

Opinion & Politics

Letters

The real cost of a tax cut in Madison County

Dear Editor:

No one loves paying taxes. But they are the price we pay for a functioning society – for safe roads, public schools, emergency response, and countless other services we rely on daily.

So, when the Madison County Board of Supervisors announced they were lowering taxes, it sounded like good news. But which taxes, exactly, were lowered?

Not income taxes. Neither state nor federal income taxes – by far the largest tax burden for most working individuals – are NOT controlled by the County Board. So those remain untouched. That brings us to property taxes – the one area where county government does have authority.

Property taxes are primarily driven by local needs and services. The largest share goes to public schools. Did the Supervisors reduce the school levy? No. For those living in city limits, the second-largest portion is the municipal (city) levy. Was that cut? Again, no.

The only portion of your property tax bill the Madison County Supervisors can control is the county levy. And perhaps, in their minds, they believe they have lowered that. But it's worth examining what that means – and what it costs.

Madison County levies taxes in two ways: one rate for properties within incorporated city limits (Urban), and another for those in un-

incorporated areas (Rural). In the current fiscal year, FY25, the Madison County Rural levy is below the state average. The Urban levy is just slightly above it.

How do we compare to our neighbors you might ask? Among 19 surrounding counties (excluding Dallas and Story, due to their unique circumstances), in FY25, Madison County ranks fifth lowest in Rural levy rates and sixth lowest in Urban.

Looking ahead to FY26, Madison County is likely on track to invest the least in public services among 21 surrounding counties.

The consequences are already here. Infrastructure is deteriorating. Competent, experienced employees have left or been let go. Services have been scaled back or eliminated. Emergency response times will likely be affected.

This is the cost of a tunnel vision approach with no long-term plan. Cutting taxes may make for headlines today, but the costs are deferred – not erased. And the bill will come due: in crumbling roads and bridges, in calls unanswered, in services gone when you need them most.

We all want efficient government. We all want accountability. But slashing funding without a strategy is not leadership. It's neglect.

The people of Madison County deserve better.

—Madison County Civic Alliance

Ray Sorensen
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

91st GA First Session Sine Die

As the 2025 legislative session comes to a close, it's fair to say this year had its share of frustration. The Iowa House got a lot done – passing bills, pushing for funding, and fighting for our priorities. However, much of that momentum slowed in the Senate, and several key issues remain unresolved.

Still, there were some wins worth noting. Landowners may finally see progress on eminent domain protections if the Governor signs the bill we sent to her desk. Local pharmacies could also benefit from much-needed Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) reform, again pending the Governor's approval.

The biggest disappointment? Property tax reform. No matter what the radio talk show hosts and journalists tell you about how easy it is to accomplish, I assure you, it is not.

At first glance, it may seem simple: lower taxes for homeowners. But the reality is far more complex. Iowa's property tax system supports the very services residents rely on most – schools, public safety, roads, infrastructure, and transit. Any meaningful reform must thread the needle between taxpayer relief and maintaining these vital services.

The real challenge is balancing competing demands. Taxpayers want lower bills. At the same time, they expect high-quality services in their communities. This tension creates a nearly impossible balance – especially when 150 legislators from every corner of the state agree we need reform but can't agree on how to do it.

Property taxes are the primary funding source for local governments. Reducing them without offering replacement funds could mean drastic service cuts. For example, DART (Des Moines Area Regional Transit) has warned of up to 40% service reductions if certain reforms pass without alternative funding.

Legislation like House File 718 (2023), which capped levy rates, sparked resistance from local officials. They argue that state-imposed caps limit their ability to meet the needs of their communities.

Mechanisms like the "rollback" create disparities and unpredictability. Reforming or eliminating these elements could lead to unintended

consequences unless carefully crafted.

There's widespread support for property tax cuts – until people see the services at risk. It's a political Catch-22: help one group, and another pays the price.

Aggressive property tax limits could disproportionately hurt lower-income areas and slow local development. Reforms must protect communities most in need.

Despite the setbacks, there is a promising proposal gaining traction: Senate Study Bill 1227 (SSB 1227). It will likely be the foundation of reform efforts in 2026. Key provisions of SSB 1227:

- Ends the "Rollback" System: Simplifies the tax structure by phasing out this outdated mechanism, allowing property taxes to reflect actual market value.
- Revenue Caps with Flexibility: Limits local budget growth to 2%, with flexibility up to 5% during periods of high inflation (based on the Consumer Price Index).
- Fairer Homestead Exemption: Replaces the original \$50,000 exemption with a 25% exemption on assessed value (up to \$125,000), benefiting both urban and rural Iowans.
- Additional State Support for Schools: Adds \$400 million annually in state funding to offset local revenue losses and protect school budgets.

Concerns still under review include impact on local services, and the need for transparency.

As we close the book on this legislative session, I'm proud of the work House Republicans accomplished – even as we faced challenges in seeing all of our priorities cross the finish line. We remained focused on fiscal responsibility, individual liberty, and protecting Iowa values, and we'll carry that same commitment into the next session. While there's still work to do—especially on tough issues like property tax reform—we're not backing down, in fact we are digging in during the interim to deliver property tax relief next session, better schools, stronger communities, and greater government accountability.

Thank you for trusting me to be your voice at the Capitol. I'll continue working to deliver real results for our district and for all Iowans.

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Relatively Minor

Vicki Minor, Editor
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Laughter does not have to come from a major source. It could indeed be ... relatively minor.

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Battle of the Maple Seeds

A sudden gust of wind unleashed a squadron of helicopters – oh wait, just some maple seeds – whirling through the backyard like they were auditioning for a stunt show.

But no need to panic! Mother Nature isn't staging a spring-time invasion; there's no pilot up there, no bombers ready to unleash chaos, and no secret plan for world domination. She's sending out the maple tree's tiny seeds, gearing up to scatter and take over the neighborhood one little sprout at a time.

While her intentions were noble – renewal, rebirth, the circle of life, blah blah blah – her springtime effort quickly turned into a frustrating fiasco. We battled to clear those pesky seeds from our gutters, flower beds, and yards. I started with a broom and a rake, and after fifteen heroic swipes, they were still defiantly clinging to the ground. It was like trying to sweep glitter in a wind tunnel. They laughed in the face of gravity.

Eventually, I had to unleash the big guns – my vacuum cleaner. It may not have been elegant, but I evicted those little pod-squatters from my outdoor space in record time.

Amid this epic struggle, I neglected to pay attention to my dogs. If I had, I might've realized I didn't need tools – I needed snacks. My dogs were munching away on those edible seeds like they'd discovered nature's hidden treasure. Who knew the solution was four paws and a good appetite?

Maple "helicopter" seeds can be eaten raw, tossed in salads, or cooked. They can also be boiled, roasted, or even ground into flour. They're a culinary secret just waiting to blow into your yard.

So, in the end, while I waged war on wind-borne debris, my dogs were casually hosting a backyard buffet. Next spring, I'll ditch the cleanup gear and open a gourmet seed food truck for canines. We'll call it Paw de Maple.

No reservations – just tails and appetites welcome.

Amy Sinclair
STATE SENATOR

The 2025 session of the 91st Iowa General Assembly has been marked by a number of pieces of common-sense legislation. As I spoke about when we opened session, Iowans made a choice, and they chose common sense.

This year, we passed common-sense legislation to allow Iowa businesses to keep more of their money to reinvest in growth, wages, and employee benefits. This legislation cuts taxes by \$1 billion. That's \$1 billion businesses will invest in our economy. It's common sense to take less from Iowans and allow the market to dictate how to invest in our state.

We continued to enact common-sense laws to restore and protect the rights of Iowans. We took additional measures to secure our elections, protecting a fundamental right of our citizens. Iowans can continue to believe in Iowa's elections and know our elections meet the highest levels of integrity. We repealed an antiquated law regarding the manner of firearms conveyance. No longer do Iowans need to be concerned about whether or not they are in compliance when exercising their right to protect themselves while traveling. It's common sense to protect the rights of law-abiding Iowans.

It's common sense. There is dignity in work, and the vast majority of Iowans know this. Having a sense of purpose and accomplishment is not only good for one's well-being, but it is good for our state. Enacting policies that help put people back to work, like work requirements for able-bodied Iowans on assistance programs, provides opportunities for Iowans to earn a living, find a sense of purpose, and contribute to the growth of our economy. I'm proud of the work we did to enact legislation to this effect. It's common sense that there is satisfaction in a good day's work.

As we return to our regular lives at home, I wish each of you the best this interim. I hope you all take pride in the common-sense legislation we passed this year knowing we continue to make Iowa the best place to live, work, and raise a family. I look forward to seeing you all back next session as we continue our work on behalf of Iowans.

Catch the Winterset City Government Update with Mayor Tom Leners on the second week of each month!

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