Opinion & Politics

Letters

Flawed analysis, hidden costs: a risky IT outsourcing gamble

Dear Editor:

On May 1, the Board of Supervisors approved the termination of the IT Director, citing a cost-benefit analysis as justification for outsourcing IT services to Solutions under the so-called "gold contract." However, this decision is deeply flawed and raises several urgent concerns regarding transparency, fiscal responsibility, and operational effectiveness.

	FY25 spend	Managed Service - Gold
Employee salary/contractor	$77,544.00	-
Employee medical	$12,000.00	-
Employee FICA	$5,933.00	-
Employee IPERs	$7,321.00	-
Solutions Managed Services (currently on Silver)	$35,496.00	$69,172.64
Solutions Prepaid Labor	$20,000.00	-
Totals	***$158,294.00***	***$69,172.64***
Estimated Net annual savings	*($89,121.36)*	

24/7 support, unlimited phone and email, 8-hour on-site tech visits included in Gold, roll over to next month if not used. Can still purchase prepaid labor for special projects.

The cost-benefit analysis presented to justify the termination was misleading and incomplete. Some examples:

- The $20,000 prepaid labor figure is inflated; discussions during the March 14, 2025 budget meeting indicated Solutions was paid in $5,000 increments, the last payment being made either end of FY24 or beginning of FY25 and that as of March 2025 there was still spend remaining from this $5k payment.
- Severance costs for the outgoing IT Director were omitted from the analysis, despite the county being responsible for this payout.
- Claims that 24/7 IT support is included are inaccurate – after-hours service incurs additional fees.

A true cost-benefit analysis should have compared all aspects of the IT Director's role – including salary, benefits, legal liabilities, severance, and the value of institutional knowledge – against the actual costs and risks of outsourcing, such as service quality, response times, and the potential for operational disruptions. The documentation provided failed to meet these standards.

Subsequent Board meetings on May 13 and May 20 revealed further procedural failures in planning and due diligence.

- The Board only began reviewing Solutions' onboarding requirements after terminating the IT Director, demonstrating a lack of strategic planning and due diligence.
- Critical IT issues have already surfaced: Solutions' response times for hardware support and VPN access are slow, and unresolved IT needs are hampering county departments' effectiveness.

Despite these problems and others, two of our supervisors (Stancil and Hobbs) approved the termination without establishing clear accountability, risking further inefficiency and confusion.

This is not the first time the county has tried outsourcing IT to Solutions. The previous attempt failed, leading to the hiring of an in-house IT Director. Now, the Board is repeating the same experiment, assuming a new contract alone will resolve past issues. The "Gold Contract" lists response times by problem severity but fails to specify how these metrics are measured or enforced, leaving service quality standards ambiguous.

The Board's decision to terminate the IT Director and contract with Solutions was made without a robust, transparent evaluation of process, risks, costs, and benefits. This approach disregards essential functions, diminishes institutional knowledge, and threatens to increase long-term costs while reducing organizational effectiveness. The process exposes significant weaknesses in governance, fiscal oversight, and continuity of public services.

The public must continue to watch every move the Board makes with unwavering vigilance. Every decision from this point forward must be met with rigorous public oversight to guarantee that actions are rooted in thorough analysis, genuine transparency, and a steadfast commitment to quality service.

Only by closely tracking IT expenditures and service results can residents safeguard their interests and hold the Board fully accountable for its choices.

—Wendy Frost, Winterset

Washington County Hospital CEO calls Medicaid cuts a 'crisis' for Iowa hospitals

After Iowa Republicans unanimously voted to pass a bill that includes more than $500 billion in cuts to Medicaid, Washington County Hospitals and Clinics CEO Todd Patterson issued a warning about the catastrophic effects the cuts could bring, both to patients and their providers.

"When policymakers in Washington or state capitals slash Medicaid funding or narrow eligibility, they are turning off the oxygen for rural health care," Patterson wrote in a guest column for the Cedar Rapids Gazette.

"Unlike larger urban systems with diversified service lines and philanthropic cushions, we rely heavily on government payers. At WCHC, over 60 percent of our patients are covered by either Medicare or Medicaid."

Medicaid provides health coverage for more than 700,000 Iowans a year. That's over one in five people in the entire state and, as Patterson mentioned, that ratio becomes higher in rural areas making it even harder for rural hospitals to provide services for everyone.

Patterson goes on to warn Iowans about what these Medicaid cuts will mean for rural hospitals:

"Medicaid cuts come with a cost to the health of the community. When coverage is stripped or access is narrowed, patients delay care until it becomes an emergency. Chronic diseases go unmanaged. Mental health crises deepen. Preventable conditions become fatal. The result is not cost savings — it is cost shifting, often to emergency rooms, law enforcement, and social services that are already stretched thin."

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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The Quest for My Name on a Coke Bottle

Eager to quench my thirst, I wandered into my local Kum & Go and made a beeline for the soft drink section. As I opened the cooler door to grab a soda, I was greeted by an array of 24 oz. Coca-Cola bottles, each featuring various names and slogans. My curiosity piqued — what if there was a bottle with my name on it? How cool would that be?

I started my search, pulling out bottles labeled "Adam," "Abbie," "Benjamin," and "Brooke," methodically going through the names from A to Z. After about an hour of digging, I noticed the store manager eying me with a hint of annoyance. Did I find my name? Sadly, no. The closest I got was "Victoria," akin to royalty. While it's nice to be associated with a queen, I would have preferred to spot my name among the 250 most popular names in the country.

It's not surprising, though. Personalized gifts have never featured my name. Unlike many tourists who collect custom keychains, necklaces, and photo frames, I haven't had that luck. Only fellow name-holders like Anna, Betty, and Shirley know the disappointment of sifting through that squeaky metal rack filled with tiny plastic doorplates, only to find their names absent.

Maybe I should consider changing my name to something more eye-catching — like Ella Vator, Sue Pernatural, Claire Voyant, or Paige Turner. While those names wouldn't likely make the personalized gift list either, they'd certainly leave a memorable impression.

Who knows? Perhaps one day, right before "Zachary" and "Zoey," I'll see my name on a bottle and savor that small yet gratifying moment of recognition. For now, I'll accept that while I may not belong to the exclusive club of personalized products, at least I won't have to explain why I chose a Coke with someone else's name on it.

Joni Ernst

United States Senator

Our nation's safety net shouldn't be strained by subsidizing the lifestyles of the self-sufficient. Yet, too many of the idle rich are living high off the hog, collecting government checks for not working, while at the same time earning a million dollars or more from some other side venture.

Thousands of out-of-work millionaires were paid more than $271 million in unemployment assistance during the first two years of the Biden administration (amounts are from tax years 2021 and 2022, numbers for 2023 and 2024 are not yet available).

Based on an analysis of tax returns from individuals and households reporting incomes of $1 million or more:

- In 2021, 14,972 millionaires collected $213.6 million of unemployment payments, about $14,267 each.
- In 2022, 5,773 millionaires were paid $57.6 million in jobless benefits, nearly $10,000 each.

The million-dollar question is "WHY?"

Unemployment compensation is intended to support those who become involuntarily unemployed, presumably with no other source of income. But, a 1964 LBJ Great Society era Department of Labor regulation requires paying unemployment benefits to anyone who loses a job, regardless of other income. This includes those who continue earning millions of dollars.

Because the program is funded primarily by taxing employers, this mandate is effectively a reverse-millionaires tax that takes from overworked small businesses to reward the wealthy who are living well without working.

Able-bodied millionaires shouldn't expect handouts made possible by the overtaxed and overworked Americans who are running businesses and creating jobs.

Have something to say?
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