

Opinion & Politics

Grant Wood memorialized Iowa's heritage

By Chuck Grassley
U.S. Senator

For 46 years in a row, I've traveled across our state to meet with Iowans in every county, every year. Each time, I learn something new in the county I'm visiting and enjoy getting a first-hand look at high-quality goods and services made here in Iowa. Some things never change, such as Iowans' productivity and humility. Iowans don't brag enough to showcase the innovation, pioneering spirit and community vitality that's part of our heritage, anchoring our economy and enriching civic life.

A century ago, a native Iowan captured the essence of self-reliance intrinsic to closely knit farm communities and small towns. He referred to himself as a farmer-painter, often wearing denim overalls. Grant Wood was born on a farm near Anamosa on February 13, 1891, and died in Iowa City on February 12, 1942. His paintings offer visual testimony to rural simplicity, polished land-

scapes and the survival mode of Midwesterners during the Great Depression. He sought to paint his neighbors, "their clothes, their homes, the patterns on their tablecloths and curtains" to illustrate their work ethic, rural American values and agricultural innovation.

Early in his career, he found work in Cedar Rapids, painting murals for stores and restaurants, designing corn-themed décor for hotels, and taking on home interior design projects. One of his most stunning works of art took him to Germany, where he supervised the manufacture of the 24-foot-high, stained-glass Veterans Memorial Window in Cedar Rapids.

Wood's most famous work, "American Gothic," was inspired by a farmhouse now known as the American Gothic House. Today, visitors can go to Eldon and bring the iconic painting to life. It's been referred to as America's "Mona Lisa," inspiring Hollywood, pop culture and politics.

"American Gothic" is a timeless tribute to Midwestern grit.

This year Americans will celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation's independence, an opportunity to reflect on the ethos of the American Dream handed down from one generation to the next. Through his work, Wood shared his love of history and country to preserve for posterity the virtues and "bits of American folklore that are too good to lose," including "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" and "Parson Weems' Fable."

As his national profile rose, Wood co-founded the Stone City Colony and Art School to collaborate with and inspire Midwestern artists. Later, he joined the art department at the University of Iowa and served as director of the Public Works of Art Project, part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal program. The artistic fruits of those years can be found in murals across Iowa, on the walls of post offices and public buildings

in communities across the state, including the Iowa State University library. His work evokes the philosophy of one of the nation's greatest orators, U.S. Sen. Daniel Webster: "The farmers therefore are the founders of human civilization." Wood championed the Regionalist Movement to celebrate America's heartland and ordinary working people. According to Wood, "... I had in mind something which I hope to convey to a fairly wide audience in America - the picture of a country rich in the arts of peace; ... a lovely nation, infinitely worthy of any sacrifice necessary to its preservation."

Just as Wood took pride in his rural roots, Iowa takes pride in this native son whose work memorialized a way of life. His life and legacy are honored many times over in the Hawkeye State, particularly in the seven-county region in east central Iowa known as The Corridor.

The Grant Wood Scenic Byway is an 80-mile route featuring farms, fields and limestone bluffs between Cedar Rapids and the Mississippi River.

Wood's home in Iowa City, 1142 Court St., is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2004, the Iowa State Quarter became the 29th coin in the 50 State Quarters Program. Its design is based on Wood's "Arbor Day" painting with his name inscribed on the reverse.

"Young Corn" and "American Gothic" were featured on U.S. postage stamps to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Iowa's statehood in 1996 and the Four Centuries of American Art in 1998.

In 2009, Wood posthumously received the Iowa Award, the state's highest citizen honor.

This year, Wood's Corn Room mural commissioned for hotels in Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Waterloo and Sioux City will celebrate its 100th anniversary. In March, the Sioux City Art Center will celebrate the return of the newly restored historic piece by which Wood celebrated his heritage and upbringing in the Corn Belt, a connection I encourage Iowans to celebrate for generations to come.

Amy Sinclair

STATE SENATOR

Week 7 of the 2026 legislative session began debate in earnest. Continuing to work together for the benefit of Iowa, many of the bills considered in the Senate were accepted by the members unanimously. I would encourage you to tune in to the live debate sessions (usually Monday afternoon through Thursday) at the legislative website www.legis.iowa.gov.

Opportunities for nonprofits, beginning farmers

Iowa State University's Graphic Design department is seeking Iowa nonprofits to participate in Design/Shift 2026, a one-day, philanthropic design-a-thon held on Saturday, April 18, at ISU's Student Innovation Center in Ames. They are seeking 8-10 nonprofits interested in a free logo design or redesign, created by teams of undergraduate and graduate graphic design students. Participating organizations must have one representative attend the event on April 18 to provide feedback, with the opportunity to collaborate with industry professionals on selecting final concepts. Interested organizations or those with questions can contact Anne Hlavacek at ahlava@iastate.edu.

Through Harvesting Our Potential, Women Food and Ag Network (WFAN) pairs aspiring and beginning farmers in the Midwest with experienced farmers for a season of mentorship. Mentees are matched with mentors involved in the type of farming they are interested in to gain hands-on experience and guidance. If you're interested in mentorship this season visit wfan.org/harvesting-our-potential.

Legislation highlights

Bills debated this week in the Senate covered a myriad of issues. These are a few of the bills that were voted out of the Senate and headed to the Iowa House for consideration.

SF2399 sets higher minimums for bond requirements when a suspect poses a significant danger if not detained. This bill will give our judges mandatory minimums for setting bonds and will help keep our communities safer.

SF2145 will help our local firefighting com-

munity with recruitment and retention. The bill allows schools to establish a training program as an elective for students enrolled in grades 11 and 12. The schools can build their curriculum from a national organization or partner with a local fire department. Students who complete the Junior Fire Fighter program and pass the certification testing will qualify for the Firefighter I Certification upon their 18th birthday or later.

SF2178 adjusts eligibility for lifetime game licenses. The DNR offers Iowans lifetime licenses for fishing, hunting and fur harvesting when they reach age 65, and under current law individuals have to wait until their 65th birthday. This bill specifies that the applicant would be eligible in the year he or she turns 65, meaning they do not have to wait until their 65th birthday to obtain this lifetime license.

SF2417 is the artificial intelligence (AI) bill to protect minors. This bill focuses on protecting and educating minors when an electronic provider uses "conversational AI service." Operators that violate the provisions of this bill are subject to injunctions and the cost of actual damages or costly civil penalties. The bill prohibits and limits how a AI service can interact with a minor based on how a reasonable person would believe the conversational AI service is human.

SF2219 applies common sense legislation to the Iowa Code that specifically allows students who participate in Future Farmers of America (FFA) or 4-H to be allowed an excused absence when they miss school due to an activity or project sponsored by 4-H or FFA. Iowa law allows the local school district to determine their attendance policies. Unfortunately, many districts have been known to exclude students involved with 4-H or FFA from the list of organizations with approved absences for participants. This causes the student to choose between participating in the 4-H or FFA event and not being allowed to make up any missed class work or missing out on participation.

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.

The Mischief and Magic of March

Today is March 4th—a date that feels more like a command than anything else. Say it out loud, and the calendar seems to urge you onward: march forth, nudging us to keep moving with a steady rhythm.

Among all the months, March is unique. When we shift from one month to another, we're usually just happy to welcome a fresh set of thirty or thirty-one days, rarely stopping to consider how that month made its entrance. Did it arrive with the roar of a lion, or with the gentle whisper of a lamb nestled in green grass beneath a bright morning sun?

Rest assured: if March begins with cold, biting winds, it usually softens by the end—unless, of course, it decides to flip the script and start sweet and innocent, only to leave us grappling with the king of the jungle when the month closes.

Thankfully, we'll "spring forward" soon enough, gaining an extra hour of sunlight to ease our minds. St. Patrick's Day will also come to the rescue, giving us an excuse to pick up a lucky charm or perhaps even a rabbit's foot (and won't it be surprised), leaving us no worse for wear.

March is a fascinating month, full of surprises. Whether we're battling the wind, adapting to unpredictable forecasts, losing an hour, or gathering good-luck tokens, we'll manage to get through. And then comes April, cheerfully reminding us that we may not be quite as dignified as we pretend to be.

If we're honest, there's a good chance we'll do something silly this month and never even realize it. But that's the charm of March: it offers us a whole month to embrace being human, full of hope, a bit rushed, occasionally confused, so that when April gently pokes fun at our foolishness, we can simply nod and say, "Of course we are. We've just made our way through March."

Something to say? Send your letter to
editor@wintersetmadisonian.com



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

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