think John is someone who has a lot of integrity and leads with his passion for kids. That makes a big impact. He's had a great footprint on education in the state of Iowa," Yelick said.

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WOI: State lawmakers plan to tackle inflation and education as top priorities

Connor O'Neal

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa lawmakers met at the State Capitol this week to discuss each party's legislative priorities for the upcoming session, which begins Monday, Jan. 13.

At the top of the list for Democrats and Republicans is addressing the economy, and the impact inflation has had at a state level.

House Republicans also want to improve the state's education system. Speaker of the House Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford, recently created the House Higher Education Committee to determine if the state is getting the value it wants from schools, in the content it teaches and "to fill workforce needs."

"I think with the workforce challenges that we are facing, some of the 'woke' policies we're seeing on campuses, I think we need to have more of a focus on what that looks like from the workforce standpoint," he said.

House Democrats instead want to cut back on the education savings account program -- which provides money for families to attend private schools.

"We're going to make sure that we are putting them first, and we're going to be pushing hard to ensure that public money goes to public schools," House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst, D-Polk County said. "Fighting back against efforts to continue to fund, in an unsustainable way, private schools with your tax dollars."

Konfrst added Democrats want to raise wages for lowans and legalize marijuana.

However, Grassley said Republicans have no interest in legalizing marijuana this session, despite it being fully legal in three of Iowa's neighboring states.

Republicans are also focused on reforming the state's property tax system through multiple pieces of legislation.

Grassley told Local 5 News: "I think where we're kind of on the path to is you'll see the House introduce a few bills, because I think what we actually have to have happen is, we have to have everyone come to the table. In the past whenever we've talked about property taxes, it feels like the local governments and the state are being pitted against one another."

Republicans are coming into this session with a two-thirds majority, however, Konfrst said Democrats aren't going to "sit back and watch," and are instead, "ready to fight."

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KCRG: The future is uncertain for free, public all-day preschool in Cedar Rapids

Mollie Swayne

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - It's one of Iowa's only free all-day preschool programs without income restrictions, and its future is in jeopardy. Truman Early Learning Center serves hundreds of children in Cedar Rapids, but it could be at the mercy of district-wide budget cuts.

Now, the Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD) is asking state lawmakers to make full-day preschool funding one of their top priorities.

Tanasiah Walker's son Khalil attends full-day preschool at Truman. She's grateful there is an all-day option, because if that wasn't available, she'd had to make significant changes.

"All of us work full time and so it would mean having to go back to paying for childcare," said Walker. "I'd have to go back to working part time. It just wouldn't be like—I like the full day."

However, the future of full-day preschool depends on the bottom line.

Right now, Truman uses what Principal Monica Frey called a blended model. About half the funding comes from the state, and the district covers the rest.

"It's a model that we cannot sustain unless the four-year-olds receive full time funding from [the] state," said Frey.

At a meeting Monday, district officials made the case to lawmakers for district-provided full-day preschool. The sole Republican in attendance, State Rep. Cindy Golding, said the majority party is considering a number of options, including money for child care rather preschool. A study about New York City's plan to provide free preschool found it could hurt the market for private daycares.

"Early childhood—child care is one of the initiatives. We're not exactly sure how that funding— if it's going through public schools, or child care centers, or it's going to businesses for reimbursement for child care, but child care is a top priority," said Golding.

TV9 asked Frey if the state does not provide the money the district is asking for, what happens to Truman?

"I would say that the future of full-day is contingent upon people making decisions to fund 4-year-old preschool or investing in that that need for full-day preschool somehow."

With 66 families on the wait-list for full day preschool, Frey said she's optimistic the data backs up the district's request.

"We're super hopeful. We're very hopeful that we can continue this."

There are likely some families who are hopeful, too.

Next year, Khalil is headed to kindergarten, but Walker said if he were headed back to Truman, but full days weren't available, "It would be a struggle."

Frey said the district needs \$500,000 to a million dollars annually to support the program.

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The Gazette: Linn County adopts carbon dioxide pipeline restrictions

Jared Strong

Linn County leaders approved new restrictions Wednesday for carbon dioxide pipelines meant to protect areas of future growth near certain smaller cities.

The hazardous liquid pipeline ordinance, approved with all three members of the Board of Supervisors in favor although no such project currently is planned for the county, generally blocks the projects from being built within 2 miles of cities that have development plans with the county, including Bertram, Ely, Palo and Springville. Larger cities in the Cedar Rapids metropolitan area do not have the "Fringe Area Plans."

The ordinance further imposes a minimum 1/8-mile separation distance between CO2 pipelines and homes and other places occupied by people.

It also has stipulations for mitigating damage to agricultural land and public roads, and to facilitate better communication between pipeline companies and those affected by their projects.

"This is fairly narrowly focused on economic development," Charlie Nichols, Linn County's director of planning and development, said at a meeting last week. "Economic development is a public purpose of counties, and hazardous liquid pipelines represent both an economic development opportunity for Linn County, as well as an economic development risk."

Such pipeline projects are expected to be a boon for ethanol producers, which could be eligible for considerable federal tax credits for capturing and sequestering carbon dioxide emissions and for producing low-carbon fuels.

But the proposals have sparked safety concerns about potential, catastrophic pipeline breaches. Under certain circumstances, they can release plumes of carbon dioxide that have the potential to kill people and animals. Federal officials have said that most pipeline failures result in the gas dissipating in the air, with no

injuries.

The county has been considering the pipeline restrictions for more than two years, after Wolf Carbon Solutions announced its intention to build a pipeline system that would transport captured carbon dioxide from ethanol producers in Cedar Rapids and Clinton to an Illinois storage location.

No Linn pipeline for now

Wolf withdrew its permit application in Iowa earlier this month. The county supervisors then approved the new ordinance in successive meetings.

That pipeline's proposed route crossed the far southern portion of Linn County and went just north of Ely, well within its 2-mile development area. The ordinance allows cities to waive that separation distance if they want.

Wolf left open the potential for it to renew its pursuit of the project in a letter this month to state regulators, but it declined to comment further when asked by The Gazette.

The company had intended to connect to Archer Daniels Midland facilities, which have by far the largest production capacity among the state's 42 ethanol plants, according to the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association.

ADM did not respond to a request to comment about its plans now, including whether it might connect to Summit Carbon Solutions' proposed system. That is the only proposal that still is viable in the state and has approval from the Iowa Utilities Commission.

Another company, Navigator CO2, withdrew its pipeline permit application with the commission last year.

A Summit spokesperson declined to speculate about the potential to add ADM's Cedar Rapids site to its network. The nearest connection point to Summit's current plan is more than 50 miles northwest of Cedar Rapids.

Summit has sued six other counties that adopted restrictive ordinances that could impede its project, including Bremer County.

A federal judge sided with Summit in two of the lawsuits, saying the counties don't have authority to regulate pipeline safety and restrict their placement. Appeals of those rulings are pending.

Linn County officials have said their ordinance does not pertain to safety, but it has the potential to affect the routes.

The county declined to comment about potential litigation, but Nichols said: "I do think our ordinance is reasonable, and it has not been put in place with the intent of prohibiting these types of projects."

The ordinance requires pipeline companies to meet all its requirements before it starts construction in the county.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: Chances for government shutdown escalate after Trump and GOP reject stopgap spending bill

Jennifer Shutt

WASHINGTON — Efforts to prevent a partial government shutdown from starting this weekend fell apart Wednesday when numerous Republicans, on and off Capitol Hill, expressed their frustration with the many extraneous provisions added to a short-term funding package.

Complicating the situation, Vice President-elect J.D. Vance posted on social media that he and President-elect Donald Trump believe Republicans should leverage the two days left before a shutdown to get Democrats to raise or suspend the debt limit.

The catch-all, year-end spending legislation released Tuesday would not only fund the government through March 14, but provide an extension of the agriculture and nutrition programs in the farm bill through Sept. 30. The 1,547-page package also holds tens of billions in emergency aid for communities recovering from natural disasters.

But it includes several sections that have angered far-right members of the Republican Party as well as Trump and his allies. They argue the extra provisions that don't relate to essential programs should be scrapped, throwing a wrench in weeks of negotiations between the Republican House and Democratic Senate.

How a shutdown works

Congress must pass a short-term spending bill before midnight on Friday when the current stopgap spending bill expires, otherwise every single federal department and agency would be required to shut down.

That would mean federal employees categorized as exempt would have to work without pay and employees categorized as non-exempt would be furloughed.

Unlike the 35-day partial government shutdown that took place during Trump's first administration, this shutdown would affect larger swaths of the federal government.

Congress had approved several of the full-year appropriations bills ahead of the 2018-2019 shutdown insulating the departments of Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Labor and Veterans Affairs.

Lawmakers had also approved the Legislative Branch spending bill, ensuring members of Congress and their staff were paid throughout the shutdown.

This time around, failing to pass some sort of stopgap spending bill ahead of the Friday midnight deadline would mean cutting off U.S. troops from pay, not to mention dozens of other national security agencies like Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

It could also wreak havoc on the numerous federal departments and agencies assisting communities with response and recovery efforts stemming from natural disasters, including hurricanes Helene and Milton.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Agriculture and Small Business Administration would all be affected by a funding lapse, as would anyone who receives funding from those programs.

Debt limit

The debt limit was not part of the spending negotiations until Wednesday when Vance insisted it be

included in any type of stopgap spending bill.

The current suspension of the debt limit is set to expire Jan. 1, but lawmakers will likely have a few months where the Treasury Department can use accounting maneuvers called extraordinary measures before the country would default.

Vance, however, doesn't seem inclined to deal with the country's borrowing authority next year.

"The most foolish and inept thing ever done by Congressional Republicans was allowing our country to hit the debt ceiling in 2025," Vance wrote in his social media post. "It was a mistake and is now something that must be addressed."

Vance wrote that addressing "the debt ceiling is not great but we'd rather do it on Biden's watch."

"If Democrats won't cooperate on the debt ceiling now, what makes anyone think they would do it in June during our administration?" Vance wrote. "Let's have this debate now. And we should pass a streamlined spending bill that doesn't give Chuck Schumer and the Democrats everything they want."

Elon Musk, a billionaire whom Trump has tasked with trying to make the federal government more efficient through steep spending cuts, wrote on social media that no legislation should move through Congress until Jan. 20, after Trump's inauguration.

That would create havoc for hundreds of government programs, including the agriculture and nutrition assistance programs within the farm bill.

"Any member of the House or Senate who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in 2 years!," Musk wrote.

While every member of the House who chooses to run for reelection will campaign during the 2026 midterm elections, just one-third of the Senate will be up for reelection since they are elected to six-year terms.

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis posted on social media that any short-term spending bill, sometimes called a continuing resolution or CR, must carry disaster aid to help his home state recover from a devastating hurricane.

"If Congressional leaders intend to leave DC before the holidays without passing disaster recovery, they should be prepared to spend Christmas in the Capitol," Tillis wrote. "I'll use every tool available to block a CR that fails Western North Carolina communities in need of long-term certainty."

West Virginia Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito said during a brief interview she wants to see disaster aid remain in a stopgap spending bill.

"I went down and saw the Asheville disaster," she said "I think we need to get the disaster aid to those affected areas, some of which are in West Virginia, believe it or not."

White House reaction

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre released a written statement Wednesday evening saying that "Republicans need to stop playing politics with this bipartisan agreement or they will hurt hardworking Americans and create instability across the country."

"President-elect Trump and Vice President-elect Vance ordered Republicans to shut down the government and they are threatening to do just that—while undermining communities recovering from disasters, farmers

and ranchers, and community health centers,” she wrote. “Triggering a damaging government shutdown would hurt families who are gathering to meet with their loved ones and endanger the basic services Americans from veterans to Social Security recipients rely on. A deal is a deal. Republicans should keep their word.”

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CNN: In reversal, key House panel votes to release Matt Gaetz ethics report

Staff

The House Ethics Committee secretly voted earlier this month to release its report into the conduct of former Rep. Matt Gaetz before the end of this Congress, according to multiple sources with knowledge of the matter.

The report is now expected to be made public after the House’s final day of votes this year as lawmakers leave Washington for the holidays, those sources said.

The vote, which has not previously been reported, amounts to a stark reversal for the panel after it had voted along party lines in late November not to release the results of the investigation. The decision to release the report suggests that some Republicans ultimately decided to side with Democrats on the matter, and it is unclear if the committee will once again change course now that it has voted.

When the committee voted last month to shelve the report, Gaetz was President-elect Donald Trump’s choice to be attorney general. Since then, Gaetz withdrew himself from consideration for the Senate-confirmed post, though he maintains frosty relations with many in his party and is still active in GOP politics.

It is exceedingly rare for an ethics report to be released after a member has left Congress, though it has happened on a couple of occasions in the past. The committee revisited the issue behind closed doors earlier this month after a feud over the report spilled into public view before Thanksgiving.

The Ethics Committee’s report concludes a years-long probe into numerous allegations against Gaetz, including whether he engaged in sexual misconduct, used illicit drugs, “shared inappropriate images or videos on the House floor, misused state identification records, converted campaign funds to personal use, and/or accepted a bribe, improper gratuity, or impermissible gifts,” according to an announcement by the panel last summer.

Gaetz has vigorously denied all the allegations and has characterized the investigation as a witch hunt.

In a post on X in response to CNN’s reporting on Wednesday, Gaetz emphasized that he was “FULLY EXONERATED” by a separate Department of Justice probe. And he said he “NEVER had sexual contact with someone under 18” — a claim that is addressed in the House Ethics report, CNN has previously reported.

“My 30’s were an era of working very hard - and playing hard too. It’s embarrassing, though not criminal, that I probably partied, womanized, drank and smoked more than I should have earlier in life. I live a different life now.”

Speaker Mike Johnson has said that he does not believe the report should be released, since Gaetz is no

longer a member of Congress after he abruptly resigned once Trump announced him as his initial attorney general choice. Johnson has acknowledged he has no role on the operations of the panel, which has traditionally operated separately from leadership. Many lawmakers believed that Gaetz resigned to try to bury the investigation.

Gaetz, who was reelected to the seat last month prior to his resignation, has said he has no plans of returning to Congress next year.

"I'm still going to be in the fight, but it's going to be from a new perch. I do not intend to join the 119th Congress," he told Charlie Kirk in an interview last month.

"I'm going to be fighting for President Trump. I'm going to be doing whatever he asks of me, as I always have. But I think that eight years is probably enough time in the United States Congress," he said.

He also recently announced that he will be joining One America News Network in January.

A spokesman for the committee did not respond to CNN's request for comment.

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CBS News: Senate passes \$895 billion defense bill with controversial gender-affirming care restriction

Kaia Hubbard

Washington — The Senate approved the mammoth \$895 billion National Defense Authorization Act on Wednesday, despite concern from some Democrats over a controversial policy restricting gender-affirming care for children of servicemembers.

In a 85 to 14 vote, the Senate approved the legislation, which the House passed last week. Eleven Democrats and three Republicans voted against it in the upper chamber. The bill now heads to President Biden's desk for his signature.

The 1,800 page national security legislation to authorize funding for the Defense Department for fiscal year 2025. But the bill includes a handful of controversial policies, like the gender-affirming care restriction, and lost support from the majority of Democrats in the House.

The Democratic-controlled Senate pushed forward with the measure nonetheless. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer noted that while the NDAA "isn't perfect," it still "includes some very good things that Democrats fought for" — citing provisions aimed at standing up against the Chinese Communist Party, boosting the use of artificial intelligence for national defense and expanding domestic tech innovation.

"Congress has passed the NDAA on a bipartisan basis for over six straight decades, and this year will be no different," Schumer said ahead of the vote on Wednesday. "We're passing the NDAA and that's a very good thing."

Sen. Ed Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, derided the gender-affirming care restriction earlier this week, calling it "the product of a nationwide campaign against trans rights" and arguing that the legislation's approval would mark "the first anti-LGBTQ law passed by Congress in decades."

Still, the outcome of the vote was all but guaranteed after the Senate advanced the measure on Monday in a 83-12 procedural vote.

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, celebrated the NDAA's "immense accomplishments," including a 14.5% pay raise for junior service members and investments in recruitment capabilities. But he said Congress "missed an opportunity to strengthen the president-elect's hand as he takes office in a precarious world situation."

Wicker outlined that the Armed Services Committee proposed \$25 billion for modernization programs, including for missile defense, ship building and counter-drone technology, saying "this should have been part of the bill today."

Sen. Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat who chairs the Armed Services Committee, called the legislation a "strong, forward looking bill that we can all be proud of." But he said he "strongly" disagrees with the inclusion of the gender-affirming care provision, calling it a "misguided provision."

"I share many of my colleagues' frustrations that the bill includes a provision that would prohibit gender-affirming health care for minors under certain circumstances," Reed noted, adding that he voted against the provision in committee. "We will continue to work to ensure the health care rights of all military personnel and their dependents."

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10/11 NOW: Nebraska's 2025 Summer EBT Program expands support beyond food assistance

Staff

LINCOLN, Neb. (KOLN) - Gov. Jim Pillen announced Wednesday that Nebraska's 2025 summer EBT program will offer families more than just food assistance.

Just this time last year though, Gov. Pillen said that he was not planning on enrolling in the program because he believed it was time for the pandemic-era program to end. He is now saying otherwise.

Pillen was joined by Department of Health and Human Services CEO Steve Corsi, Department of Education Commissioner Brian Maher, and Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Director Shannon Grotrian to explain how the revamped program is dedicating \$24 million to families around the state.

"We transformed it from a program that provides money for groceries through the EBT card, to a program that provides broader support to Nebraskans in need of services," Gov. Pillen said.

The program initiates a "Nebraska Way" focus designed by the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure families have access to resources that is beyond just food assistance.

Eligible families that are a part of the program can receive up to \$40 per child over the summer months for a total of \$120 per child to help with food costs.

"This will empower families to purchase healthy food items and budget effectively, promoting long-term well-being," Grotrian said.

DHHS plans to empower families by collaborating with SNAP Education, the Summer Food Service program,

the Grocers Association and other community-based programs to spread the word of the EBT.

“We’re ensuring this program not only grows, but makes a greater impact in 2025,” Grotrian said.

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AP: How New York prosecutors used a terrorism law in the charges against Luigi Mangione

Jennifer Peltz

NEW YORK (AP) — New York prosecutors are using a 9/11-era anti-terrorism law in their case against the man charged with gunning down UnitedHealthcare’s CEO outside a midtown Manhattan hotel.

Luigi Mangione was indicted on charges of murder as an act of terrorism, under a state law that allows for stiffer sentences when a killing is aimed at terrifying civilians or influencing government.

If it sounds like an unusual application of a terrorism law, it’s not the first time the statute has been applied to a case that wasn’t about cross-border extremism or a plot to kill masses of people.

Mangione is jailed on other charges in Pennsylvania, where he is scheduled to appear at an extradition hearing Thursday that could clear the way for him to be brought to New York.

Here are some things to know about the anti-terrorism law and the case surrounding the death of Brian Thompson.

What does the law say?

Mangione is charged with first-degree and second-degree murder counts that specifically refer to a New York law that addresses terrorism. Essentially an add-on to existing criminal statutes, it says that an underlying offense constitutes “a crime of terrorism” if it’s done “with intent to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a unit of government by intimidation or coercion or affect the conduct of a unit of government by murder, assassination or kidnapping.”

What does it do?

If a defendant is convicted, the “crime of terrorism” designation boosts the underlying offense into a more serious sentencing category. For example, an assault normally punishable by up to 25 years in prison would carry a potential life sentence.

Mangione would face a possible life sentence if convicted.

New York does not have the death penalty. The state’s highest court threw out a capital punishment law in 2004.

Why do prosecutors say the anti-terrorism law applies in UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson’s killing? Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg put it simply: “The intent was to sow terror.” The Democratic prosecutor noted that the shooting unfolded early on a workday in a heavily trafficked business and tourist area, and he mentioned Mangione’s writings, while declining to get more specific.

When arrested, the 26-year-old was carrying a handwritten letter that called health insurance companies

“parasitic” and complained about corporate greed, according to a law enforcement bulletin obtained by The Associated Press.

New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch has said Mangione also was carrying a gun that matched shell casings at the crime scene. Investigators say ammunition found near Thompson’s body bore the words “delay,” “deny” and “depose,” mimicking a phrase some people use to decry insurers’ practices.

Deputy Commissioner Rebecca Weiner said the reaction to Thompson’s killing shows it fits within a law against violence designed to intimidate a civilian population.

The shooting prompted a wave of public criticism of the health insurance industry. Much of it is people sharing stories and frustration, but there also have been “wanted” posters targeting other health care honchos. Concerned companies have taken top executives’ biographies offline, canceled in-person shareholder meetings and even told employees to work from home temporarily.

What does Mangione’s side say?

His New York attorney, Karen Friedman Agnifilo, called the case “overcharged” in a statement Wednesday. The term is courthouse lingo for saying that prosecutors went too far.

Where did this law come from?

State lawmakers passed it in 2001, six days after the Sept. 11 attacks, saying the state needed “legislation that is specifically designed to combat the evils of terrorism” and that wasn’t just for federal courts. Then-state Sen. Michael Balboni, who was among the law’s leading proponents, recalls pointing out that many cases could come via state and local law enforcement officers, who far outnumbered federal agents in New York.

Many other states passed similar laws around the same time, and Congress approved the Patriot Act.

Has New York’s anti-terror law been used before?

There’s no comprehensive count of cases where the anti-terrorism statute was used, because it can be layered onto many different types of charges, from weapons possession to murder.

The specific first-degree murder “in furtherance of an act of terrorism” charge against Mangione has been the top count in only three other cases statewide, according to the Division of Criminal Justice Services.

In New York City alone, over a half-dozen cases of various sorts have used the terror law, starting with the 2004 indictment of a Bronx gang member. He was accused of killing a 10-year-old girl and paralyzing a man at a christening party.

Manhattan prosecutors got convictions or guilty pleas in cases including plots to bomb synagogues or open fire on their congregants; a plan to build pipe bombs to try to undermine public support for the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; alleged efforts to recruit support for the Islamic State group and to provide money and knives to Syrian extremists; and a white supremacist who killed a Black man because of racial hatred.

Friedman Agnifilo was a top deputy to Bragg’s predecessor, Cyrus Vance Jr., when some of those cases were prosecuted.

Are there limits on when the terror law applies?

Lawmakers set the parameters broadly. The law doesn’t say that cases have to involve mass casualties or international extremism, Balboni said in a telephone interview on Wednesday.

“You’re trying to prevent individuals in this country who want to change government and use extremism and

violence to that end,” whether what they want to change is foreign policy or health care industry regulation, said.

Courts haven’t set out overarching rules for when a case qualifies. However, the state’s top court said the Bronx gang member’s case did not.

The high court overturned his conviction. Justices were skeptical that the shooting — allegedly targeting a rival gang member — was meant to intimidate the broader community. They also worried that the meaning of terrorism could be trivialized if “applied loosely in situations that do not match our collective understanding of what constitutes a terrorist act.”

The man, who denied involvement in the shooting, was retried on manslaughter and other charges. He was convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison.

Is Mangione charged with anything else?

Yes. The indictment includes another second-degree murder charge that doesn’t have the terrorism allegation, as well as eight weapons-possession counts.

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NBC News: Wisconsin school shooting victims named as teacher Erin West and student Rubi Vergara

Patrick Smith

Tributes have been paid to the two victims who died in the shooting at the Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin, on Monday, who have been named as 42-year-old teacher Erin M. West and 14-year-old student Rubi P. Vergara.

The Dane County Medical Examiner’s office confirmed their identities in a press release Wednesday night, while in a separate statement, the school said, “our hearts are heavy with these losses.”

The suspected shooter, 15-year-old Natalie Rupnow, a freshman at the school who was also known as Samantha, died on the way to hospital on Monday from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound, police said.

“ALCS is a better school for the work of Erin West. She brought her love of Jesus and love of people to our staff and school family all wrapped in a hug and topped with a smile,” the school’s statement said.

Wisconsin school shooting victims named as teacher Erin West and student Rubi Vergara

The school said West worked as a substitute teacher for three years before taking a full-time staff role as an in-house substitute teacher and coordinator, “a role tailor made for her abundant skills and breadth of knowledge.”

“She served our teachers and students with grace, humor, wisdom, and — most importantly — with the love of Jesus. Her loss is a painful and deep one and she will be greatly missed not just among our staff, but our entire ALCS family,” the statement added.

Rubi Vergara, a 9th grade student, had been at the school since kindergarten and was described as popular

and a keen volunteer.

"Her gentle, loving, and kind heart was reflected in her smile. Rubi was a blessing to her class and our school. She was not only a good friend, but a great big sister," the school said.

"Often seen with a book in hand, she had a gift for art and music. Yet, it was Rubi's love for Jesus that shined brightest and she shared His love with others by volunteering faithfully. She will be missed deeply by her teachers and fellow students," the statement added.

An online obituary uploaded to a local funeral home website said Vergara loved art, singing and playing keyboard in her family's worship band. "She shared a special bond with her beloved pets, Ginger (cat) and Coco (dog)," the obituary said.

Wisconsin school shooting victims named as teacher Erin West and student Rubi Vergara

Rubi Patricia Vergara.Jenn Vergara

The funeral home said a service for Vergara would be held on Saturday at 11 a.m. CST (12 a.m. ET) and would be livestreamed online.

The police investigation into the shooting continues. Authorities said Wednesday night that the two unidentified students who received life-threatening injuries remain in a local hospital, while the four people who were treated in hospital for minor injuries sustained in the shooting have been discharged.

Police said that the shooter opened fire in a second-floor classroom "during a study hall for mixed graders."

Two guns were found at the school, but only one was used in the shooting, police said.

Police said they were working to establish a motive and said they were aware of the suspect's alleged social media activity and "documents and photos circulating the internet," that have yet to be verified.

Detectives want to speak to any who may have interacted with Rupnow in the days or weeks before the shooting — they can contact police anonymously through Madison Area Crime Stoppers at p3tips.com or by calling 608-266-6014.

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NEWS CLIPS

Thursday, December 19, 2024

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IOWA NEWS:

DMR: New Iowa vaping law unconstitutionally favors 'Big Tobacco,' retailers claim in new lawsuit

William Morris

A group of e-cigarette retailers and manufacturers are suing to block new Iowa regulations they say would eliminate "over 99%" of vaping products currently offered for sale in the state and force many smoke and vape shops out of business.

The subject of the lawsuit, led by an industry group called Iowans for Alternatives to Smoking and Tobacco, is a new state law, House File 2677. The "vapor products directory" bill was passed during the 2024 legislative session and imposes fines on makers and sellers of vape products that lack U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval.

The plaintiffs say that rule violates the U.S. Constitution because Congress gave the FDA the exclusive authority to enforce its drug safety mandates, and because the law includes exceptions for some products derived from tobacco, but not for similar products containing nicotine from other sources.

Heather Glenn, president of IFAST and owner of Des Moines store Route 69 Vapor, a plaintiff in the suit, called the new rules "Big Tobacco's political manipulation."

"We are being legislated out of existence by the regulatory effects of HF 2677," she said in a statement. "Dozens of Iowa businesses are on the verge of being shuttered and their hard-working employees and their families will suffer the financial consequences of this legislative sop to Big Tobacco."

The plaintiffs allege the bill included language supported by lobbyists for major tobacco companies, who make vaping products covered by the bill's exceptions, while the majority of their competitors' products are not. The complaint also notes that anti-smoking stalwart American Cancer Society Action Network registered to lobby against the bill, which nonetheless passed and was signed into law in May.

They also argue in their petition that the FDA has intentionally declined to go after vaping products that are sold while their approval applications are pending, as doing so might inadvertently force smokers back to more-dangerous cigarettes. And they note that the FDA could change its current enforcement priorities when President-elect Donald Trump takes office in January, just two weeks before the Iowa Department of Revenue intends to begin enforcing the new law Feb. 3.

The suit seeks an injunction blocking the law and declaring it unconstitutional prior to that date.

The Iowa Attorney General's Office declined to comment.

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WHO13: Iowa congressional delegation members frustrated with funding bill

Zach Fisher

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa's six congressional delegation members are awaiting a vote on a bill that would extend government funding and avoid a government shutdown. The concern from those six members is what's within a 1,500 page continuous resolution.

United States Senator Chuck Grassley during his weekly media availability highlighted his concern with the government potentially shutting down.

"I don't want a government shutdown. I don't think we'll have a government shutdown, and I'm sure we won't have one when it comes to a vote in the United States Senate. I know it's a little closer in the House of Representatives, but that's the way it is," said Grassley (R). The Senate waits for some type of funding bill to come out of the U.S. House.

Wednesday Republican house lawmakers were sorting through the massive bill that would include \$10 billion in direct payments to farmers, \$21 billion in agriculture disaster aid, a one year extension of the 2018 farm bill and year round E-15.

Accessible playground coming to Iowa State Fairgrounds
Congressman Zach Nunn's office tells WHO 13 News that those are portions of the bill that is supported by Congressman Nunn, but the 1,500 page bill includes some things that frustrate him and other lawmakers, specifically mentioning the portion of the bill that increases pay for those elected.

Senator Joni Ernst expressed her displeasure with the bill that was introduced in a post on social media Wednesday.

"Congress deserves a lump of coal for failing to do its job and putting special interests ahead of taxpayers," Ernst wrote in part. In a follow up post Sen. Ernst showed support for Iowa farmers, saying that a farm bill shouldn't be held hostage by the massive spending package.

If there is not some type of resolution passed before the Friday deadline, there will be some aspects of the federal government shut down on Saturday.

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WOI: State lawmakers plan to tackle inflation and education as top priorities

Connor O'Neal

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa lawmakers met at the State Capitol this week to discuss each party's legislative priorities for the upcoming session, which begins Monday, Jan. 13.

At the top of the list for Democrats and Republicans is addressing the economy, and the impact inflation has had at a state level.

House Republicans also want to improve the state's education system. Speaker of the House Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford, recently created the House Higher Education Committee to determine if the state is getting the value it wants from schools, in the content it teaches and "to fill workforce needs."

"I think with the workforce challenges that we are facing, some of the 'woke' policies we're seeing on campuses, I think we need to have more of a focus on what that looks like from the workforce standpoint," he said.

House Democrats instead want to cut back on the education savings account program -- which provides money for families to attend private schools.

"We're going to make sure that we are putting them first, and we're going to be pushing hard to ensure that public money goes to public schools," House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst, D-Polk County said. "Fighting back against efforts to continue to fund, in an unsustainable way, private schools with your tax dollars."

Konfrst added Democrats want to raise wages for Iowans and legalize marijuana.

However, Grassley said Republicans have no interest in legalizing marijuana this session, despite it being fully legal in three of Iowa's neighboring states.

Republicans are also focused on reforming the state's property tax system through multiple pieces of legislation.

Grassley told Local 5 News: "I think where we're kind of on the path to is you'll see the House introduce a few bills, because I think what we actually have to have happen is, we have to have everyone come to the table. In the past whenever we've talked about property taxes, it feels like the local governments and the state are being pitted against one another."

Republicans are coming into this session with a two-thirds majority, however, Konfrst said Democrats aren't going to "sit back and watch," and are instead, "ready to fight."

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Radio Iowa: U.S. Rep. Nunn says public needs answers on drone sightings

Kay Henderson

Iowa Congressman Zach Nunn, a Republican from Bondurant who's a colonel in the Air Force Reserves, says the American public needs real answers to repeated reports of drone sightings.

"I'd like to end the hysteria, but I believe that comes from clear leadership in the White House," Nunn says. "In the last month, we clearly have not received that."

President Biden said this week there's nothing nefarious about drone sightings on the east coast. President-elect Trump has said something strange is going on and he is staying away from his New Jersey golf club as a precaution.

"We are living in a post-9/11 world where if you see something, you should say something," Nunn says. "Challengingly...we have a FAA who is pointing fingers at the Department of Defense who is pointing fingers at the Department of Homeland Security who is pointing fingers at the FBI (and) we have the same White House that couldn't tell us that a Chinese-made balloon is floating over the country at the beginning of the year is now ending the year with being a little too coy on what's happening with drones flying over New Jersey."

The U.S. Coast Guard as well as New Jersey law enforcement agencies have confirmed the sightings there. "It's been verified by the governor and frankly kids on the Jersey Shore are seeing this stuff and we can't get a straight answer out of the White House," Nunn says, "and now it's happening in other places across the country."

A White House spokesman says there is no national security threat and it appears to be normal, legal activity. "I will agree with the White House that we've got more than a million drones operating across our country, but here's what I also know: I know the majority of these drones, particularly the commercial drones, are made in China," Nunn says. "Elements, particularly in Iran, have used drones in an aggressive way to attack not only the State of Israel, but killed three U.S. military members in Syria earlier this year."

Nunn says the U.S. should have a domestic drone production program, so the country isn't dependent on drone technology that today comes from China and eastern Europe. Nunn, who was an airborne intelligence officer in the Air Force, also led an Iowa National Guard Intelligence Squadron in the past decade.

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Iowa Public Radio: Judicial branch audit says \$27.6 million went to wrong state funds due to IT errors

Katarina Sostaric

State Auditor Rob Sand released an audit report Tuesday that says the Iowa Judicial Branch distributed \$27.6 million of court debt collections to the wrong state fund over four years, shorting other state and local funds in the process.

The problem was caused by computer programming errors at the judicial branch. Some Republican officials have accused Sand, the only statewide elected Democrat, of failing to address the financial irregularities when his office was notified of a potential problem in 2022.

The claim that we didn't follow up is just not true.

State Auditor Rob Sand

Sand said his office has been in contact with judicial branch officials about the programming errors since that time, and was waiting for the judicial branch to provide final numbers that could be included in the audit for fiscal year 2023. He accused Republican officials of "making stuff up" about his office, and said they should apologize to his staff.

"The claim that we didn't follow up is just not true," Sand said. "We have remained actively engaged with the judicial branch. We worked with the judicial branch in settling on a plan to hire computer coding experts to address this issue, and duplicating that again obviously would have been a waste of tax money."

Judicial branch says it has fixed the IT errors

The audit report includes a statement from the Iowa Judicial Branch, which says officials believe they have fixed the programming errors that sent \$27.6 million of court debt collections — about 4.68% of collections from fiscal years 2021-2024 — to the wrong funds and shorted state and local funds by the same amount.

The biggest financial impacts were to the Road Use Tax Fund, which was shorted more than \$10 million, and the Victim Compensation Fund, which was shorted more than \$7 million.

The judicial branch said it made programming changes on Nov. 22 that will go through a third-party review to make sure they are correctly distributing funds in compliance with Iowa law.

The judicial branch also stated it has corrected financial distributions made since July 1, 2024, which was the beginning of the current fiscal year. But they are not able to fix funding mistakes from past fiscal years without action from the Legislature.

"We are interested and willing to work with all court debt stakeholders to correct all misallocations from FY21 through FY24," the judicial branch response in the audit report states.

Sand said the numbers presented in the audit report, which his office received Oct. 23, represent the judicial branch's final numbers of how much various accounts have been overfunded and underfunded.

"Now that we know that, the Legislature can make those adjustments," Sand said. "But there was no way that we could have done that prior to the judicial branch actually providing those numbers."

Sand's office is also set to review the judicial branch's calculations to ensure the numbers presented in Tuesday's report are accurate.

GOP officials want more scrutiny of misallocated funds

Iowa Department of Management Director Kraig Paulsen continued to criticize Sand's handling of the matter Tuesday after the audit was released. He said he was not satisfied with the audit report, and that Sand's office would need to verify and document the judicial branch's calculations in the follow-up review.

This clearly is something that we as a state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled.

Kraig Paulsen, director of the Iowa Department of Management

Paulsen said lawmakers should investigate the matter, and Iowans deserve an apology.

"This clearly is something that we as a state government enterprise have not handled as good as it should have been handled, nor do I think we met their expectations," he said. "And I think in particular...they should have been notified sooner, and we should have been in finding out what was right and what was wrong sooner."

Paulsen disagreed with Sand's assertion that the auditor's office was required by state law to keep the information it received about financial irregularities in the judicial branch confidential. He also pushed back on Sand's claim that the Department of Management was first to discover the problem.

Sand provided an email from a DOM employee dated July 26, 2022, that raised questions about a drop in revenue in the Road Use Tax Fund. But Paulsen said while his office saw a change in that fund, they did not understand the magnitude of the problem or have access to the information that would allow them to find the problem.

House Speaker Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford, has also criticized Sand's response to the misallocated funds.

Grassley's spokesperson, Melissa Saitz, said in a statement that it took scrutiny from Republican lawmakers and the executive branch for Sand to release audit reports that mention the problem.

"This report, however, far from answers all our questions," she said. "Iowa House Republicans just learned about this issue in September and are still working to understand

the full implications. We look forward to working this session to get our questions answered and this issue rectified.”

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Iowa Soybean partners with state for water quality efforts

Cami Koons

A public-private partnership between the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa Soybean Association and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will invest over \$2.3 million to install nutrient-reducing practices in priority Iowa watersheds.

The majority of the funding will come from IDALS for outreach and to farmers and landowners who will then work with conservation staff to implement practices like saturated buffers, oxbows and perennial cover. The \$1.4 million put up by IDALS will also support design and engineering costs.

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig announced the project Wednesday at the Iowa Soybean Association's Winter Policy Conference.

"This project, and others like it, prove collaborating is key to making meaningful progress," Naig said in a statement. "If you are a farmer or landowner located within the project area, I would invite you to consider how you can incorporate some of these water quality practices on your land."

According to a press release from IDALS, the partnership will prioritize the watersheds of North Raccoon River, Boone River, Skunk River, Middle Cedar River and Turkey River.

Christie Wiebbecke, the chief officer for Iowa Soybean Association's research and conservation said the association was "grateful" for the "support and partnership" from IDALS and USFWS.

The goal of the initial three-year agreement is to install at least 21 saturated buffers, 900 acres of perennial cover and 30 multi-purpose oxbows, which restore curves to a stream and help to capture nutrients from water that drains into a stream.

The press release from IDALS called these "science-based" practices that improve soil health and protect water quality.

According to a report from Iowa Soybean Association, tile drainage routed through a restored oxbow can remove 50%-95% of nitrate from the water before it runs off into the rest of the stream.

The practices follow the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, which is part of a multistate effort through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to reduce nutrient runoff from agricultural fields into the Mississippi River watershed, and thus reduce the dead-zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

Andrew DiAllesandro, the USFWS private lands coordinator for Iowa, stressed the importance of collaboration in creating a “lasting legacy” for Iowa resources and communities.

“This public-private partnership will be instrumental in delivering impactful water quality and wildlife habitat conservation practices across Iowa and will be a model for partnership efforts moving forward,” DiAllesandro said in the press release.

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Iowa Capital Dispatch: Iowa Western Community College receives EPA grant for job training

Brooklyn Draisey

Iowa Western Community College will recruit and train people to safely deconstruct buildings and return contaminated areas to spaces people can safely inhabit with a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The EPA announced in a news release that Iowa Western Community College, based in Council Bluffs, received a \$478,474 grant through the Brownfields Job Training Program, which helps organizations prepare and employ people to rehabilitate spaces where the environment is thought or confirmed to have been contaminated.

Matt Mancuso, vice president of business and community education, said in an interview the college will use these funds to recruit and train as many as 96 students over the next four years and help them find work in Council Bluffs, North Omaha and the surrounding area on brownfield sites.

“It’s exciting for both Iowa Western and the community to have this type of training,” Mancuso said.

The EPA has tasked Iowa Western with recruiting underemployed or unemployed individuals in order to bolster the workforce, Mancuso said, and program participants will receive a stipend. The final year of the five-year grant will be spent following up with graduates to see where they are and if they’re still employed.

Those going through the four-week training will learn about safe deconstruction of buildings, Mancuso said, as well as procedures for dealing with lead paint and asbestos and OSHA standards. The college developed the curriculum after speaking with Council Bluffs officials to learn what would be most valuable to the community.

Participants can leave the training with up to five federal certifications, and almost 70 will be placed in environmental job positions, according to the release. Mancuso said there are brownfields sites all over the U.S., including Council Bluffs, but even those who don’t specifically work on a site will have skills that are in high demand.

Mancuso said he hopes the program will be a game-changer for both the students and the organizations and businesses the college serves.

“Today’s announcement is a key step in revitalizing communities and transforming underutilized Midwestern spaces,” said EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister in the release. “We congratulate the selected organizations and eagerly look forward to working together to develop a skilled workforce in environmental jobs.”

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KCRG: Shutting down parts of federal government costs money, Sen. Grassley warns

Dave Price

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa State Capitol Bureau) - Do not count U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, among those in his party threatening to shut down parts of the federal government amid budget fights.

“I don’t want a government shutdown,” Grassley said when asked by Gray Media Iowa Wednesday afternoon about the temporary budget compromise proposal Congress had been discussing.

Congress failed to pass a traditional budget earlier this year and instead agreed to a temporary spending bill. But that short-term solution expires this Friday. Without new funding, some parts of the federal government may have to temporarily pause.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers have been working on another temporary spending plan that could fund federal operations until March. It would continue current spending levels and add funding commitments.

The Associated Press laid out some of the additions that were added to the proposal, which includes a 3.8% raise for members of Congress. That would bring the first raise since 2009.

Elon Musk -- the billionaire businessman who spent an estimated \$200 million to help get Donald Trump elected president and now works with the incoming Trump administration to reduce federal spending -- told Republicans to oppose the compromise spending proposal and said that anyone who supports it should lose their seats in two years.

Grassley said that failing to reach compromise on another spending agreement and temporarily shutting down some federal services and agencies will cost additional money.

“It costs money to shut down the government. It costs money to open up the government. It even costs money this week to plan if there is going to be a shutdown of government,” Grassley said.

Late Wednesday afternoon, Trump spoke out publicly against the bipartisan agreement that a group of Congressional lawmakers released the day before. And he demanded that an agreement to raise the federal government’s debt ceiling also be included in a final proposal, even though that issue could have waited until next year when he takes over as president.

By Wednesday evening, the spending plan that a group of bipartisan lawmakers released a day earlier was dead, according to House Majority Leader Steve Scalise.

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KCRG: Two new dispensaries expected to help fund infrastructure upgrades in East Dubuque

Keegan Turnbough

EAST DUBUQUE, Illinois (KCRG) - Two new dispensaries are opening in East Dubuque in the next two months.

The Dispensary, located at 1709 Highway 35 North, has enjoyed being the community's only cannabis shop for the last three years. East Dubuque City Manager Bob Seitz said the business generates around \$45,000 monthly for the city in cannabis and sales taxes.

Seitz said he expects the city's revenue to increase with the addition of two more cannabis shops. NuEra Cannabis plans to open a store at 20170 U.S. Highway 20 West by the end of the month, while Bridge City Collective will launch a dispensary at 122 Sinsinawa Avenue by the end of January.

"We haven't counted this in our budget," said Seitz. "We can direct that money to buy down debt and improve infrastructure, going to water mains and things that have been neglected by the city for many years."

According to Seitz, Bridge City Collective's dispensary will be the first new building in the city's downtown core in about 15 years, and the first of several multi-million dollar projects in the area, including remodeling the city's 140-year-old police and fire station.

"It's going to be a complete revival of our business district from a tax revenue standpoint, but mainly updating the city, making it look great and improving pride among people in the city," said Seitz.

Bridge City Collective President David Alport said the cannabis store chain, based out of Portland, Oregon, is invested in adding to the "growth and vibrancy of the downtown area."

"The thing that sets us apart is we're really trying to be a part of the community there in downtown East Dubuque, so it's more than just opening up a store somewhere along a corridor," said Alport, noting its building also features a public outdoor space.

NuEra Cannabis Marketing Director Jonah Rapinio said the Illinois-based cannabis store chain differentiates itself from the market because of its medicinal roots.

"We really understand that people, even when they're purchasing as adults and use for recreation, a lot of people are using it medicinally to help them with that back pain or as an alternative to sleep medication," said Rapinio. "We really try to be very sensitive and empathetic for what people are looking for because we know that not everybody is looking for that recreational experience."

TV9 asked both Alport and Rapinio about joining a competitive market in the tri-state area.

“It can only make us stronger and it also really only helps the consumer, where there’s not a monopoly happening. Where there’s options and they’ve got choices,” noted Rapinio. “Then we’ve got to make sure we’re always doing the best that we can to attract and bring those people in and give them the best possible experience.”

“We welcome our neighbors in the community in the cannabis space and for us, we’ll just keep our head down and do what we do best, and that’s offer something that’s unique as far as a welcoming space,” said Alport.

After several years of working with NuEra Cannabis and Bridge City Collective, Seitz said it’s exciting to see the finish line near.

“It’s always a challenge getting people across the line and this has been several years for each of these businesses,” explained Seitz. “It’s a big sense of accomplishment. It’s great for the future of the city, but it’s also the investment that comes into the city and I think opens up the city to more investment in the future.”

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KCRG: 'No more backfills': Advocates press Gov. Reynolds on tax reform

Conner Hendricks

DES MOINES, Iowa (Gray Media Iowa Capitol Bureau) - Wednesday, lobbyists and trade groups weighed in on what they want Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds to prioritize in her next budget.

17 people spoke during the governor's one-hour public hearing. Property taxes were the biggest topic.

Chris Hagenow with Iowans for Tax Relief wants state lawmakers to eliminate local leaders from raising property taxes by more than two percent in a year.

"We think it's appropriate to put in some spending limitations this year. And I know that will be met with significant resistance but it's time," he said.

Hagenow adds that he doesn't want legislators to offset potential local revenue loss.

"No more checks. No more backfills. Is that it's time for them to start bending the cost curve down at the local level," he said. "I don't think that it is responsible for the state to pick up part of the tab in this effort towards property tax relief. Is that the state should not be subsidizing the ongoing growth in local government spending."

One thing lawmakers will have to focus on when crafting these cuts is how they'll affect different communities based on size. A flat cap on growth may affect a small town differently than it would a larger city due to the sizes of their tax bases.

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Iowa News Now: UI Athletics to retire Caitlin Clark's #22 jersey, celebrating her historic achievements

Staff

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Caitlin Clark's #22 jersey will be retired in a ceremony on Feb. 2, 2025 inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

In a press release UI Athletics, says the retirement honors Clark's, "legacy, achievement and undeniable impact."

"I'm forever proud to be a Hawkeye and Iowa holds a special place in my heart that is bigger than just basketball," Clark said. "It means the world to me to receive this honor and to celebrate it with my family, friends and alumni. It will be a great feeling to look up in the rafters and see my jersey alongside those that I've admired for so long."

Clark will be in attendance for the game against USC on Feb. 2, 2025. Tipoff is set for 12:30 p.m. and the contest will air on FOX28 and the Hawkeye Radio Network.

"Caitlin Clark has not only redefined excellence on the court but has also inspired countless young athletes to pursue their dreams with passion and determination," said Beth Goetz, Henry B. and Patricia B. Tippie Director of Athletics Chair. "Her remarkable achievements have left an indelible mark on the University of Iowa and the world of women's basketball. Retiring her number is a testament to her extraordinary contributions and a celebration of her legacy that will continue to inspire future generations. Hawkeye fans are eager to say thank you for so many incredible moments."

Cheapest tickets for the Iowa game Wednesday morning were around \$200 a piece. After the announcement, the cheapest priced tickets on Seat Geek clocked in at \$803.

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Daily Nonpareil: Council Bluffs students have fun while learning about technology through coding

Timothy Rohwer

The importance of technology can be found everywhere for today's and tomorrow's students.

"Technology is everywhere and it's not going away," said Jayme Busch, an official with AIM Institute of Omaha. "It's in cars, phones, televisions, Chromebooks."

But, while learning of technology may be important, it doesn't mean it can't be fun.

That was true Tuesday when Busch and other AIM officials visited Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Council Bluffs to host an Hour of Code, introducing students to coding opportunities with artificial intelligence and non-AI components.

Charles Kaup, AIM's director of youth academics, defined coding as building computer programs from scratch.

"It's building apps, building websites, programming robots," said Busch, who also serves as AIM's southwest Iowa outreach coordinator. "It's like putting pieces of a puzzle together."

The Hour of Code activities took part throughout the day during the students' science classes. Altogether, nearly 900 students took part in coding activities in various games.

"We're trying to give the kids the basics of coding," Busch said. "It's spun in a way to involve interactive learning that is fun. You can't continue the game until you code it."

Teacher Katrina Fitch said, "Some have done it in the past, others haven't."

In one sixth grade class, when Kaup asked how many were familiar with coding, more than half of the students raised their hands.

"It always surprises me how many kids have done this already," he said afterwards.

Sixth grader Rylan Allen said, "I started in the second grade."

During the classes, the students were given a choice of numerous games to code.

"I feel like it is putting a puzzle together to do what you want it to do," Busch said.

The students were also encouraged with work with others.

"Everybody learns better when you're talking together," Kaup said.

The classes ended with students filling out a survey on the project.

Allen said he has long liked computers and coding.

“I tried it and just got into it,” he said. “The more I do it, it becomes easier.”

Major Young, another sixth grader, added, “It helps me understand things more.”

Tuesday’s event was a collaboration between the AIM Institute and the Council Bluffs Community School District. Hour of Code is a global movement to inspire children to learn more and to feel empowered toward technology, Busch said.

Locally, the AIM Institute, a nonprofit organization, works to fill the growing gap in the tech workforce by training new tech talent and upskilling existing tech workers.

“The goal of this program is to give access to everyone,” Kaup said. “In Iowa, there is a huge demand for these coding jobs.”

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Daily Nonpareil: Minden continues to find progress in rebuilding after tornado disaster

Hailey Peck

Minden continues to progress in rebuilding after the devastating tornado that hit the community in April.

The Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors received a progress update from Bethany Wilcoxon, senior adviser for McClure and Associates.

The city has received multiple grants to help with the rebuild. Wilcoxon noted that the group is working with the Iowa Economic Development Authority for the state's Emergency Community Catalyst Building Remediation Grant.

Minden was awarded \$500,000, which is going into a couple of key buildings like the meat market, the pharmacy, the former bowling alley, the grocery store and the post office. Wilcoxon said that the only hold-up is the business's insurance.

Minden was also selected for the Iowa Rural Development Council's Rural Business Initiatives. Minden was one of four communities selected.

"The cool thing about this is that we can give money to the small businesses but we can also tap into other partners from around the state to provide technical assistance," Wilcoxon said.

Other funding opportunities for Minden include a Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery grant valued at \$1.1 million and funding from the Community Foundation of Western Iowa.

Minden is also seeking \$1.3 million in water distribution system improvements and a new well, 80% of which would be covered by the Iowa Economic Development Authority.

"We anticipate funding would be awarded at the end of the year or early next year and then construction would start in the spring," Wilcoxon said.

Wilcoxon also mentioned that master planning for a community recreation center has begun.

As Minden continues to be rebuilt, Wilcoxon said they will continue to apply for public and private funding. A temporary development moratorium is in effect while decisions about what downtown should look like are made. The moratorium is expected to last until March.

"The resilience of these communities, I really think that's what spurred Minden's success to date," Wilcoxon said. "I'm really excited with how they're progressing."

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Radio Iowa: Iowa's governor asks new lieutenant governor to focus on STEM, A.I.

Kay Henderson

Arkansas, Massachusetts and now Iowa are the only three states that have two women at the top of state government.

During an interview with Radio Iowa on Wednesday, Governor Kim Reynolds said Chris Cournoyer brings a long list of skills and attributes to the role of lieutenant governor and she didn't limit her search for a lieutenant governor to women.

"It wasn't intentional, I'll say that. Neither is my strong-willed team that I have at the Capitol or my cabinet that's led by a lot of strong, capable, intelligent women as well," Reynolds said. "Chris just checked a lot of boxes and she really complements what we're trying to do here."

Reynolds has asked Cournoyer to review state-led efforts over the past 11 years to encourage students to seek careers in science, technology, engineering and math and update the programs for the next decade. Cournoyer has led STEM efforts in the Quad Cities and has taught robotics and computer coding.

"Kids aren't afraid of technology and so when they bring these STEM programs into the schools, they just really embrace it," said Cournoyer, who joined Reynolds in the governor's formal office for a joint interview with Radio Iowa.

The governor said Cournoyer's background in computer programming and artificial intelligence will be another asset in efforts to modernize state government operations.

"We want to make sure we're bringing AI to state government," Reynolds said, "but we want to make sure we're doing it responsibly and we're doing it right."

Cournoyer is among legislators from around the country who recently served on a task force on cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Cournoyer said there has to be a human component to A.I., to monitor the data that's collected and ensure the outcomes aren't skewed. "And then we really want to make sure that when we're looking at data and how we're running those algorithms and developing them that we're doing it in a very ethical manner," Cournoyer added.

Reynolds described herself and Cournoyer as "competitive people" — both mentioned they played girls sports in high school, but when asked about a run for re-election in 2026, Reynolds said she hasn't decided whether the Reynolds-Cournoyer team will be on Iowa's ballot.

"Honestly, right now I'm trying to get through Christmas, figure out what the (state) budget looks like for the next legislative cycle," Reynolds said. "I'm very excited about some of the things that we're working on."

Reynolds will deliver the annual “Condition of the State” address to legislators on January 14 and release details of her 2025 policy agenda.

For the past 15 weeks, Iowa did not have a lieutenant governor. Reynolds waited until after the November election to begin the search to replace Adam Gregg, who resigned as lieutenant governor on September 2. Reynolds told Radio Iowa she’s “had my eye on Chris” for a while and she described Cournoyer as the type of :get-it-done: person who’s a good fit for her governing team.

“It’s just a really added bonus that she’s also a woman and we’ll continue to be role models for young girls all across the state,” Reynolds said.

Cournoyer added: “I’ve had so many role models in my life, Governor Reynolds being one who has just really inspired me and I’ll take that responsibility very seriously, knowing that somebody might be watching how I conduct myself and making sure that I’m doing that with high standards.”

Cournoyer has been a state senator for the past six years, but resigned Monday morning just before being sworn in as lieutenant governor. The governor has not yet set the date for a special election in the state senate district the includes Le Claire, where Cournoyer lives, as well as the cities of Clinton, Maquoketa and DeWitt.

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DMR: How a 'computer nerd' and substitute teacher earned her spot as Iowa's lieutenant governor

Brianne Pfannenstiel

Chris Cournoyer was substitute teaching in a fourth-grade classroom on a day when students were learning about Iowa history, including the state's governor, the state tree and the state rock.

At the time, the Iowa Legislature had just declined to pass a bill making the honeybee the state insect, so Cournoyer got the students to vote on which insect they believed should represent Iowa and craft a letter about it to Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds.

This week, as she sat next to Reynolds in her formal office looking back on that moment, Cournoyer said it's "very surreal" to think that students in other Iowa classrooms might now be learning her name as the state's new lieutenant governor.

But now that Cournoyer has officially taken the oath of office, the former state senator, mother of four, self-proclaimed "computer nerd" and substitute teacher said she's ready to "get to work."

She said when Reynolds officially offered her the job, she was prepared.

"I had come to the Capitol that day and we just had some final conversations about what the job entailed and what the expectations were," Cournoyer told the Des Moines Register in an interview. "And then she said, 'It's yours if you want it.' And she said, 'Do you want to take some time to talk to your family?' And I said, 'No, we've already talked. I've talked to my family. We're all in, and I'm in, so let's go.'"

Reynolds said she thrives on that "doer" mentality, relates to Cournoyer's competitive instincts and is looking forward to tapping her experience with technology, artificial intelligence and STEM learning, which focuses on science, technology, engineering and math.

"She was somebody that came to mind right away as somebody that I really wanted to sit down and visit with," Reynolds told the Register. "You know, we've talked to other people too, but, you know, she was really somebody that I had identified early on in the process."

Iowa is one of few states with women leading as governor, lieutenant governor
Iowa is now one of only a few states in the country to have ever had women concurrently serving as governor and lieutenant governor.

Massachusetts and Arkansas became the first states to put women in both of their top executive offices in 2022.

Now, Iowa joins them.

Reynolds said she didn't set out to select a woman for the job and picked the person she thought was the best fit.

But she said she is proud to have surrounded herself with "really bright, intelligent, strong, compassionate women that are balancing family and work and policy and making a difference" throughout her office and cabinet.

"We see a problem, we address a problem, and then we move on to the next one," she said of women who are used to juggling many different roles.

Reynolds said it's important for girls to have role models at high levels, but she didn't "truly, honestly realize how important it was" until she became governor.

Now, when young girls visit her office, she puts them in the big red executive chair behind her desk.

"I sit them in a chair and just say, 'You can be whatever you want to be,'" Reynolds said. "And that might be a mom or a teacher or an astronaut or the next governor of this great state, or president of the United States, but you get to decide that."

Cournoyer said she's used to being in male-dominated spaces, noting that there weren't many other girls or young women getting into technology or programming at the time she was exploring those fields.

"I really had to work harder to prove myself to my male counterparts," she said. "I think that made me a better programmer, really, because I had to work a little harder to prove that I was just as good as anybody else. And that was something that my father always told me, that, you know, you can do anything a boy can do. And so I just kind of had that mindset that, you know, if I just work hard, I can do anything I set my mind to."

Cournoyer has helped to oversee legislation that removed gender balance requirements on state boards and commissions. At the time, she said the need is outdated and women are holding leadership roles more than ever before.

She said this week that her appointment to the lieutenant governor position helps prove her point.

"We're going to normalize this, and it's just not going to be an issue in the future," Cournoyer said.

Will Kim Reynolds seek reelection with new lieutenant governor by her side?

Reynolds would not say whether she intends to seek reelection with her new lieutenant governor in 2026 when their terms expire.

"Honestly, right now, I'm focused on preparing for the next legislative session," Reynolds said.

She said she's looking forward to working with incoming Republican President-elect Donald Trump, who she supported after first endorsing Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

"He really works well with the states. He really defers to the states," Reynolds said. "I think there's a tremendous amount of opportunity to do block grants and to really — we did DOGE before DOGE was cool."

The new Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, is set to focus on slashing government waste and spending. It's being headed by tech mogul Elon Musk and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and is championed by Iowa's U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst in Congress.

Chris Cournoyer is sworn in as Iowa's next lieutenant governor on Monday, Dec. 16, 2024, at the Iowa State Capitol.

"We'll announce at some point ... what we're going to do," Reynolds said of her reelection prospects. "But right now I'm really focused on this next legislative session — and a new puppy! I'm focused on that and trying to get her trained."

Reynolds recently adopted a labradoodle puppy she named Rosie.

School safety issues drove Chris Cournoyer to run for school board. Cournoyer said she got her first taste of politics after the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012. Her twin boys were first graders at the time — the same age as some of the victims.

She wanted to know what her school was doing to enhance safety measures and couldn't get an answer from her school board representative. So she decided to run and ultimately replaced him on the board.

"A friend of mine said, 'Well, if you don't think he's doing a good job, you should run for it,'" she said. "And I thought, 'Oh, no, I can't. I'm not doing that.' I didn't really have any ambition to do that. But, you know, the more I really thought about it and talked to my family about it, they said, 'You know what, if not you, who?'"

She said she worked to understand her role on the school board and enact good policy.

"You're not there to fire math teachers or basketball coaches," she said. "You're there to really set good policy that, you know, supports students being successful after graduation and be a good steward of taxpayer dollars. So I took that job very seriously, and then I started paying attention to other issues that were important to me."

Cournoyer later was elected school president and served for two years before she was approached to run for the state Senate.

"I was a little resistant to that as well," she said. "My vision — and how politics was portrayed to me — was that it was just always fighting. But I was convinced that I could do more for education and issues that were important to me at the state level, and they certainly were right about that."

New lieutenant governor has technology and education background

In addition to serving on her local school board, Cournoyer has also spent time working directly with students in technology related after-school programs.

When one of her sons wanted to get into robotics, Cournoyer said the only answer was to step up and lead a FIRST LEGO League robotics team.

Then she decided to branch out, starting an after-school robotics program for elementary students and an “hour of code” program. She later coached a Girls in STEM high school team that developed an app.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Reynolds expanded the rules around who qualified to substitute teach in the state. Cournoyer said that allowed her to gain the qualification and move into substitute teaching.

“It's really a great gig, and it's given me an opportunity to get into the classrooms and see what kind of really great things are going on in our schools at the front lines,” Cournoyer said.

She said it’s allowed her to share first-hand perspectives of how schools are operating as the Legislature considers education policy changes.

Cournoyer said her interest in technology and coding came from her father, who took an early interest in technology while at the University of Iowa and helped nurture that same interest in his daughter.

When other kids were typing their school assignments on a typewriter, Cournoyer said she had keyboarded them and printed them with a dot matrix printer. In grade school, she took a class at the community college, and her high school offered a programming class in the 1980s that was “pretty ahead of its time.”

“It's something that I obviously had an acumen for, and it was something that my dad and I did together.”

Over the years, Reynolds has been an advocate for STEM education. She said one of the reasons she remains passionate about it is because it can expose young girls to concepts they might not otherwise engage with.

“A lot of times girls don't think that that's an area that they would be good at, or they would even like,” Reynolds said. “And so the more that we can expose them early on, that really drives that passion, and they see that they can do it, and it really opens up so many opportunities for them. So I love that she can continue to tell that story.”

As lieutenant governor, Chris Cournoyer will look at future of STEM Advisory Council Reynolds said Cournoyer’s portfolio of duties and policy initiatives will evolve as they put together their governing agenda for the next year. But she said she hopes Cournoyer will take on a leadership role in reorienting the governor’s STEM Advisory Council to be more forward looking.

“We really have raised the awareness of STEM, but it's been in existence for 11 years,” Reynolds said of the group. “So we need to really take a look at what it looks like going forward. And so I'd like her to really take the STEM Advisory Council and take a look at what the next 11 years looks like. How do we restructure it? How do we be more intentional? How do we align it with what we're doing already here in the state, with workforce and innovation, and what do those new jobs look like?”

Iowa lieutenant governor Chris Cournoyer stands for a portrait on Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, at the Iowa state Capitol. She said she also hopes to have Cournoyer help lead some initiatives around using artificial intelligence in state government.

“We want to make sure that we're taking advantage of the opportunities that (AI) brings to state government, but we also want to make sure that we're being very careful in how we implement it,” Reynolds said. “Every state is looking at it, and I really think that that's an opportunity for her to step into that and really kind of help — we'll work together on it — but help kind of direct what that looks like, and how we start to build that out in the state of Iowa.”

She said the pair will also be focused on issues such as maternal health care in 2025. Reynolds is interested in Cournoyer's experience as a small business owner. And, she said, they'll continue to focus on education.

Cournoyer has received some criticism from the Iowa Standard, a right-wing blog favoring socially conservative policies. The blog has accused Cournoyer of being too cozy with LGBTQ groups in the state, including Iowa Safe Schools, attending a fundraiser for the group. She has also spoken about the need to ban conversion therapy for LGBTQ youth.

“I got up and spoke about how, you know, as a former school board member, it is extremely important to me that all kids feel safe at school,” Cournoyer said. “And we've come a long way in terms of anti-bullying programs and mental health supports and school resource officers and things that we can do to fortify the buildings to make them safer. Because if kids don't feel safe at school, they can't learn.”

Reynolds said she would urge Republicans to look at Cournoyer's record as a whole.

“She's been a strong supporter in every major priority that I have put forward, from cutting taxes five times in the last six years to reducing the size and scope of government ... to protecting girls sports, to protecting their safe spaces, protecting life. She has been an advocate and a supporter of all of those pieces of legislation.”

Reynolds said she's confident that Cournoyer will be a strong advocate for her agenda moving forward.

“I have full confidence in the lieutenant governor,” she said. “She'll be a great advocate.”

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Iowa News Now: Iowa groups share 2025 legislative priorities with Gov. Reynolds, includes maternal care

Skylar Tallal

DES Moines, Iowa — On Wednesday, Iowa organizations let Governor Kim Reynolds know what priorities they would like to see her fund next legislative session.

Heading in to 2025, experts predict the state will make less money than they spent this past year. While that means lawmakers could have less revenue to work with, there's still a \$2 billion budget surplus and other reserve funds they could dip into.

Many Iowa organizations praised Gov. Reynolds' conservative spending policies during the governor's budget meeting Wednesday, along with the income tax cuts that are playing a major role in the recent state budget predictions showing a decrease in revenue next year.

Property tax cuts are already on Republican lawmakers' agenda for the 2025 legislative session. Some Iowans laid out what they hope to see and claimed local governments are spending too much.

"We think it's appropriate to put in some spending limitations this year and I know that will be met with significant resistance but it's time," Chris Hagenow the president for Iowans for Tax Relief said. "And we would start by suggesting a 2% spending cap on all communities."

Agriculture groups asked the governor to fund more programs to combat foreign animal diseases like the recent surge in bird flu cases impacting farmers across the state and nation. That request came on the same day as a state of emergency declaration over the outbreak in California.

Meanwhile, Iowa representatives are hoping to see even more investments in healthcare, specifically in rural areas, and addressing maternal medical care and a shortage of OBGYN's. It's something Gov. Reynolds said will continue to be one of her top priorities next session.

"As you know, Iowa's faced with significant declines in labor and delivery services and we've seen that over the past couple of decades," Allen Anderson the president and CEO of St. Anthony Regional Hospital said. "We continue to see that decline and have some stories that, to tell. But that trend is particularly concerning in our rural communities."

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KCCI: KCCI sits down with Gov. Reynolds, Lt. Gov. Cournoyer in first television interview together

Laura Terrell, Kayla James

DES MOINES, Iowa —

Recently appointed Iowa Lt. Gov. Chris Cournoyer says she is ready to lead the state alongside Gov. Kim Reynolds. Reynolds appointed Cournoyer to the position Monday. This comes a little more than three months after former Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg resigned.

Both Reynolds and Cournoyer sat down with KCCI Wednesday for their first television interview together, where the governor says Cournoyer is the right person for the job because of her expertise in business, innovation and technology.

Cournoyer is a mother of four children. She's also a fifth-generation Iowan from LeClaire in eastern Iowa. The lieutenant governor says she's honored to be second in command of the state.

Cournoyer began serving in the Iowa Senate in 2019.

"I have been very supportive of the governor's agenda since I've been in the Senate. I think we align very, very well there. You know, my school board background, I've done a lot of education bills. I think my experience as a school board member, as well as a substitute teacher, I've brought a lot of good insights," said Cournoyer, who also mentioned her children are in the K-12 system. "I think I've had some good contributions to the legislation that we've brought forward, but also with my technology background and my business background."

Cournoyer told KCCI she never had an interest in politics until 2012 when the Sandy Hook shooting occurred. She had children in the first grade at the time.

According to Cournoyer, the tragedy shaped her passion for school safety.

"We've certainly come a long way since December of 2012 in terms of just the physical security of schools, but also adding SROs, mental health, anti-bullying and so many programs that I think are important to make sure our kids are safe at school," said Cournoyer. "Because if you don't feel safe, you can't learn. That's really been an ongoing priority of mine."

Reynolds says energy, infrastructure and maternal health will be some of the big priorities in 2025. The governor believes her newly appointed lieutenant governor will help further those priorities.

"I love the fact that she's a business owner, so she has experience in the private sector as well as state government. She's a get-it-done kind of person," said Reynolds. "When you combine all of that, that's somebody that I was very excited about having a part of my team."

We're both very competitive. We love getting in there and making a difference, and really trying to make things better, leaving it a little bit better than we found it."

Reynolds says she's working with Senate leadership to call a special election to replace Cournoyer's Senate seat. A date has not been set yet.

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DMR: Satanic Temple demands Iowa reschedule 'forcibly canceled' holiday event in state Capitol

Sabine Martin

The Satanic Temple is threatening possible legal action against the Iowa Department of Administrative Services after the agency refused to approve the religious group's holiday celebration in the Capitol building, arguing it would have been "harmful to minors."

The Temple's legal representative sent a letter to the state Monday demanding the proposed Dec. 14 event be rescheduled for this Saturday or work to "facilitate my client's free expression and avoid potential litigation."

"This letter arises from a potential legal dispute in which you prohibited my client's holiday event from equal access to state facilities on equal terms as other religious events," Satanic Temple's general counsel Matt Kezhaya wrote in the letter obtained by the Des Moines Register.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa said in a post on Facebook Friday evening that the Iowa Department of Administrative Services "forcibly canceled" its Dec. 14 event.

Adam Steen, Iowa Department of Administrative Services director, said in a statement to the Register he denied the event after determining the "totality of the event request to include elements that are harmful to minors."

Christopher Sikich, Iowa Department of Administrative Services public information officer, said Monday the department has "no further comment on this matter."

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said in a statement Monday the state government is always going to be concerned about the well-being of children. She called for Iowans to pray over the Capitol building last year while a satanic display was up.

"The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit," she said. "Because of this, the state's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

Satanic Temple says state created a 'false narrative' that sticks included in costume contest would hit children

Documents obtained by the Register shed more light on the Satanic Temple's request and its attempts to negotiate a resolution that would allow its event to proceed.

The Satanic Temple described the event as a "family-friendly one-day event celebrating the holiday season" with Satanic holiday carols, an all-ages Krampus costume contest, a large Satanic altar and display, an ornament-making station and a Satanic ritual, according to the Temple's Oct. 7 Capitol event application.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa planned its holiday celebration one year after a Tennessee man was charged with a felony for vandalizing a display in the Iowa Capitol building depicting the horned deity Baphomet. The refusal of the event also comes after a Satanic Temple display was destroyed in the New Hampshire State Capitol this week.

The satanic display at the Iowa State Capitol, after being vandalized. Before the state refused the event, emails were exchanged between officials at the Department of Administrative Services and the Satanic Temple of Iowa exploring details of the holiday celebration.

A Capitol Complex events coordinator Dec. 3 sent an email requesting the Satanic Temple of Iowa specify what carols would be sung, what images would be depicted on the ornaments and coloring pages, and provide details and images about the costume contest and ritual.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa sent the Iowa Department of Administrative Services a photo of people dressed in Krampus costumes as an example of anticipated attire at the event's contest in response to a Dec. 3 email.

The Satanic Temple of Iowa provided a photo of people dressed in Krampus costumes as an example of anticipated attire at the event's contest in response to the Dec. 3 email, Kezhaya wrote.

Krampus is an anthropomorphic figure with horns, originated in European Alpine folklore, who travels with St. Nicholas and punishes those who have misbehaved by swatting them with a "birch rod."

People dressed as 'Krampus' take part in the traditional parade of Krampus night (Krampusnacht) in Kiefersfelden, Bavaria, southern Germany, on December 5, 2024. Kezhaya wrote in the letter that the email exchange concludes the decision to refuse the event was "'content-based,' which is subject to the strictest judicial scrutiny," citing the case U.S. Supreme Court case Reed v. Town of Gilbert, Ariz.

In another email exchange between both parties on Dec. 10, Steen wrote that the request to hold the event was refused under Administrative Rule 100.4(5) and the department's section 5.15 of its memorandum of understanding. Essentially, the state argued that costumed characters brandishing sticks would harm children.

"The cumulative circumstances that occur within the State Capitol building, including the presence of minors, coupled with the anticipation of costumes with sticks used as weapons on children, positions the event to be harmful to minors contrary to MOU section 5.15," Steen wrote.

Kezhaya countered that the costume event would not have entailed hitting children and the stick are simply part of a traditional costume, for "appearance only." Kezhaya wrote the Satanic Temple of Iowa struck the costume event after the state raised questions, but to no avail.

"Nor does the photograph you referenced depict children being hit," Kezhaya wrote. "You simply concocted a false narrative about the contents of my client's speech and then used your lie as a basis to deny the application."

What the rules say

Section 5.15 prohibits obscene materials and gratuitous violence or gore in the Capitol, since it is often a destination for children.

"Gratuitous violence or gore," includes depictions of severe bodily injury or blood, organs or other bodily fluids. The Satanic Temple contends its event would not violate any of those provisions.

Kezhaya told the Register that shielding the public's viewpoints from information or religions they might not agree with does not promote a market of free ideas.

"It's common for individuals to react in extreme ways when they're confronted with ideas that they don't like, and it's a whole other thing when a government tries to either facilitate that by, for example, speaking out against TST (The Satanic Temple) as a religion, or validity as a religion," Kezhaya said.

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The Gazette: Grant Wood AEA Chief Administrator John Speer retiring

Grace King

CEDAR RAPIDS — John Speer, who led the Grant Wood Area Education Agency through controversial changes approved by Iowa lawmakers earlier this year, is retiring as chief administrator from the organization this summer.

Speer, 53, said he's known for the last few years retirement was on the horizon for him after more than six years as chief administrator. His last day will be June 30.

"One of my lasting legacies I hope is that I left places better than when I arrived, that I treated people with care, respect and professionalism," Speer said. "I'll miss the people I work with. I'll miss the students."

As chief administrator of Grant Wood AEA, Speer oversees the delivery of services to thousands of students and hundreds of educators in a seven-county region. Grant Wood AEA is one of nine agencies across the state that assist students with disabilities and delivers general education and media services to educators. There are 74,000 students in the Grant Wood AEA region, which includes Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn and Washington counties.

The Grant Wood AEA board is responsible for appointing a new chief administrator. Speer was paid a base salary of \$227,041 a year, and earned additional compensation of \$28,963 and benefits.

Board President Randy Bauer said the board would appoint an interim or share a chief administrator with another AEA while its searches for a new leader. Bauer said the board is considering using a search firm if it decides to hire from outside the agency.

Speer laid out a "vision" with "clear direction and measurable goals" when he joined the AEA, Bauer said. These goals include:

Increasing academic performance of all students through innovative practices and equitable use of resources;

All third-graders be proficient in reading, all fifth-graders be proficient in math, and learning gaps in reading and math between students in special education and not in special education be reduced;

Increase students' sense of physical and emotional safety in school;

Increase students' access to mental health supports in school;

And increase the number of adults equipped to support the well-being of students in school.

"John has a passion for people and a passion for improvement," Bauer said. "We're really happy for him and wish him well in retirement."

Changes made by lawmakers 'challenging'

Major changes were made to the AEAs during the 2024 legislative session through House File 2612. The compromise was less than what Gov. Kim Reynolds proposed, but she said the new law would improve transparency over the cost of AEA services.

Speer said the changes have been “very challenging.”

“What we’ve tried to do is take the current situation and intended outcome of the legislation and do the best we can to make sure Grant Wood AEA continues to be a vibrant, well-thought of and necessary organization. I think we’ve accomplished that. We’re on our way to stabilizing as a system,” Speer said.

As the next legislative session approaches in January, Speer said he hopes lawmakers would give AEAs time to enact the changes made under the 2024 law.

For the first year of the law, Iowa school districts are receiving 60 percent of the funds for media services and education services that used to go to the AEAs. They can choose to use that with the AEAs, or with an outside party, and the money can be spent on any general fund purpose.

Once the new law is fully implemented in its second year, 10 percent of state funding for special education services will remain with districts for them to use, while 90 percent will continue to flow directly to the AEAs.

Also in the second year, all state funding for other education services and media services will go directly to schools — which could use that money with AEAs or get services from another entity.

Previously, federal and state special education funding went directly to the agencies. AEAs also receive property tax funding for media services and other education services for schools in their region.

A long career as an educator

Speer began his career as an educator in 1994 after graduating with a bachelor’s degree from the University of Northern Iowa. He worked as a high school teacher and has served as superintendent of Allamakee, Ballard and the College Community school districts.

At each district, he oversaw the completion of “critically needed” construction projects, he said

“I have had the unbelievable good luck of working with great professionals and unbelievable people,” Speer said. “I’ve made incredible friendships over the years.”

After six years at College Community, he was hired as Grant Wood AEA’s chief administrator, a role he began in July 2018.

Speer said his time as an administrator in K-12 education is “closing,” but he’s looking forward to other opportunities.

“I think I have a lot to contribute in the area of education,” Speer said. “I’ll gauge the landscape here this spring and early summer, and determine the next chapter in my professional career.”

Speer said he has no intention to leave Iowa or the Corridor. It’s where he grew up. One thing he could see himself doing more of is coaching and refereeing — especially basketball and volleyball. “Both sports are desperate for officials,” he said.

Speer said he is “hopeful” for the future of K-12 education in Iowa. “I would caution that great schools don’t happen without reasonable funding,” he said.

Leaving a ‘footprint’ on education

Cindy Yelick, chief administrator of Heartland AEA, said Speer is focused on “making improvements that benefit all kids in the Grant Wood region and across the state.”

Heartland AEA serves more than 80 public school districts and accredited non-public schools in central Iowa, including Des Moines.

“He’s really been a leader among the chiefs group. He provided some great strategic vision and a great perspective. He did great work to improve the financial health of the system,” Yelick said.

“I think John is someone who has a lot of integrity and leads with his passion for kids. That makes a big impact. He’s had a great footprint on education in the state of Iowa,” Yelick said.

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WOI: State lawmakers plan to tackle inflation and education as top priorities

Connor O'Neal

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa lawmakers met at the State Capitol this week to discuss each party's legislative priorities for the upcoming session, which begins Monday, Jan. 13.

At the top of the list for Democrats and Republicans is addressing the economy, and the impact inflation has had at a state level.

House Republicans also want to improve the state's education system. Speaker of the House Pat Grassley, R-New Hartford, recently created the House Higher Education Committee to determine if the state is getting the value it wants from schools, in the content it teaches and "to fill workforce needs."

"I think with the workforce challenges that we are facing, some of the 'woke' policies we're seeing on campuses, I think we need to have more of a focus on what that looks like from the workforce standpoint," he said.

House Democrats instead want to cut back on the education savings account program -- which provides money for families to attend private schools.

"We're going to make sure that we are putting them first, and we're going to be pushing hard to ensure that public money goes to public schools," House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst, D-Polk County said. "Fighting back against efforts to continue to fund, in an unsustainable way, private schools with your tax dollars."

Konfrst added Democrats want to raise wages for Iowans and legalize marijuana.

However, Grassley said Republicans have no interest in legalizing marijuana this session, despite it being fully legal in three of Iowa's neighboring states.

Republicans are also focused on reforming the state's property tax system through multiple pieces of legislation.

Grassley told Local 5 News: "I think where we're kind of on the path to is you'll see the House introduce a few bills, because I think what we actually have to have happen is, we have to have everyone come to the table. In the past whenever we've talked about property taxes, it feels like the local governments and the state are being pitted against one another."

Republicans are coming into this session with a two-thirds majority, however, Konfrst said Democrats aren't going to "sit back and watch," and are instead, "ready to fight."

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KCRG: The future is uncertain for free, public all-day preschool in Cedar Rapids

Mollie Swayne

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (KCRG) - It's one of Iowa's only free all-day preschool programs without income restrictions, and its future is in jeopardy. Truman Early Learning Center serves hundreds of children in Cedar Rapids, but it could be at the mercy of district-wide budget cuts.

Now, the Cedar Rapids Community School District (CRCSD) is asking state lawmakers to make full-day preschool funding one of their top priorities.

Tanasiah Walker's son Khalil attends full-day preschool at Truman. She's grateful there is an all-day option, because if that wasn't available, she'd had to make significant changes.

"All of us work full time and so it would mean having to go back to paying for childcare," said Walker. "I'd have to go back to working part time. It just wouldn't be like—I like the full day."

However, the future of full-day preschool depends on the bottom line.

Right now, Truman uses what Principal Monica Frey called a blended model. About half the funding comes from the state, and the district covers the rest.

"It's a model that we cannot sustain unless the four-year-olds receive full time funding from [the] state," said Frey.

At a meeting Monday, district officials made the case to lawmakers for district-provided full-day preschool. The sole Republican in attendance, State Rep. Cindy Golding, said the majority party is considering a number of options, including money for child care rather preschool. A study about New York City's plan to provide free preschool found it could hurt the market for private daycares.

"Early childhood—child care is one of the initiatives. We're not exactly sure how that funding— if it's going through public schools, or child care centers, or it's going to businesses for reimbursement for child care, but child care is a top priority," said Golding.

TV9 asked Frey if the state does not provide the money the district is asking for, what happens to Truman?

"I would say that the future of full-day is contingent upon people making decisions to fund 4-year-old preschool or investing in that that need for full-day preschool somehow."

With 66 families on the wait-list for full day preschool, Frey said she's optimistic the data backs up the district's request.

"We're super hopeful. We're very hopeful that we can continue this."

There are likely some families who are hopeful, too.

Next year, Khalil is headed to kindergarten, but Walker said if he were headed back to Truman, but full days weren't available, "It would be a struggle."

Frey said the district needs \$500,000 to a million dollars annually to support the program.

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The Gazette: Linn County adopts carbon dioxide pipeline restrictions

Jared Strong

Linn County leaders approved new restrictions Wednesday for carbon dioxide pipelines meant to protect areas of future growth near certain smaller cities.

The hazardous liquid pipeline ordinance, approved with all three members of the Board of Supervisors in favor although no such project currently is planned for the county, generally blocks the projects from being built within 2 miles of cities that have development plans with the county, including Bertram, Ely, Palo and Springville. Larger cities in the Cedar Rapids metropolitan area do not have the "Fringe Area Plans."

The ordinance further imposes a minimum 1/8-mile separation distance between CO₂ pipelines and homes and other places occupied by people.

It also has stipulations for mitigating damage to agricultural land and public roads, and to facilitate better communication between pipeline companies and those affected by their projects.

"This is fairly narrowly focused on economic development," Charlie Nichols, Linn County's director of planning and development, said at a meeting last week. "Economic development is a public purpose of counties, and hazardous liquid pipelines represent both an economic development opportunity for Linn County, as well as an economic development risk."

Such pipeline projects are expected to be a boon for ethanol producers, which could be eligible for considerable federal tax credits for capturing and sequestering carbon dioxide emissions and for producing low-carbon fuels.

But the proposals have sparked safety concerns about potential, catastrophic pipeline breaches. Under certain circumstances, they can release plumes of carbon dioxide that have the potential to kill people and animals. Federal officials have said that most pipeline failures result in the gas dissipating in the air, with no injuries.

The county has been considering the pipeline restrictions for more than two years, after Wolf Carbon Solutions announced its intention to build a pipeline system that would transport captured carbon dioxide from ethanol producers in Cedar Rapids and Clinton to an Illinois storage location.

No Linn pipeline for now

Wolf withdrew its permit application in Iowa earlier this month. The county supervisors then approved the new ordinance in successive meetings.

That pipeline's proposed route crossed the far southern portion of Linn County and went just north of Ely, well within its 2-mile development area. The ordinance allows cities to waive that separation distance if they want.

Wolf left open the potential for it to renew its pursuit of the project in a letter this month to state regulators, but it declined to comment further when asked by The Gazette.

The company had intended to connect to Archer Daniels Midland facilities, which have by far the largest production capacity among the state's 42 ethanol plants, according to the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association.

ADM did not respond to a request to comment about its plans now, including whether it might connect to Summit Carbon Solutions' proposed system. That is the only proposal that still is viable in the state and has approval from the Iowa Utilities Commission.

Another company, Navigator CO2, withdrew its pipeline permit application with the commission last year.

A Summit spokesperson declined to speculate about the potential to add ADM's Cedar Rapids site to its network. The nearest connection point to Summit's current plan is more than 50 miles northwest of Cedar Rapids.

Summit has sued six other counties that adopted restrictive ordinances that could impede its project, including Bremer County.

A federal judge sided with Summit in two of the lawsuits, saying the counties don't have authority to regulate pipeline safety and restrict their placement. Appeals of those rulings are pending.

Linn County officials have said their ordinance does not pertain to safety, but it has the potential to affect the routes.

The county declined to comment about potential litigation, but Nichols said: "I do think our ordinance is reasonable, and it has not been put in place with the intent of prohibiting these types of projects."

The ordinance requires pipeline companies to meet all its requirements before it starts construction in the county.

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NATIONAL NEWS:

States Newsroom: Chances for government shutdown escalate after Trump and GOP reject stopgap spending bill

Jennifer Shutt

WASHINGTON — Efforts to prevent a partial government shutdown from starting this weekend fell apart Wednesday when numerous Republicans, on and off Capitol Hill, expressed their frustration with the many extraneous provisions added to a short-term funding package.

Complicating the situation, Vice President-elect J.D. Vance posted on social media that he and President-elect Donald Trump believe Republicans should leverage the two days left before a shutdown to get Democrats to raise or suspend the debt limit.

The catch-all, year-end spending legislation released Tuesday would not only fund the government through March 14, but provide an extension of the agriculture and nutrition programs in the farm bill through Sept. 30. The 1,547-page package also holds tens of billions in emergency aid for communities recovering from natural disasters.

But it includes several sections that have angered far-right members of the Republican Party as well as Trump and his allies. They argue the extra provisions that don't relate to essential programs should be scrapped, throwing a wrench in weeks of negotiations between the Republican House and Democratic Senate.

How a shutdown works

Congress must pass a short-term spending bill before midnight on Friday when the current stopgap spending bill expires, otherwise every single federal department and agency would be required to shut down.

That would mean federal employees categorized as exempt would have to work without pay and employees categorized as non-exempt would be furloughed.

Unlike the 35-day partial government shutdown that took place during Trump's first administration, this shutdown would affect larger swaths of the federal government.

Congress had approved several of the full-year appropriations bills ahead of the 2018-2019 shutdown insulating the departments of Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Labor and Veterans Affairs.

Lawmakers had also approved the Legislative Branch spending bill, ensuring members of Congress and their staff were paid throughout the shutdown.

This time around, failing to pass some sort of stopgap spending bill ahead of the Friday midnight deadline would mean cutting off U.S. troops from pay, not to mention dozens of

other national security agencies like Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

It could also wreak havoc on the numerous federal departments and agencies assisting communities with response and recovery efforts stemming from natural disasters, including hurricanes Helene and Milton.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Agriculture and Small Business Administration would all be affected by a funding lapse, as would anyone who receives funding from those programs.

Debt limit

The debt limit was not part of the spending negotiations until Wednesday when Vance insisted it be included in any type of stopgap spending bill.

The current suspension of the debt limit is set to expire Jan. 1, but lawmakers will likely have a few months where the Treasury Department can use accounting maneuvers called extraordinary measures before the country would default.

Vance, however, doesn't seem inclined to deal with the country's borrowing authority next year.

"The most foolish and inept thing ever done by Congressional Republicans was allowing our country to hit the debt ceiling in 2025," Vance wrote in his social media post. "It was a mistake and is now something that must be addressed."

Vance wrote that addressing "the debt ceiling is not great but we'd rather do it on Biden's watch."

"If Democrats won't cooperate on the debt ceiling now, what makes anyone think they would do it in June during our administration?" Vance wrote. "Let's have this debate now. And we should pass a streamlined spending bill that doesn't give Chuck Schumer and the Democrats everything they want."

Elon Musk, a billionaire whom Trump has tasked with trying to make the federal government more efficient through steep spending cuts, wrote on social media that no legislation should move through Congress until Jan. 20, after Trump's inauguration.

That would create havoc for hundreds of government programs, including the agriculture and nutrition assistance programs within the farm bill.

"Any member of the House or Senate who votes for this outrageous spending bill deserves to be voted out in 2 years!," Musk wrote.

While every member of the House who chooses to run for reelection will campaign during the 2026 midterm elections, just one-third of the Senate will be up for reelection since they are elected to six-year terms.

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis posted on social media that any short-term spending bill, sometimes called a continuing resolution or CR, must carry disaster aid to help his home state recover from a devastating hurricane.

“If Congressional leaders intend to leave DC before the holidays without passing disaster recovery, they should be prepared to spend Christmas in the Capitol,” Tillis wrote. “I’ll use every tool available to block a CR that fails Western North Carolina communities in need of long-term certainty.”

West Virginia Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito said during a brief interview she wants to see disaster aid remain in a stopgap spending bill.

“I went down and saw the Asheville disaster,” she said “I think we need to get the disaster aid to those affected areas, some of which are in West Virginia, believe it or not.”

White House reaction

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre released a written statement Wednesday evening saying that “Republicans need to stop playing politics with this bipartisan agreement or they will hurt hardworking Americans and create instability across the country.”

“President-elect Trump and Vice President-elect Vance ordered Republicans to shut down the government and they are threatening to do just that—while undermining communities recovering from disasters, farmers and ranchers, and community health centers,” she wrote. “Triggering a damaging government shutdown would hurt families who are gathering to meet with their loved ones and endanger the basic services Americans from veterans to Social Security recipients rely on. A deal is a deal. Republicans should keep their word.”

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CNN: In reversal, key House panel votes to release Matt Gaetz ethics report

Staff

The House Ethics Committee secretly voted earlier this month to release its report into the conduct of former Rep. Matt Gaetz before the end of this Congress, according to multiple sources with knowledge of the matter.

The report is now expected to be made public after the House's final day of votes this year as lawmakers leave Washington for the holidays, those sources said.

The vote, which has not previously been reported, amounts to a stark reversal for the panel after it had voted along party lines in late November not to release the results of the investigation. The decision to release the report suggests that some Republicans ultimately decided to side with Democrats on the matter, and it is unclear if the committee will once again change course now that it has voted.

When the committee voted last month to shelve the report, Gaetz was President-elect Donald Trump's choice to be attorney general. Since then, Gaetz withdrew himself from consideration for the Senate-confirmed post, though he maintains frosty relations with many in his party and is still active in GOP politics.

It is exceedingly rare for an ethics report to be released after a member has left Congress, though it has happened on a couple of occasions in the past. The committee revisited the issue behind closed doors earlier this month after a feud over the report spilled into public view before Thanksgiving.

The Ethics Committee's report concludes a years-long probe into numerous allegations against Gaetz, including whether he engaged in sexual misconduct, used illicit drugs, "shared inappropriate images or videos on the House floor, misused state identification records, converted campaign funds to personal use, and/or accepted a bribe, improper gratuity, or impermissible gifts," according to an announcement by the panel last summer.

Gaetz has vigorously denied all the allegations and has characterized the investigation as a witch hunt.

In a post on X in response to CNN's reporting on Wednesday, Gaetz emphasized that he was "FULLY EXONERATED" by a separate Department of Justice probe. And he said he "NEVER had sexual contact with someone under 18" — a claim that is addressed in the House Ethics report, CNN has previously reported.

"My 30's were an era of working very hard - and playing hard too. It's embarrassing, though not criminal, that I probably partied, womanized, drank and smoked more than I should have earlier in life. I live a different life now."

Speaker Mike Johnson has said that he does not believe the report should be released, since Gaetz is no longer a member of Congress after he abruptly resigned once Trump announced him as his initial attorney general choice. Johnson has acknowledged he has no role on the operations of the panel, which has traditionally operated separately from leadership. Many lawmakers believed that Gaetz resigned to try to bury the investigation.

Gaetz, who was reelected to the seat last month prior to his resignation, has said he has no plans of returning to Congress next year.

“I’m still going to be in the fight, but it’s going to be from a new perch. I do not intend to join the 119th Congress,” he told Charlie Kirk in an interview last month.

“I’m going to be fighting for President Trump. I’m going to be doing whatever he asks of me, as I always have. But I think that eight years is probably enough time in the United States Congress,” he said.

He also recently announced that he will be joining One America News Network in January.

A spokesman for the committee did not respond to CNN’s request for comment.

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CBS News: Senate passes \$895 billion defense bill with controversial gender-affirming care restriction

Kaia Hubbard

Washington — The Senate approved the mammoth \$895 billion National Defense Authorization Act on Wednesday, despite concern from some Democrats over a controversial policy restricting gender-affirming care for children of servicemembers.

In a 85 to 14 vote, the Senate approved the legislation, which the House passed last week. Eleven Democrats and three Republicans voted against it in the upper chamber. The bill now heads to President Biden's desk for his signature.

The 1,800 page national security legislation to authorize funding for the Defense Department for fiscal year 2025. But the bill includes a handful of controversial policies, like the gender-affirming care restriction, and lost support from the majority of Democrats in the House.

The Democratic-controlled Senate pushed forward with the measure nonetheless. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer noted that while the NDAA "isn't perfect," it still "includes some very good things that Democrats fought for" — citing provisions aimed at standing up against the Chinese Communist Party, boosting the use of artificial intelligence for national defense and expanding domestic tech innovation.

"Congress has passed the NDAA on a bipartisan basis for over six straight decades, and this year will be no different," Schumer said ahead of the vote on Wednesday. "We're passing the NDAA and that's a very good thing."

Sen. Ed Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, derided the gender-affirming care restriction earlier this week, calling it "the product of a nationwide campaign against trans rights" and arguing that the legislation's approval would mark "the first anti-LGBTQ law passed by Congress in decades."

Still, the outcome of the vote was all but guaranteed after the Senate advanced the measure on Monday in a 83-12 procedural vote.

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, celebrated the NDAA's "immense accomplishments," including a 14.5% pay raise for junior service members and investments in recruitment capabilities. But he said Congress "missed an opportunity to strengthen the president-elect's hand as he takes office in a precarious world situation."

Wicker outlined that the Armed Services Committee proposed \$25 billion for modernization programs, including for missile defense, ship building and counter-drone technology, saying "this should have been part of the bill today."

Sen. Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat who chairs the Armed Services Committee, called the legislation a "strong, forward looking bill that we can all be proud of." But he said he "strongly" disagrees with the inclusion of the gender-affirming care provision, calling it a "misguided provision."

"I share many of my colleagues' frustrations that the bill includes a provision that would prohibit gender-affirming health care for minors under certain circumstances," Reed noted, adding that he voted against the provision in committee. "We will continue to work to ensure the health care rights of all military personnel and their dependents."

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10/11 NOW: Nebraska's 2025 Summer EBT Program expands support beyond food assistance

Staff

LINCOLN, Neb. (KOLN) - Gov. Jim Pillen announced Wednesday that Nebraska's 2025 summer EBT program will offer families more than just food assistance.

Just this time last year though, Gov. Pillen said that he was not planning on enrolling in the program because he believed it was time for the pandemic-era program to end. He is now saying otherwise.

Pillen was joined by Department of Health and Human Services CEO Steve Corsi, Department of Education Commissioner Brian Maher, and Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Director Shannon Grotrian to explain how the revamped program is dedicating \$24 million to families around the state.

"We transformed it from a program that provides money for groceries through the EBT card, to a program that provides broader support to Nebraskans in need of services," Gov. Pillen said.

The program initiates a "Nebraska Way" focus designed by the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure families have access to resources that is beyond just food assistance.

Eligible families that are a part of the program can receive up to \$40 per child over the summer months for a total of \$120 per child to help with food costs.

"This will empower families to purchase healthy food items and budget effectively, promoting long-term well-being," Grotrian said.

DHHS plans to empower families by collaborating with SNAP Education, the Summer Food Service program, the Grocers Association and other community-based programs to spread the word of the EBT.

"We're ensuring this program not only grows, but makes a greater impact in 2025," Grotrian said.

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AP: How New York prosecutors used a terrorism law in the charges against Luigi Mangione

Jennifer Peltz

NEW YORK (AP) — New York prosecutors are using a 9/11-era anti-terrorism law in their case against the man charged with gunning down UnitedHealthcare’s CEO outside a midtown Manhattan hotel.

Luigi Mangione was indicted on charges of murder as an act of terrorism, under a state law that allows for stiffer sentences when a killing is aimed at terrifying civilians or influencing government.

If it sounds like an unusual application of a terrorism law, it’s not the first time the statute has been applied to a case that wasn’t about cross-border extremism or a plot to kill masses of people.

Mangione is jailed on other charges in Pennsylvania, where he is scheduled to appear at an extradition hearing Thursday that could clear the way for him to be brought to New York.

Here are some things to know about the anti-terrorism law and the case surrounding the death of Brian Thompson.

What does the law say?

Mangione is charged with first-degree and second-degree murder counts that specifically refer to a New York law that addresses terrorism. Essentially an add-on to existing criminal statutes, it says that an underlying offense constitutes “a crime of terrorism” if it’s done “with intent to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a unit of government by intimidation or coercion or affect the conduct of a unit of government by murder, assassination or kidnapping.”

What does it do?

If a defendant is convicted, the “crime of terrorism” designation boosts the underlying offense into a more serious sentencing category. For example, an assault normally punishable by up to 25 years in prison would carry a potential life sentence.

Mangione would face a possible life sentence if convicted.

New York does not have the death penalty. The state’s highest court threw out a capital punishment law in 2004.

Why do prosecutors say the anti-terrorism law applies in UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson’s killing?

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg put it simply: “The intent was to sow terror.” The Democratic prosecutor noted that the shooting unfolded early on a workday in a heavily

trafficked business and tourist area, and he mentioned Mangione's writings, while declining to get more specific.

When arrested, the 26-year-old was carrying a handwritten letter that called health insurance companies "parasitic" and complained about corporate greed, according to a law enforcement bulletin obtained by The Associated Press.

New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch has said Mangione also was carrying a gun that matched shell casings at the crime scene. Investigators say ammunition found near Thompson's body bore the words "delay," "deny" and "depose," mimicking a phrase some people use to decry insurers' practices.

Deputy Commissioner Rebecca Weiner said the reaction to Thompson's killing shows it fits within a law against violence designed to intimidate a civilian population.

The shooting prompted a wave of public criticism of the health insurance industry. Much of it is people sharing stories and frustration, but there also have been "wanted" posters targeting other health care honchos. Concerned companies have taken top executives' biographies offline, canceled in-person shareholder meetings and even told employees to work from home temporarily.

What does Mangione's side say?

His New York attorney, Karen Friedman Agnifilo, called the case "overcharged" in a statement Wednesday. The term is courthouse lingo for saying that prosecutors went too far.

Where did this law come from?

State lawmakers passed it in 2001, six days after the Sept. 11 attacks, saying the state needed "legislation that is specifically designed to combat the evils of terrorism" and that wasn't just for federal courts. Then-state Sen. Michael Balboni, who was among the law's leading proponents, recalls pointing out that many cases could come via state and local law enforcement officers, who far outnumbered federal agents in New York.

Many other states passed similar laws around the same time, and Congress approved the Patriot Act.

Has New York's anti-terror law been used before?

There's no comprehensive count of cases where the anti-terrorism statute was used, because it can be layered onto many different types of charges, from weapons possession to murder.

The specific first-degree murder "in furtherance of an act of terrorism" charge against Mangione has been the top count in only three other cases statewide, according to the Division of Criminal Justice Services.

In New York City alone, over a half-dozen cases of various sorts have used the terror law, starting with the 2004 indictment of a Bronx gang member. He was accused of killing a 10-year-old girl and paralyzing a man at a christening party.

Manhattan prosecutors got convictions or guilty pleas in cases including plots to bomb synagogues or open fire on their congregants; a plan to build pipe bombs to try to undermine public support for the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; alleged efforts to recruit support for the Islamic State group and to provide money and knives to Syrian extremists; and a white supremacist who killed a Black man because of racial hatred.

Friedman Agnifilo was a top deputy to Bragg's predecessor, Cyrus Vance Jr., when some of those cases were prosecuted.

Are there limits on when the terror law applies?

Lawmakers set the parameters broadly. The law doesn't say that cases have to involve mass casualties or international extremism, Balboni said in a telephone interview on Wednesday.

"You're trying to prevent individuals in this country who want to change government and use extremism and violence to that end," whether what they want to change is foreign policy or health care industry regulation, said.

Courts haven't set out overarching rules for when a case qualifies. However, the state's top court said the Bronx gang member's case did not.

The high court overturned his conviction. Justices were skeptical that the shooting — allegedly targeting a rival gang member — was meant to intimidate the broader community. They also worried that the meaning of terrorism could be trivialized if "applied loosely in situations that do not match our collective understanding of what constitutes a terrorist act."

The man, who denied involvement in the shooting, was retried on manslaughter and other charges. He was convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison.

Is Mangione charged with anything else?

Yes. The indictment includes another second-degree murder charge that doesn't have the terrorism allegation, as well as eight weapons-possession counts.

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NBC News: Wisconsin school shooting victims named as teacher Erin West and student Rubi Vergara

Patrick Smith

Tributes have been paid to the two victims who died in the shooting at the Abundant Life Christian School in Madison, Wisconsin, on Monday, who have been named as 42-year-old teacher Erin M. West and 14-year-old student Rubi P. Vergara.

The Dane County Medical Examiner's office confirmed their identities in a press release Wednesday night, while in a separate statement, the school said, "our hearts are heavy with these losses."

The suspected shooter, 15-year-old Natalie Rupnow, a freshman at the school who was also known as Samantha, died on the way to hospital on Monday from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound, police said.

"ALCS is a better school for the work of Erin West. She brought her love of Jesus and love of people to our staff and school family all wrapped in a hug and topped with a smile," the school's statement said.

Wisconsin school shooting victims named as teacher Erin West and student Rubi Vergara
The school said West worked as a substitute teacher for three years before taking a full-time staff role as an in-house substitute teacher and coordinator, "a role tailor made for her abundant skills and breadth of knowledge."

"She served our teachers and students with grace, humor, wisdom, and — most importantly — with the love of Jesus. Her loss is a painful and deep one and she will be greatly missed not just among our staff, but our entire ALCS family," the statement added.

Rubi Vergara, a 9th grade student, had been at the school since kindergarten and was described as popular and a keen volunteer.

"Her gentle, loving, and kind heart was reflected in her smile. Rubi was a blessing to her class and our school. She was not only a good friend, but a great big sister," the school said.

"Often seen with a book in hand, she had a gift for art and music. Yet, it was Rubi's love for Jesus that shined brightest and she shared His love with others by volunteering faithfully. She will be missed deeply by her teachers and fellow students," the statement added.

An online obituary uploaded to a local funeral home website said Vergara loved art, singing and playing keyboard in her family's worship band. "She shared a special bond with her beloved pets, Ginger (cat) and Coco (dog)," the obituary said.

Wisconsin school shooting victims named as teacher Erin West and student Rubi Vergara
Rubi Patricia Vergara.Jenn Vergara

The funeral home said a service for Vergara would be held on Saturday at 11 a.m. CST (12 a.m. ET) and would be livestreamed online.

The police investigation into the shooting continues. Authorities said Wednesday night that the two unidentified students who received life-threatening injuries remain in a local hospital, while the four people who were treated in hospital for minor injuries sustained in the shooting have been discharged.

Police said that the shooter opened fire in a second-floor classroom “during a study hall for mixed graders.”

Two guns were found at the school, but only one was used in the shooting, police said.

Police said they were working to establish a motive and said they were aware of the suspect’s alleged social media activity and “documents and photos circulating the internet,” that have yet to be verified.

Detectives want to speak to any who may have interacted with Rupnow in the days or weeks before the shooting — they can contact police anonymously through Madison Area Crime Stoppers at p3tips.com or by calling 608-266-6014.

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From: Roger Riley
Subject: WHO13 Media Request
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 19, 2024 10:30 AM (UTC-06:00)
Hi Mason,

Working a story on the Satanic Temple display.

Register said the Governor made a statement on this Monday.

Could you send that to me please?

Thanks much!

Roger Riley
WHO13 News Multi-Media Journalist
1801 Grand Avenue
Des Moines IA 50309
515-291-5952 cell
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From: Roger Riley
Subject: Re: WHO13 Media Request
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 19, 2024 10:41 AM (UTC-06:00)
Mason,

Thanks so much! Have a wonderful Christmas- and New Year's!

Roger

From: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 10:32 AM
To: Roger Riley <Roger.Riley@WHOTV.com>
Subject: Re: WHO13 Media Request

Good morning Roger,

Yes, you can attribute the following to the Governor:

"Our state government is always going to be concerned about the wellbeing of children. The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit. Because of this, the State's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

Thanks,
MM

Mason Mauro
Deputy Communications Director
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds | Lt. Governor Chris Cournoyer
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



From: Roger Riley <Roger.Riley@WHOTV.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 10:29 AM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: WHO13 Media Request

Hi Mason,

Working a story on the Satanic Temple display.

Register said the Governor made a statement on this Monday.

Could you send that to me please?

Thanks much!

Roger Riley
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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Re: WHO13 Media Request
To: Roger Riley
Sent: December 19, 2024 10:32 AM (UTC-06:00)

Good morning Roger,

Yes, you can attribute the following to the Governor:

"Our state government is always going to be concerned about the wellbeing of children. The Iowa State Capitol Complex is a place that is open to the public, where children and families routinely visit. Because of this, the State's event policy takes into consideration conduct that would be harmful to minors. This satanic event, which specifically targets children, is harmful to minors and so it was denied."

Thanks,
MM

Mason Mauro
Deputy Communications Director
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds | Lt. Governor Chris Cournoyer
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



From: Roger Riley <Roger.Riley@WHOTV.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 10:29 AM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: WHO13 Media Request

Hi Mason,

Working a story on the Satanic Temple display.

Register said the Governor made a statement on this Monday.

Could you send that to me please?

Thanks much!

Roger Riley
WHO13 News Multi-Media Journalist
1801 Grand Avenue
Des Moines IA 50309
515-291-5952 cell

roger.riley@who13.com

@rogerriley Twitter



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From: Roger Riley
Subject: WHO13 One more question
To: Mauro, Mason
Sent: December 19, 2024 11:22 AM (UTC-06:00)
Hi Mason,

One more question: the attorney for the Satanic Temple is saying online that there may be a chance they could hold their event tis coming Saturday. Checking also with DAS, wonder if you'd heard that?

Thanks!

Roger Riley
WHO13 News Multi-Media Journalist
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From: Mauro, Mason
Subject: Re: WHO13 One more question
To: Roger Riley
Sent: December 19, 2024 11:37 AM (UTC-06:00)
Hi Roger,

DAS would be the agency for the Satanic Temple to reach out to if they were to request holding an event at the Capitol Complex.

Thanks,
MM

Mason Mauro
Deputy Communications Director
Office of the Governor of Iowa
Governor Kim Reynolds | Lt. Governor Chris Cournoyer
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue | Des Moines, IA 50319
515-745-2840 mobile
mason.mauro@governor.iowa.gov
governor.iowa.gov



From: Roger Riley <Roger.Riley@WHOTV.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 11:21 AM
To: Mauro, Mason <Mason.Mauro@governor.iowa.gov>
Subject: WHO13 One more question

Hi Mason,

One more question: the attorney for the Satanic Temple is saying online that there may be a chance they could hold their event this coming Saturday. Checking also with DAS, wonder if you'd heard that?

Thanks!

Roger Riley
WHO13 News Multi-Media Journalist
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