

Have you ever joined a reading challenge? A reading challenge is more than a goal – it’s a great way to stay focused, expand your genre knowledge and give a sense of accomplishment. A challenge can provide structure and excitement a person might need.

There are many different kinds of challenges. I have done monthly challenges. Monthly challenges work well if you are a mood reader, they allow you to be flexible while still having direction. A reader can work ahead or decide on a monthly theme.

I would like to try a read around the world challenge. This broadens a reader’s horizons by reading books from different countries and cultures.

I have also done an ABC challenge. This challenge is harder to do, as it requires finding an author that has the last or first name of a letter in the alphabet. Z and X were the hardest to find. Both were from different countries and harder to get into and read. I did find it fun, and it forces a reader to read authors that normally you wouldn’t try. I

did find good authors this way that I would not have normally read.

Now unfortunately, I am going to delve into something I was hoping I would not have to do, politics. President Trump has issued an executive order calling for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to be dismantled. This agency distributes congressional funds to libraries and museums. This could affect delivery services to public libraries, the kids’ summer programs and LIBBY. Please contact the

local senators and tell them how important libraries are to the community. Enough on that.

I am coming out of my slump. I started reading a series that includes vampires and demigods. It is so far proving interesting. It feels good to be reading again.

Have a great Easter, enjoy the food and family and friends. Take time to grab that book, even if it’s just a few pages or chapters, enjoy the weather. Have a great week!!



## SSA final agreement

This week, we passed a final SSA agreement, SF 167, after months of negotiations. While our original proposal included more money for schools, this final agreement includes a couple of key wins secured by Iowa House Republicans.

- The agreement includes:**
- The increase in SSA for Fiscal Year 2026 plus an additional \$5 per student. This results in more than \$105,000,000 more in school aid.
  - This year also brings phase two of the teacher salary increase. This will include almost \$35,000,000 additional dollars for public schools.
  - The State Cost Per Pupil amount increases to \$7,988 per student which includes an additional \$5 for per pupil equity, which was a key component fought for by House Republicans. This is an increase of \$162 per pupil.
  - The operational sharing cap increases from 21 to 25, an additional \$942,087 for public schools.
  - There is an additional increase in transportation equity, which brings an additional to \$1,554,938 more for public schools.
  - It also extends the Property Tax Relief Payment (PTRP) an additional year which has the state pick up any property tax growth in the Additional Levy portion

of the school funding formula. The amount that the State picks up will now be over \$136,000,000.

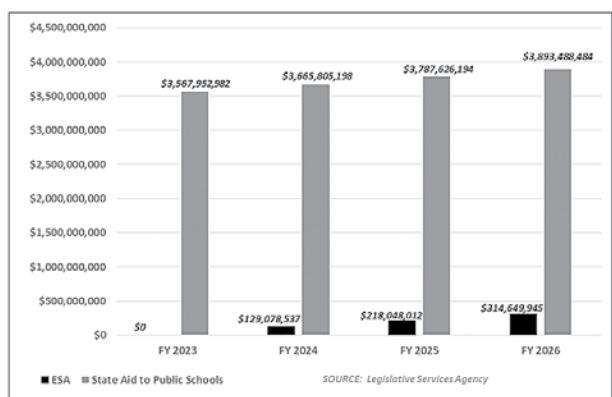
House Republicans secured more than \$4.7 million in additional investments for public schools through our negotiations. These increases represent many of the specific funding issues we hear from our school districts. While each line item may not affect each individual school district equally, one line item may have a big impact on addressing the issue a specific district is facing. House Republicans are working to respond to the specific concerns we’re hearing from our schools in a responsible manner.

**Democrats’ false claims on school funding**

Democrats repeated the grossly misleading claim that we are increasing ESA funding by 44% while increasing public school funding by 2%. They say this to make it sound as if we are spending more on private schools than on public schools, but that is far from the truth. The cost per pupil of ESAs increases each year at the same rate as the number we set for SSA. This year is the final year of expansion in the ESA program that allows all families to qualify. This is why the increase looks greater this year, not because more was given to private schools.

Does the state spend more on ESAs than on public K-12 schools? Here’s a chart to show the amounts spent.

What kind of accountability exists in the ESA program? The Iowa Education Savings Account (ESA) program, established under



the Students First Act, includes several safeguards and accountability measures to prevent improper expenditures by recipients and schools. These measures ensure that funds are used appropriately for approved educational purposes while maintaining oversight and transparency. Below are the key safeguards and accountability mechanisms in place:

**Administration by a Third-Party Entity:** The Iowa Department of Education has contracted with Odyssey, a third-party administrator, to manage the ESA program. Odyssey handles applications, financial transactions, compliance, and fraud prevention. This external oversight helps ensure that funds are securely administered and that payments are processed only for verified, eligible expenses.

**Restricted Use of Funds:** ESA funds must first be used to pay tuition and fees at an accredited nonpublic school before any remaining balance can be applied to other qualified educational expenses, such as textbooks, tutoring, or educational therapies. This prioritization ensures that the primary purpose—supporting enrollment in accredited schools—is met

before discretionary spending is allowed.

**Approval and Verification Process:** Parents or guardians must apply annually for an ESA, and applications are subject to verification processes. For example, residency and income (where applicable) are checked, often through automated systems like Iowa state tax return data. Once approved, families must designate the accredited nonpublic school their child will attend, and the school invoices the ESA account directly. Payments are only released after parental approval, keeping funds under state control until a legitimate expense is confirmed.

**Enrollment and Payment Deadlines:** To retain ESA funds, students must be enrolled in an accredited nonpublic school, and tuition and fees must be paid through the ESA portal by specific deadlines (e.g., September 30 for fall funds and February 1 for spring funds in the 2025-26 school year). If these conditions aren’t met, the student becomes ineligible, and the account is closed, with any remaining funds returned to the state’s general fund. This ensures funds are tied to active participation

in an accredited educational setting.

**Fraud Detection and Penalties:** The program includes provisions to address fraudulent use of funds. If funds are improperly obtained or spent, the Department of Education or Odyssey can recover those amounts from the parent or guardian, including through legal action if necessary. Parents or guardians found to have committed fraud are barred from future participation in the program, serving as a deterrent against misuse.

**Closure of Unused Accounts:** When a student graduates high school or turns 20 (whichever comes first), any remaining funds in their ESA account are transferred back to the state’s general fund. This prevents indefinite retention of unused public money and ensures it is redirected to other state priorities.

**Accreditation Requirement for Schools:** Only accredited nonpublic schools can participate in the ESA program. This requirement ensures that schools meet certain educational standards, providing a baseline of accountability for the institutions receiving ESA funds. Home-based education and unaccredited programs are explicitly excluded from eligibility.

**Annual Application Requirement:** Families must reapply each year to continue participating, which allows the state to reassess eligibility and monitor ongoing compliance. This recurring process helps prevent long-term misuse by requiring regular updates and verification.



In the Senate, we continue to work on the bills that made it out of the last legislative deadline. Also, this week Senate Republicans announced a budget target for FY 2026, setting our target at \$9.411 billion. This is a 5.2% increase and is close to the Governor’s budget request.

This week, both chambers passed Senate File 167, which sets K-12 education funding for the next year. SF 167 allocates an additional \$240 million for K-12 education in Iowa. With this new money, K-12 schools in Iowa will be receiving over \$4.2 billion in general fund aid. It brings our state’s total spending to \$7,988 per student, and includes phase 2 of the historic teacher pay raise increase passed last year.

SF 167 also includes a \$1.6 million increase for school transportation and nearly \$1 million for operational sharing.

Thursday, I shepherded SF 619 through a Ways and Means subcommittee and the full committee. This is the Governor’s Disaster Recovery and Housing Assistance proposal. Generally, this bill implements policy changes to address lessons we learned from last year’s floods and tornadoes. It ensures funding is available for communities to assist in recovery from storms and natural disasters. It provides consumer protections to protect the most vulnerable from the risk of fraud.

The bill also appropriates money from the Economic Emergency Fund to ensure cash is available to state entities for immediate disaster response when the governor declares an emergency.

NW Iowa citizens who live in communities ravaged by flooding last year are anxiously waiting for this bill to move. SF 619 has broad support, and it is a priority!

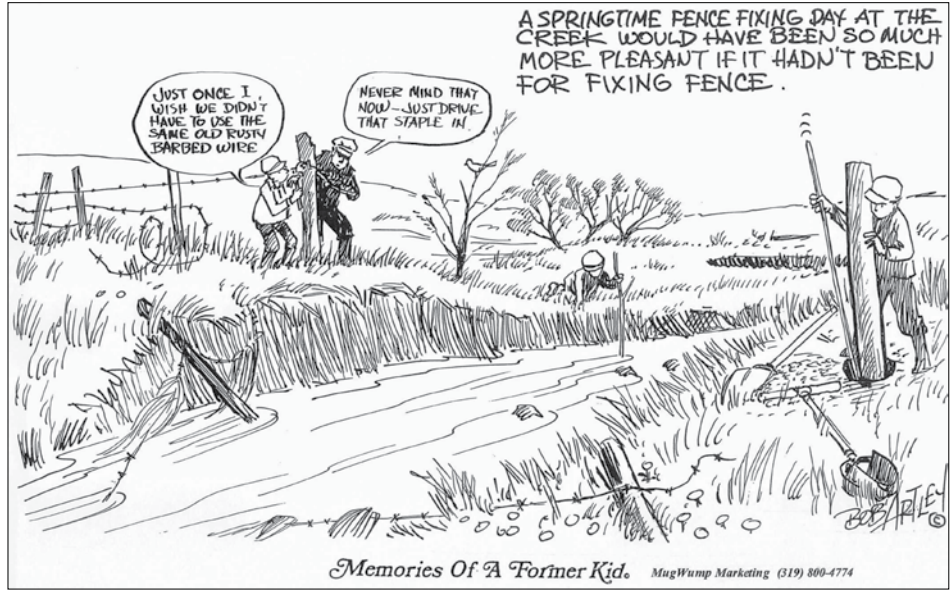
A shout out to Abraham Clark (Forest City) and his Clear Lake Robotics Team. The robots they created were amazing. On Wednesday, I

had the pleasure of visiting with Aubrey McEnroe of Algona. Aubrey is working towards her doctorate at the University of Iowa Counseling Psychology Ph.D. Program, and she is planning to return to Algona to serve individuals in our rural communities. Aubrey is excited about coming back. I suspect

she will have a huge impact when she opens her practice!

If you are planning to visit the Capitol, please let me know. The best way to reach me is by email at dave.rowley@legis.iowa.gov or by cell 712-330-5596.

Have a great week!



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