

# OPINION



**Rep. Randy Feenstra**  
(R), Iowa's 4th Congressional District

## Supporting our veterans and honoring their service

Rep. Randy Feenstra, (R),  
Iowa's 4th Congressional District

(SBA) - Meeting with Iowa veterans and ensuring that, as a grateful state and nation, we support these heroes through the best healthcare and services that we have to offer is a top priority for me. Earlier this September, I had the pleasure of sitting down with fellow Iowan and new National Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Carol Whitmore, who is the first Iowan elected to the position. We discussed the challenges our veterans face and effective solutions to barriers like access to healthcare.

Similarly, in April of this year, I was in Marshalltown on my 36 County Tour to tour the Iowa Veterans Home (IVH) with the Commandant of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, Todd Jacobus. IVH is truly the gold standard of long-term care for our veterans. I was thoroughly impressed with the amenities and the care provided – a standard that far surpasses what could ever be expected of the roughly 700 employees who dedicate their time and talents to the nearly 400 residents. My tour of this facility—and conversations with Carol and Todd—highlighted the importance of ensuring our brave men and women receive the high-quality healthcare and benefits that they have earned and deserve.

Just the other week, I'm glad that my office could honor two veterans from Franklin County by presenting to their family a

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**Lynn Hicks**  
Chief of Staff and Public Information  
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## Don't go backward on how we fight violent crime. We know what works

Lynn Hicks, Chief of Staff and  
Public Information Officer at the  
Polk County Attorney's Office

(SBA) - The rhetoric over crime feels as if we're strapped in a DeLo-rean and hurtling back to a dangerous future.

We've landed back in the late 1980s-early 1990s, an era bookended by two pieces of legislation that led to mass incarceration and huge racial disparities in sentencing: the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and the 1994 crime bill. Fear of "superpredators" — later debunked as myth — drove policies to treat juveniles as irredeemable adult criminals. Instead of Willie Horton, now there's Decarlos Brown Jr.

Fear, denial, and division lead us to cast blame and grasp for outdated solutions. Some voices on the left minimize legitimate concerns over urban violence. On the right, outrage over horrific crimes — such as the tragic, senseless killings of Iryna Zarutska in Charlotte and Laken Riley in Georgia — is used to justify mass arrests and deportations, harsher sentences, and threats of more National Guard deployments in cities. Meanwhile, the U.S. Justice Department has terminated hundreds of grants for violence prevention programs.

This shouldn't be a partisan debate. After all, the aforementioned federal bills were bipartisan, and the 1994 crime bill was sponsored by Sen. Joe Biden. In his first administration, President Donald Trump signed the First Step Act, which released thousands of inmates from federal prisons and provided programs to reduce recidivism.

The recent rhetoric threatens proven anti-crime programs, argues David Kennedy, a professor of criminal justice at John Jay Col-

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## STRAIGHT TALK

A Commentary By Timothy Loftus, Editor & Publisher  
Sergeant Bluff Advocate Newspaper-[www.sergeantbluffadvocates.com](http://www.sergeantbluffadvocates.com)



## Opinions are like pink flamingos: Sometimes they bite

(SBA) - Opinions are like the pink flamingos down in Florida—bright, bold, sometimes amusing, but every once in a while, they bite. And while you won't see flamingos standing around Kiwanis Park or perched along the Missouri River, you sure see opinions. They gather at Hy-Vee over coffee, they flap around at city council meetings, they squawk on Facebook groups about school board elections, and every so often, one of them sneaks up and nips at you when you weren't expecting it.

The thing about flamingos is that they stand out. You notice them. Same with opinions. The good ones are worth admiring—balanced, thoughtful, grounded in experience and fact. Like a flamingo in perfect posture, they catch your attention because they carry some grace. Then there are the other ones. Loud, unsteady, maybe even plastic. They don't hold up under close inspection. You've seen these too, the wild theories, the arguments based on memes instead of facts, the kind of chatter that makes you wonder if someone's cheese slid right off their cracker. And like the late, great "Green Mile" movie moment reminds us, sometimes that cheese really is gone.

But opinions are everywhere, and everyone's got one. Some people wield theirs with wisdom, citing history, experience, or even a touch of humility. Others fire them off like they're playing whack-a-mole with reality. You've probably sat in a conversation with someone like that—they've got an opinion on everything, and yet the moment you ask them for proof, they change the subject. They're like those Twitter warriors who will argue for three hours that cereal is soup, then vanish the second someone asks for a definition of soup.

The tragedy is that those kinds of opinions don't stay put anymore. They don't just stay at the kitchen table anymore. Thanks to the internet, they spread. They multiply. One moment it's one guy at the VFW claiming wind turbines are secretly messing with GPS signals, and the next thing you know, there's a whole Facebook thread of folks swearing it's true. Suddenly, you're at Thanksgiving and your cousin is repeating it as fact while your aunt is yelling about pineapple on pizza being a communist plot.

It's at moments like that when Carl Sagan's words still matter, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." If you're going to tell me flamingos are secretly government drones, then don't show me a blurry TikTok with ominous music—show me schematics. Around here, we like proof. Farmers know this better than anyone. You can have all the opinions in the world about when the corn is ready, but if the moisture isn't right, you're just wasting fuel and time. The soil doesn't care about your

feelings. The grain elevator doesn't care about your Facebook post. Facts still matter.

And that's really the heart of it—facts matter, but opinions matter too. The comedian John Oliver nailed it when he said, "You are entitled to your own opinion. But you are not entitled to your own facts." That's the line we so often forget. Some opinions are grounded in truth, experience, or wisdom. Others are floating around like balloons at the Woodbury County Fair—bright and noisy, but mostly hot air.

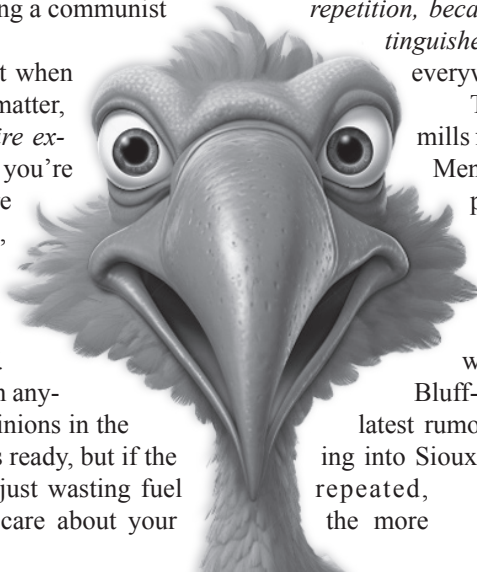
The best conversations, though, aren't about "winning." They're about the ideas that stay with you. Everyone's had one of those late-night talks where the conversation zigzags from football to whether life exists in outer space to what kind of pizza should be considered "real pizza." Around here, I've heard more than one spirited debate about whether Casey's taco pizza is superior to Pizza Ranch, and honestly, those are the kinds of arguments that keep life fun. The good opinions—the ones worth holding—are the ones that make you think, that make you laugh, and that maybe even keep you up a little at night wondering if you might be wrong.

But then there are the other kinds. The ones where you realize you're not in a discussion, you're in a hostage situation. Someone is firing opinions like shotgun pellets, and you're just ducking for cover. These aren't the conversations that stretch your brain. These are the ones where you're silently praying for a phone call, a fire alarm, or even a tornado siren to bail you out.

Part of the reason opinions get so messy these days is the rabbit hole problem. Lewis Carroll gave us Alice tumbling down into Wonderland, and now we use that as shorthand for what happens when curiosity goes haywire. You start out with a simple Google search about gas prices in Sioux City, and next thing you know, it's three in the morning, and you're watching a YouTube video about how lizard people run Hy-Vee. Daniel Kahneman, one of the greatest minds of our time, nailed it, "A reliable way to make people believe in falsehoods is frequent repetition, because familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth." And repetition is everywhere—especially online.

That's why small-town rumor mills feel even more turbocharged now. Mention the Woodbury County jail project three times in line at Hy-Vee, and by the end of the week, everyone's heard a version of it, no matter how far from the truth it is. The same happens with school funding in Sergeant Bluff-Luton, or ethanol policies, or the latest rumor about gas station chains moving into Sioux City. The more an opinion gets repeated, the more

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