

Opinion & Politics

Letters

Attorney, Sheriff address 1st Amendment concerns

Dear Editor:

On March 30, 2026, at a public meeting of the Madison County Board of Supervisors, in the lower annex at approximately 3:30 p.m. an unfortunate event occurred.

During public comment a local resident was expressing his displeasure with the current direction of the board of supervisors, and during his time for public comment he used an unsavory word.

Once the curse escaped his lips, Supervisor Jessica Hobbs, who by that time had already shown her displeasure with the speaker through her words and actions, demanded that the speaker be silenced and removed due to profanity.

This is an unacceptable action. Lest the Board of Supervisors forgets, there is more than one section of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America as well as Article 1 section 7 of the Iowa Constitution which reads in part "Every person may speak, write and publish his sentiments on all subjects... No Law shall be passed to restrain or abridge the liberty of speech or the press."

We as a nation were founded on this most sacred principle, and the founders of this country risked their lives and liberty to ensure that opinions, even the ones which are unpop-

ular with those in power, can be expressed.

Unfortunately, in the confusion of the moment, under duress by Jessica Hobbs and Heather Stancil, the Sheriff's office was called upon to remove someone for exercising their God-given right. The citizen was not removed from the building, but his expression was interrupted and curtailed by the government body in the form of the Madison County Board of Supervisors. We are issuing this statement to express that neither the County Attorney's Office, nor the Sheriff's Department, will have any part in violating the right of the people to freely express their opinions during the time set aside for public comment.

Additionally, this is to serve as a reminder to the members of the Board who most often yell decorum, that respect and decorum is a two-way street, and taunting or egging on members of the public will not be tolerated.

"In those wretched countries where a man cannot call his tongue his own, he can scarce call anything his own. Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech; a thing terrible to public traitors" - Benjamin Franklin.

The Madison County Sheriff Jason Barnes and I have no further comment at this time regarding this matter.

—Stephen J. Swanson, Madison County Attorney

Wake up, Iowa!

Dear Editor:

Often, I wonder what it will take for Iowans to wake up and pay attention to the State Auditor's office. I pray it won't take a massive scandal like what happened in Minnesota.

What is the point of paying taxes if we are not going to properly oversee how those dollars are spent?

Right now, \$51 million levied through township property taxes goes with virtually no oversight. On top of that, more than \$100 million a year in small-town property taxes can go without an audit for up to eight years. I find it ironic that taxpayers are required to keep careful records and report our income to the government every year so they know exactly how much we owe them, yet local governments are not held to the same standard of accountability to us.

That has to change, and it is exactly why I am running for State Auditor.

I have a real plan to fix Iowa Code and increase efficiency so we can properly oversee our hard-earned tax dollars. I also believe taxpayers deserve to see a detailed account of how their money is spent. That is why I am proposing a statewide accounting software system for local governments, with transactions made available online for the public to review. It shouldn't take a PhD to understand how our property taxes are being spent, and I believe the public should be able to see every transaction.

Transparency is how we truly root out fraud, waste, and abuse. It will not only curb the temptation to misuse taxpayer dollars, but it will also empower voters to identify bad actors in their local elections.

I urge Iowans to wake up, pay attention to this race, and take it seriously. It is critical that we elect someone who cares about doing the job, not someone simply seeking a political title.

Sincerely,
—Abigail Maas, Candidate for State Auditor

Examining Winterset's property tax growth

Dear Editor:

Property taxes are one of the most important issues facing local taxpayers. Looking at Winterset's recent budgets helps explain why many residents are asking questions.

Since fiscal year 2021/2022, Winterset's taxable property valuation has grown from about \$188 million to roughly \$252 million, an increase of about 34%. Under normal circumstances, growth like that often reflects a community experiencing strong population growth, new housing development, and new commercial or industrial investment.

But that isn't really the case in Winterset.

According to the most recent census data, Winterset's population is likely the same as it was in 2020, and there has been little new commercial or industrial development over that same time period. In other words, the city is not experiencing the kind of growth that would typically explain a large increase in tax revenue.

At the same time valuations were rising, the city's tax levy rate increased from 13.29 to 16.15. When both valuations and the levy rate increase together, property tax collections rise much faster.

The result is that Winterset's regular property tax revenue increased from about \$2.5 million to more than \$4.2 million annually over the past five fiscal years – an increase of

roughly 68%.

These numbers don't automatically mean every decision made by city leaders was wrong. But they do raise reasonable questions. When tax revenues increase this quickly, taxpayers deserve clear explanations about spending priorities and long-term financial planning.

It is also worth asking what the city of Winterset is doing to pursue growth. Winterset is dramatically lagging behind the population and new housing goals stated in the 2023 Comprehensive Plan.

Sustainable communities strive to expand their tax base through new housing, new businesses, and job-creating investment, which spreads the cost of local government across a larger base of taxpayers.

Without that kind of growth, the burden of funding city government increasingly falls on the same residents and property owners year after year.

Open discussion about budgets, taxes, and priorities is healthy for any community.

Winterset residents deserve transparency, clear information, and a voice in decisions that affect both their tax bills and the future direction of the community.

The next City Council Meeting is on Monday, April 6, at 7:00. The FY26/27 budget will be on the agenda.

—Scott S. Stover, Winterset

Relatively Minor

Vicki Minor, Editor
editor@wintersetmadisonian.com

Laughter does not have to come from a major source. It could indeed be ... relatively minor.

If A Camel Says 'Happy Hump Day', Walk Away Slowly

A wise person once said, "Tis better to be silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt." Keeping that in mind, the first of April might feel eerily quiet for some and quite chaotic for others, especially for those who are a bit too trusting. After all, it's April Fool's Day, the one day of the year that practically demands a healthy dose of skepticism. On this day, we're encouraged to question everything, especially if something seems a bit off or too bizarre to be real.

Traditionally, it's the day set aside for pulling pranks on friends, family, coworkers, and even unsuspecting strangers just trying to go about their day. So, a word of caution: believe only half of what you see and absolutely none of the texts you get before noon. Even the most innocent messages, like "Can you swing by my office for a minute?" should be approached with caution, maybe even with a witness, just in case.

This year, April 1 conveniently falls on Hump Day, which is fitting since Wednesday is right in the middle of the workweek. At the start of the week, everyone seems fairly composed, but by the time Wednesday arrives, some people might start acting a little silly. When I hear "Hump Day," I can't help but think of that quirky desert animal known for its two distinctive humps.

So, if I happened to see a camel leisurely walking down the street in the middle of the week, casually smoking a cigarette, I would not be bothered. And if, before crossing the street, it paused to check a smart watch awkwardly strapped to its leg and muttered, "Ten thousand steps before noon," I'd assume it was just trying to get some exercise. But the moment that camel flicked away the cigarette, turned its head toward me, and cheerfully said, "Happy Hump Day," I'd realize I'd been caught up in a classic April Fool's joke.

At that point, I'd probably just nod, wish it well, and continue on my way.

Looking to contact us?

Information
News
Sports
Legals
Obituaries
Advertising
Letters to the Editor

info@wintersetmadisonian.com
news@wintersetmadisonian.com
sports@wintersetmadisonian.com
legals@wintersetmadisonian.com
obits@wintersetmadisonian.com
ads@wintersetmadisonian.com
editor@wintersetmadisonian.com

Connect with your legislators

IOWA STATEHOUSE

Representative Ray Sorensen (R) Dist. 23 515-281-3221 ray.sorensen@legis.iowa.gov
Senator Amy Sinclair (R) Dist. 12 515-281-3371 amy.sinclair@legis.iowa.gov

U.S. CONGRESS

Representative Zach Nunn (R) Third District DC office: 202-225-5476
U.S. Senator Charles Grassley (R) DM office: 515 288-1145
U.S. Senator Joni Ernst (R) DM office: 515 284-4574

Editorial Page Guidelines: We want to hear your perspective and views on local issues. We welcome letters with a unique viewpoint that are supported by facts and offer a solution if applicable. Send your letter to the editor to editor@wintersetmadisonian.com. Letters to the editor should be no more than 600 words. Submissions 200-300 words have the best chance of being published. You must include your name, address, and a daytime phone number for verification. All submissions of letters to the editor become the property of The Madisonian and may be edited for length, redundancy, clarity, civility, and accuracy and may be published or distributed in print, electronic, or other forms. Our intent in editing is not to change your opinions expressed, but to ensure your views are clear, concise, and easy to understand. We will try to contact you if we need to edit your letter, but cannot guarantee we will be able to do so because of time constraints. Not all letters submitted will be published. Typically, we will only publish one letter per writer every 30 days. We will not print letters that make false or damaging statements about another person or that are factually inaccurate.

Winterset Madisonian

Susan Smith – Publisher
Christa Braga – Assistant Editor
Louise Berdine – Legals

Vicki Minor – Managing Editor
Gale Blader – Sports & News
Tracy Van Kooten – Layout Design

The Winterset Madisonian (USPS 687-260) is published weekly on Wednesdays by MadCoMedia Group, Inc. Periodical Postage paid at Winterset, Iowa 50273. Entered as Periodical at the Post Office at Winterset, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

All content of the Winterset Madisonian copyrighted and trademarked under U.S. and Iowa copyright and trademark laws. Use of Madisonian material is prohibited without permission.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

One year in Madison and surrounding counties (Clarke, Union, Adair, Dallas, Polk, and Warren) \$75.00.
Elsewhere in Iowa \$78.00.
Elsewhere in the United States \$81.00 per year;
Half-year subscriptions also available. Temporary Changes of Address \$2.
Postmaster: Send all changes of address to:
The Winterset Madisonian, P.O. Box 350, Winterset, IA 50273-1506
Phone: 515-462-2101 • Fax: 515-462-2102