

AREA & STATE

In address, Reynolds proposes update to veterans' services, talks rural health care, charter schools

■ Governor doesn't bring up eminent domain

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Reynolds began her Condition of the State address by acknowledging Iowans who died in 2025, including three legislators who died in office, Rep. Martin Gruber, Sen. Rocky DeWitt and Sen. Claire Celsi, as well as former Rep. Janet Metcalf.

She also spoke on the loss of two Iowa National Guard service members, Sgt. William Nathaniel Howard of Marshalltown and Sgt. Edgar Torres-Tovar of Des Moines. They died Dec. 13, 2025, in Palmyra, Syria when a gunman associated with ISIS fired on American troops, also injuring three other Iowa soldiers and killing a U.S. civilian. Reynolds said the Torres-Tovar family was honoring their son's death in a memorial service Tuesday evening, while Howard's wife, parents and brother attended the Condition of the State address. She told them their family "remains in our prayers, and we will never forget Nate's sacrifice."

"When I reflect on the evil that robbed our state of two exceptional young men and wounded three others, I'm aware that no words can right the wrongs of their deaths or make up for the heartbreak of their loved ones," Reynolds said. "But know this: their service lives on — in the families they cherished, in the communities they strengthened and in the freedoms they helped preserve."

Reynolds said Iowa owes service members a "debt of gratitude," which is "best paid by ensuring our veterans get every benefit they've earned." She said while the state is home to nearly 178,000 veterans, only one-third of veterans are receiving the benefits they earned.

"That's not acceptable," Reynolds said. "An outdated system that provides little accountability is leaving too many veterans



— and well-meaning county officials — without the tools, training and consistency they need. So tonight, I'm proposing a bill to modernize the system statewide."

While the state currently provides counties funding to train Veterans Service Officers across the state, the governor is proposing redirecting this funding to create a centralized training program through the state Department of Veterans Affairs and create a single statewide claims program for submitting veterans' benefits claims.

Additionally, while each Iowa county currently receives \$10,000 to support their local VSOs, the program proposes tying state funding to outcome and performance measures. It would give counties in the top third of VA compensation per capita \$15,000; the middle third of counties \$5,000, with a bonus award of \$5,000 if compensation per capita is increased by 5%, and the bottom third of counties \$2,000 with a bonus award of \$3,000 for a 5% per capita compensation increase.

"The goal is simple — more benefits reaching more veterans," Reynolds said. "Let's do more for the heroes who've done so much for us."

House Minority Leader Brian Meyer said he believed the governor's proposal on improving access to veterans' benefits is something Democrats would be willing to support.

"I think that was something that we can all come together on and really take a look at it,"

Meyer said. "Some of this stuff, ... it has to be known to the Legislature, and in a bipartisan way we can work on things like that."

FEDERAL DOLLARS DIRECTED TOWARD CANCER PROGRAMS

Making effective use of taxpayer dollars is not limited to state and local governments, Reynolds said, but also includes federal funding flowing to the state through both established programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP, as well as the Rural Health Transformation Program established through the tax and spending bill signed by President Donald Trump in 2025.

Iowa was awarded \$209 million in the first year of the Rural Health Transformation Program funding, and Reynolds said more than \$50 million of that federal funding will be invested in cancer prevention, screening and treatment. Concerns about cancer in Iowa have grown as the state has the second-highest cancer incident rate in the country.

The \$50 million will go toward expanding cancer screenings for uninsured and underinsured Iowans, investing in cancer specialists and cancer treatment equipment in rural Iowa, and funding radon testing kits, mitigation efforts and specialists, Reynolds said. This work is already beginning, she said, as the state has already received 250 proposals from around Iowa for the program with plans to begin awarding contracts by the end of January.

CONDITION OF THE STATE

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attempts to limit local taxing authority, Reynolds said she found limits on specific levies are not an effective way to address property tax increases.

"So this year, we need to go after the real driver of the problem, spending," Reynolds said. "Spending is what drives taxes, always has, always will. And the most reliable way to protect taxpayers is to limit the growth of government itself."

The governor's proposal would cap overall revenue for local government to 2% growth each year, with an exemption built in for new construction. The cap also includes exceptions for debt service and school funding.

In Spencer, local leaders are taking a wait-and-see approach to property tax reform efforts. City Manager Kevin Robinson declined to comment on Reynolds' proposal until he can review and analyze the Governor's bill. Spencer Community School District Superintendent Terry Hemann said schools all over the state were in a similar position.

"We just don't know how (property tax reform) is going to affect us," He said.

Reynolds' measure incorporates two ways aimed at helping local governments reduce costs. The proposal would create a \$10 million fund of one-time money to provide grants to local governments pursuing consolidation and shared service agreements with other local governments for services like emergency medical services, law enforcement and public health. It also would remove election mandates for county treasurers, auditors and recorders, meaning these positions could become appointed, instead of elected, positions in the future.

Reynolds' proposal also would change how often property tax assessments are conducted, moving from every two years to every three years. Additionally, it

would limit the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts and accelerate the timeline for using the state's Secure an Advanced Vision for Education (SAVE) funding stream for property tax relief.

Reynolds said the proposal also works to provide property tax relief for both older homeowners and new homeowners. The legislation would freeze property taxes for seniors age 65 and older in homes valued at \$350,000 or less, "because no one should be taxed out of their own front door," she said. The bill would also create FirstHome Iowa Accounts modeled after the Iowa 529 Plan, the state-sponsored savings plan that allows families to create a savings fund for a person's future educational expenses that offers both tax-free growth and tax-free withdrawals for qualified costs.

The FirstHome Iowa Account proposal would mean funds in tax-deductible savings accounts could be used to for the purchase or closing costs of a home, with certain restrictions. The money in these accounts could only be used to purchase a home in Iowa, and the person using the funds cannot have owned a home in the past three years in the state. Unlike the 529 Plan accounts, the FirstHome Iowa Accounts would be subject to some federal taxes, as there is not a federal equivalent to the program.

This proposal differs significantly from the legislation brought forward by Senate Republicans Monday. Senate Study Bill 3001 proposes ending the state's "rollback" system of calculating property taxes, while Reynolds' measure would not make a change to this system. The Senate GOP measure would also expand Iowa's homestead tax credit, while the governor's bill would change the homestead tax credit to a tax exemption.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Klimesh told reporters he was

waiting to see the language for property tax bills coming from Reynolds and House Republicans before starting the conversation, but said he believed it was worthwhile to make larger, structural changes to Iowa's property tax system.

"My messaging that, you know, we have a 40-year-old system, we've slapped a lot of Band-aids on it," Klimesh said. "... I still see a lot of value in taking the system and stripping it down to its chassis and then rebuilding it from there, I think. But again, waiting until we see the proposal from the governor's office and from the House, and then having that conversation."

While House Republicans have not come out with a property tax proposal yet, House Speaker Pat Grassley said the caucus plans to come out with legislation next week. Grassley said there will be some points of consensus — and differences — between the House GOP plan and the Senate's and governor's proposals.

Though there will be differences, Grassley said he believes Republicans will be able to come together to find a solution.

"I think you're going to see three different bills with the same objective, which is providing certainty for Iowans," Grassley said. "... I think we're going to have the ability to work together. I think we have the same mindset when it comes to that. But as far as specific pieces that she walked through tonight, I want to see what the impacts are going to be moving forward before I commit to any sort of specific piece that she touched on."

House Democrats have also introduced a property tax plan earlier in January to freeze property taxes for seniors age 65 and older, triple the Homestead Tax Credit, and limit annual property tax growth to 4%.

• News Editor Nick Lowrey contributed to this report.

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Seasons Center for Behavioral Health earns national COA Accreditation

Seasons Center for Behavioral Health has achieved national accreditation through COA Accreditation. Organizations pursue accreditation to demonstrate the implementation of best practice standards in the field of human services. COA Accreditation evaluated all aspects of Seasons Center's programs, services, management and administration.

COA Accreditation, a service of Social Current, is an objective, independent and reliable validation of an agency's performance. The accreditation process involves a detailed review and analysis of an organization's administration, management, and service delivery functions against international standards of best practice. The standards driving accreditation ensure that services are well-coordinated, culturally competent, evidence-based, outcomes-oriented and provided by a skilled and supported workforce.

To achieve accreditation, Seasons Center first provided over 650 pieces of written evidence of compliance with the COA Accreditation standards. Thereafter, a group of specially trained volunteer Peer Reviewers confirmed adherence to these standards during a series of on-site interviews with trustees, staff and clients. Based on their findings, COA Accreditation's volunteer-based Accreditation Commission voted that Seasons Center had successfully met the criteria for accreditation.

For more info on Seasons Center, visit www.seasonscenter.org.

SNOW PARKING ORDINANCE

City of Spencer Prohibits Street Parking during snow events.
No Parking on city streets or alleys from 12:00 midnight to 7:00 am.

This ordinance goes into effect if the National Weather Service predicts a snow accumulation of 2 or more inches or if new snow accumulation has reached 2 or more inches measured at the KICD radio station. The snow event shall continue so long as snow accumulation continues and for an additional 48 hours after snowfall has ended. Non-compliance will result in a \$100 fine and/or towed.

City Code, Title 7-5-7 article A

SIDEWALK SNOW REMOVAL

It is the responsibility of the abutting property owner to remove snow and ice accumulations from the public sidewalks adjacent to their residence or place of business after a snow event. In the Spencer downtown commercial district, 12 hours is allowed from the time the snowfall ceases. In all other areas of the city, 24 hours is allowed from the time the snowfall ceases. If an abutting property owner does not remove the snow and ice within the time specified, the city may do so and assess the costs, including an administration fee.

The complete city ordinance regarding the removal of snow from streets and sidewalks can be found at www.spenceriowacity.com under Public Notices - City Code - Title 5-1 Article E.

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