

In South Africa: 'The craziest, most wonderful week of my life'

ISAAC VOSBURG
WHERE IN THE
WORLD IS ISAAC
VOSBURG

This week has been one of the longest of my entire life, and the experiences held within it amount to far more than seven days seem capable of containing. In fact, there were multiple points within these last few days when I stopped to check the date to be sure that I hadn't missed my deadline to submit this week's column. My time has been chock full of the most incredible opportunities, notably because I have spent this past week wholly immersed in the nature and environment of South Africa.

It is spring break for Grinnell, and I am rounding out the first of two weeks of course-embedded travel with my BIO-195 course. After spending a few days at the University of Pretoria, the majority of my week has been spent living in a hut on the Manyeleti Game Preserve, which opens into Kruger National Park, near the border with Mozambique. As it pertains to the study of New and Emerging Infectious Diseases (the true title of BIO-195), Kruger contains an immense amount of biodiversity, and thus potential points of disease saltation from species to species, which range from



Africa's Big Five (rhinoceros, African buffalo, lions, elephants, and leopards) to shongololo giant millipedes to an ornithologist's absolute dream in terms of the seemingly uncountable distinct species of birds.

This past week I have listened in on lectures from microbiologists, conservation aviators, and disease ecologists, identified sex and species of tick samples, performed PCR tests to determine bacterial infection in rodents, gone on game drives that would make a National Geographic documentary filmmaker jealous, lived completely off grid without cell service or WiFi, and genuinely embraced the experiences on offer here in South Africa. While I have lived out far too much to detail in a single column, allow me to describe this new setting I find myself in so that my stories moving forward will be grounded in mutual understanding.

Out of all my travels, I have never seen a place like South Africa. Not only is this the first time that I have ever set foot on

the continent, it's also my first time in the Southern Hemisphere as a whole. Like Iowa, South Africa has cornfields that stretch on as far as the eye can see; flat land, few trees, interspersed with small herds of cattle. I was stunned when I saw the fields of hay, wrapped up into big round bales, the same as we have in the States. As I looked out into one particular field, I saw hayracks hooked in a train of four, loaded two round bales deep and two round bales long. I wondered what monster of a machine would be needed to pull such a load, especially considering that it had just rained an equivalent to my monsoon experiences in India and Malaysia.

Unlike Iowa, however, all this flat land immediately dropped off into the most beautiful green mountains and valleys, an anthropomorphized savannah, where settlements were nestled into the cradle of the hills. The road wound around and around, crossed rivers and streams, and as we continued east

from Pretoria toward Kruger National Park and Mozambique, the landscape shifted once again. The mountains smoothed out, cropping up only intermittently now, and the homes became more dispersed. After seven long hours on the road, we neared Manyeleti, our home for the remainder of this first week.

While in Manyeleti, I have lived a life. Waking up anywhere from 4:30 to 5:30 AM on a typical day, opening the front door of my hut to see a baboon sitting on my chair, who promptly turned, screamed at me, and ran away, seeing all sorts of wildlife on our drives to and from the Main Camp where we were staying, and so, so much more. My time in South Africa so far has been filled with memories, from late-night card games with my classmates and friends, to sliding through the muck in the dark in the back of a Toyota pickup, emerging from the river running through the dirt road to see a male elephant at the crest of the small hill again, contributing to the stream as he urinated in our direction. As we passed the elephant in the dark, someone next to me said, "That was the craziest five seconds of my life." I would extend that to say that this week has been the craziest, most wonderful, and awe-inspiring week I have ever lived.

SUDOKU

						1		6
	4	3						
				8		4	3	
6					9		5	
		4	8		5			
	9					7	8	3
		8		4	6			
3	1			9				
	5				3		1	

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:
Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

SUDOKU ANSWERS:

8	1	8	2	7	2	9	5	4
3	1	7	4	6	8	8	1	3
2	4	6	9	3	3	7	2	6
5	3	7	3	6	1	4	2	8
3	8	8	1	7	4	2	6	5
1	1	9	6	5	2	8	7	3
7	4	4	8	2	8	7	1	8
4	5	4	2	2	6	6	9	6
7	3	3	4	4	3	6	5	1
8	6	6	8	1	7	5	6	2
8	7	6	1	2	6	8	7	8

THIS WEEK'S SUDOKU IS SPONSORED BY:

Senior Life
Solutions®

FRANKLIN
GENERAL
HOSPITAL

an affiliate of MERCYONE.

Providing direction, answers, and support for an improved quality of life.

(641) 456-5935

To the People of House District 55



REP. SHANNON LATHAM
COLUMNIST

Week 9 of the 2026 Iowa legislative session was filled with debate as the Iowa House of Representatives sent 33 bills to the Senate for consideration before the second legislative funnel deadline.

March 20 is the final date for bills and joint resolutions that originated in the House to pass through Senate subcommittees and committees. Likewise, Senate bills and joint resolutions must be reported out of House committees to remain alive. The only exceptions to this

deadline are bills being considered by the Appropriations or Ways & Means Committees.

Economic Development Budget Subcommittee

This week Patti Hansen, Vice President of Continuing Education & Economic Development for North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) in Mason City, presented to the House Economic Development Appropriations Budget Subcommittee. She was joined by Susan Bunz, Vice President of Human Resources for Stellar Industries in Garner, and Dean Sonquist, founder and President of Plas-Tech Tooling in Garner. They shared how the Iowa Industrial New Jobs Training (260E) program helps attract businesses to and grow existing businesses in North Iowa.

Iowa's 260E program is a workforce-training incentive used by the state to help businesses create and train employees for new

jobs. The Iowa DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) task force recommended replacing 260E with a \$30 million employer-directed workforce training fund administered by Iowa Workforce Development. This is a concern to the business owners and managers who have contacted me as they prefer 260E programs continue to be administered by Iowa's community colleges.

Governor's Emergency Powers

Governors across the country — primarily in blue states — abused their power in the name of an emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to ensure that never happens in Iowa.

Under House File 2694, the Iowa Governor's emergency powers are not absolute and cannot be used to suspend the fundamental rights of Iowans.

This legislation provides four, non-negotia-

ble safeguards. Even in an emergency, the Governor cannot:

1. Close places of worship.
2. Unilaterally change election law.
3. Mandate a vaccination.
4. Regulate conduct within a private residence.

This legislation allows the Governor to offer guidance and make recommendations. However, it ensures that deeply personal decisions remain in the hands of Iowans — where they belong.

Welfare Reform

House File 2716 aims to protect the integrity and sustainability of Iowa's public assistance programs, so they can provide proper care for the Iowans who really need it.

Key provisions of the bill include:

- Expanding Medicaid eligibility for Employed Persons with Disabilities from 250% of the Feder-

al Poverty Limit (FPL) to 300% FPL, allowing more disabled Iowans to qualify and to accept raises and promotions without fear of losing Medicaid coverage.

- Excluding pension accounts and spousal income from income eligibility determinations, allowing disabled Iowans to plan for their future and get married without becoming ineligible for coverage.
- Increasing the base reimbursement rate for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) providers in rural areas to cover the travel time and expenses incurred, allowing more Iowans in rural areas to receive the care they need in their home and keeping them out of expensive institutions.

Constituents in the Capitol

I visited with Megan Mollenbeck from Franklin General Hospital in Hampton during the Iowa Hospital Association's Day on the Hill. She appreciated me voting in favor of HF 2635, which maintains the Certificate of Need (CON) program to regulate certain health facility expansions and protect access to lower-cost care.

During Farm Bureau Day on the Hill, I met with the Franklin County members about several topics including: landowner rights, property tax reform, and rural veterinarian incentive programs. Pictured from left to right are Rep. Shannon Latham, Kaitlyn Porter and Tanner Brass. Rodney Peters is seated in the Speaker's chair.

Stay in Touch
As I always say, I can't represent you if I don't hear from you. I welcome visits from constituents at the statehouse. Feel free contact me about issues of interest to you. You're welcome to message me through social media, email me at shannon.latham@legis.iowa.gov, or call the Iowa House switchboard at (515) 281-3221.

**Submit any "Letters to the Editor" at
news@hamptonchronicle.com**

NEWS

COUNCIL: FROM COVER

Thank you all. My wife and I really appreciate it."

He also reported that his team has been very busy and that they'll soon be working on the court-ordered clean-ups that Police Chief Mark Morrison had mentioned.

"We will be working diligently to get that done," he said.

During his report, City Manager Ron Dunt mentioned the upcoming public hearing for the proposed levy on March 26.

City Councilor Kristin Roode had no report for the evening.

City Councilor Bar-

ry Lamos mentioned how happy he was about the city possibly receiving grant money to work on the abandoned pharmacy that the city acquired last year.

"We are all struggling with budget cuts," Lamos said. "Who knows what is going to happen with the tax levy stuff. We're taking down houses and I've always got this little catch: we cut trees down and then we plant trees. Well, when we burn houses down, we're not building houses. Let's start building some houses here."

City Councilor Jim Davies reported he was at the

Chamber of Commerce earlier that afternoon, and that Chamber Director Elisa Van Wert plans on attending a meeting in the near future to give an update on what's going on at the Chamber. He also thanked the city employees who put up the tennis nets, adding that boys tennis officially begins March 16 and that girls tennis is switching to fall. He added that the medal parts of benches at Band Shell Park have been sandblasted and powder-coated, thanking the city once again for their participation with this project. He hopes the

benches will be done by the time Tuesday on the Town rolls around.

During his report, City Councilor Bill Holmstrom said that what should have been a negative experience turned into a positive one the previous weekend. While driving home from Mason City, on Highway 65, one of his tires went flat, leaving him on the side of the road. A young man from Dumont pulled over and offered to help him, followed by the Highway Patrol.

"I am so grateful for this young man," he said.

City Councilor Jeanne

Fay thanked the dispatchers and Hampton Police Department for their help recently, mentioning their professionalism.

City Councilor Jerre Greffe had no report, as she was not in attendance during the meeting.

For his report, Mayor Steve Birdsall mentioned their upcoming goal-setting session, encouraging the councilors to come with an open mind and ready to work. He also reported that the library meeting was scheduled for the following Wednesday, March 25.

City Councilor Jeanne



Carl Beyers presenting a task order for the AvGas Fuel Farm Project during the meeting. Beyers presenting a task order for the AvGas Fuel Farm Project during the meeting.