



WEEKLY FRONT

Fooled Again The Battle Between False Spring and Second Winter

BY CHRIS C. NELSON
Publisher, *The Osage Oracle*

If you want to understand why North Iowa can surge into the 60s or 70s—sometimes even flirting with 80 degrees across parts of the United States—only to turn around and deal with accumulating snow days later, you have to step back and look at the atmosphere as a large-scale, dynamic system in transition.

What we are experiencing right now is not random variability. It is a predictable outcome of seasonal physics, driven by competing air masses, a strengthening temperature gradient, and a highly amplified jet stream pattern that defines late March across the central United States.

At its core, this is a battle between two dominant air masses. To the south, the Gulf of Mexico is becoming increasingly active, supplying warm, moist air northward into the Plains and Midwest. This is the source of those early spring days—mild temperatures, higher dew points, and a sense that winter is fading.

At the same time, to the north, the Arctic reservoir has not yet collapsed. Snowpack across Canada remains intact, surface albedo is still high, and cold, dense air masses continue to develop and persist. These air masses are thermodynamically stable, and importantly, they are readily available to be transported southward when the upper-level pattern allows.

North Iowa sits directly in the zone where these two air masses meet. That alone creates volatility, but the

real driver of the dramatic swings we've seen over the past couple of weeks lies in the behavior of the jet stream.

During winter, the jet stream tends to be more zonal—flowing west to east with less amplification. As we move into spring, the latitudinal temperature gradient between the equator and the poles begins to weaken, but it does not disappear evenly. Instead, it becomes uneven, which promotes a more meridional flow pattern.

In practical terms, the jet stream begins to buckle.

Ridges build northward, allowing warm air advection to surge into the Midwest. These ridges are often associated with subsidence, clear skies, and efficient warming at the surface. That is when we experience those 60- and 70-degree days that feel like a definitive seasonal shift.

But those ridges are transient.

As energy moves through the upper-level flow, those ridges are replaced by troughs—deep southward dips in the jet stream that tap directly into Arctic air. When a trough establishes itself over the central United States, cold air advection becomes dominant. Surface winds shift to the northwest, pressure rises behind a passing system, and temperatures fall rapidly—often 20 to 30 degrees within a day.

This transition is not gradual because the atmosphere is not in equilibrium. It is highly energetic.

The most impactful events occur when these troughs interact with exist-

ing moisture and baroclinic zones already in place across the region. A strong temperature gradient at the surface, combined with upper-level divergence and mid-level vorticity advection, creates an environment favorable for cyclogenesis.

In other words, storms strengthen.

When a surface low develops along this boundary, it pulls moisture northward ahead of it while simultaneously wrapping colder air into the system from the northwest. The result is a dynamic precipitation shield where rain can rapidly transition to snow as the thermal profile of the atmosphere cools.

This is how you end up with a sequence where one day features above-average temperatures under a ridge, and within 48 hours, a deepening low-pressure system produces accumulating snow under a trough.

We have seen multiple examples of this pattern across the United States in recent weeks, including systems that brought significant snowfall to areas that had just experienced springlike warmth. These are not outliers. They are characteristic of a highly amplified spring pattern.

Another key factor is the position and strength of the polar jet relative to the subtropical jet. When these two streams interact or phase, the resulting energy can enhance storm development, increasing precipitation intensity and expanding the reach of cold air on the backside of systems.

From a climatological standpoint, March is one

of the most volatile months in Iowa for this exact reason. The atmosphere is attempting to transition from a winter regime dominated by cold air masses to a spring regime driven by increasing solar radiation and moisture return. That transition is inherently unstable.

And while it may feel like spring is being delayed, what we are actually observing is the normal progression of the season.

False spring is not a failure of the forecast or an anomaly in the system. It is a reflection of temporary ridging and warm air advection. Second winter is not a surprise—it is the inevitable response when the jet stream re-amplifies and allows cold air to re-enter the region.

The important takeaway is that until the Arctic air mass weakens substantially and the jet stream shifts farther north in a more consistent pattern, these swings will continue to be possible.

That means additional temperature variability, continued potential for late-season snow, and an ongoing battle between competing air masses over the Midwest.

So while the calendar may suggest that winter is behind us, the atmospheric setup tells a different story.

In North Iowa, spring is not a single event.

It is a process governed by dynamics, energy, and timing.

And until those elements align consistently in favor of warmth, winter will continue to make its presence felt.

EDITORIAL

Keep public notices in Iowa newspapers before we lose what they protect

BY CHRIS C. NELSON
Publisher, *The Osage Oracle*

There is a quiet pillar holding up local democracy in Iowa, and most people don't think about it until it's gone. It doesn't make headlines. It isn't flashy. It sits, week after week, in the pages of local newspapers—public notices.

And if we're not careful, we are going to lose them.

Public notices are not a courtesy. They are not a suggestion. They are the legal mechanism that ensures government actions are visible to the people they affect. When a city raises taxes, when a school district holds a hearing, when land is rezoned, when property is foreclosed—those actions must be made public before they happen. Not after. Not buried. Not hidden behind a login or a forgotten webpage. Public.

That requirement exists in Iowa law for a reason. It is rooted in one of the oldest principles of American democracy: government must operate in the open. You cannot have accountability without visibility, and you cannot have visibility without a system that guarantees it.

For more than a century, that system has been the newspaper.

Not because newspapers are perfect, but because they are independent. That distinction matters more than anything else in this conversation. A public notice is only as trustworthy as the platform it is published on. If government agencies are allowed to publish notices only on their own websites, then the same entity making decisions is also controlling how—and whether—the public sees them. That is not transparency. That is self-reporting.

Newspapers provide a third-party record. Once a notice is printed, it cannot be quietly edited, altered, or deleted. It exists as a permanent, verifiable document. It can be clipped, archived, challenged in court. That permanence is not a bug in the system—it is the entire point.

And in Iowa, where small towns stretch across hundreds of miles of farmland and not every resident is glued to a government website, newspapers remain one of the most reliable ways to reach the public. The idea that “everything is online now” may hold true in larger cities or among younger audiences, but it does not reflect the full reality of rural Iowa. There are still thousands of Iowans who rely on their local newspaper as their primary connection to what is happening in their community.

Even for those who are online, the question is not just access—it is awareness. People do not wake up in the morning and check five different government websites to see if something important has changed. But they do pick up a newspaper. They do scroll through a trusted local news source. Public notices are not just about being available—they are about being seen.

There is also a reality that many are hesitant to say out loud: public notices help keep local newspapers alive. And that matters. Across Iowa, local journalism is under pressure.

Newsrooms are smaller. Resources are tighter. Some communities have already lost their papers entirely. When that happens, the loss is immediate and profound. Coverage of city councils fades. School board decisions go unreported. Local businesses lose a platform. The shared story of a community begins to fracture.

Public notice revenue is one of the few stable, legally mandated streams that helps sustain these papers. It is not a handout. It is a system where government fulfills its obligation to inform the public, and in doing so, supports the infrastructure that holds it accountable.

When that system is removed, the consequences are not theoretical. They are real. Newspapers close. Oversight disappears. Communities become less informed about decisions that directly impact their lives.

And yet, there is growing pressure—both in Iowa and across the country—to move public notices exclusively online. It is often framed as modernization. As efficiency. As cost savings.

But we should ask a simple question: at what cost?

Moving notices solely to government-controlled websites may save money in the short term, but it reduces visibility, weakens accountability, and removes the independent record that has protected the public for generations. It assumes that access equals awareness. It assumes that digital systems cannot fail, cannot be manipulated, cannot be ignored.

History tells us otherwise.

The current model in Iowa—requiring publication in newspapers while also making notices available online—is not outdated. It is balanced. It combines the permanence and independence of print with the accessibility of digital platforms. It ensures that notices are both widely seen and permanently recorded.

That is not something we should be rushing to dismantle.

Because at its core, this issue is not about newspapers. It is about whether we believe government actions should be easy to find, hard to hide, and independently verified.

Public notices are one of the last safeguards ensuring that happens at the local level.

If we remove them from newspapers, we are not just changing where information is posted. We are changing how power is held accountable.

And once that accountability is weakened, it is incredibly difficult to get back.

Iowa has long understood the value of open government. It is written into law, practiced in communities, and reinforced through institutions like local newspapers that serve as both witness and watchdog.

The question now is whether we are willing to protect that system—or slowly let it erode in the name of convenience.

Because if public notices disappear from newspapers, the real loss won't be measured in dollars or ink.

It will be measured in what the public no longer sees.

Week ten — End of the second funnel

BY JANE BLOOMINGDALE
Iowa State Representative

The past few weeks in the Iowa House we were busy with floor debate, but this week shifted back to committee work. With our second funnel deadline, bills must pass out of committee in both the House

and the Senate to remain eligible this year. Exceptions to our funnel week deadline include Appropriations and Ways and Means bills. Next week we will be back to debate on eligible bills.

HF 2739 temporarily increases the provider tax on insurance companies from 0.925% to 3.5% for

nine months, generating an estimated \$250 million of additional funding for Medicaid. **This is a tax on insurance companies, not a tax on Iowans.** Without these funds, Iowa faces projected Medicaid deficits of \$90 million for FY 2026 and \$167 million for FY 2027. This is not unique

to Iowa, states across the country are facing rising Medicaid costs due to the end of pandemic-era federal support and new federal restrictions on states' ability to raise rates from where they are today. No one likes tax increases,

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