

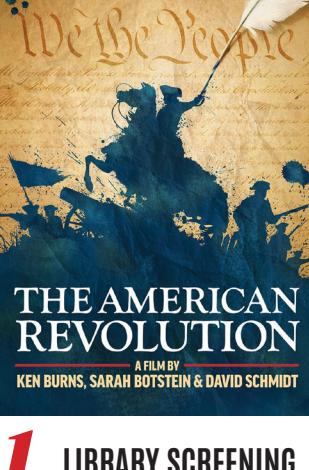
TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026



SPENCER REPORTER

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5 THINGS TO KNOW



1. LIBRARY SCREENING PART OF REVOLUTION

The Spencer Public Library on Wednesday, Jan. 28, at 2 p.m., will host a Spirit of Service screening reel of Ken Burns's new documentary, "The American Revolution." The Spirit of Service screening reel includes selected excerpts from the series and is designed to encourage thoughtful discussion about the American Revolution, especially around the spirit of service in American culture. There will be a 30-minute film clip with a discussion after. It is free to the public. Call 712-580-7290 for more information.

2. LITTLE LEAGUE REGISTRATION

SYBSA announced registration for Spencer Little League began Monday, Jan. 12, and is underway through Sunday, Feb. 8. Summer ball is open to boys and girls in grades K-8, with registration ranging from \$75 to \$95 depending on the player's grade. Registration after the Feb. 8 deadline is \$20 more. Register at spencerlittleleague.org. Team sponsors are being sought as well, and you can email spencerlittleleague@outlook.com for information.

3. EGGS & ISSUES SET FOR JAN. 31

It's time to begin thinking about citizen duties with regard to checking in with local legislators during the upcoming session. The first of three Eggs & Issues forums with lawmakers, hosted by the Spencer Chamber, is set for Saturday, Jan. 31, 9-10:30 a.m., at the Spencer City Hall Chambers. Other dates are Saturdays, Feb. 21 and March 28.

4. CASSA PRESENTS 'GRIDLOCK' FILM

"Gridlock," a film about sex trafficking in Iowa, will be presented by the Spencer Office of Centers Against Abuse & Sexual Assault on Thursday, Feb. 26, 6-8 p.m., at the Spencer Hospital. Seating is limited to 80 people. You can register by calling 712-363-5042.

5. SPENCER YPS PLAN TRIVIA NIGHT

Spencer Young Professionals will have a trivia night Tuesday, Feb. 3, with doors opening at 6:30 p.m. and the event at 7 p.m. It's at the Spencer Municipal Golf Course. Contact spenceriayp@gmail.com for details.

LOST REVENUE

SPENCER FINANCE COMMITTEE COULD RETHINK LOCAL SALES TAX ALLOCATIONS



■ Discussion comes amid renewed push to limit local government revenue

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The Spencer City Council's Finance Committee continued to weigh options for how to allocate the city's sales tax revenue, including taking a hard look at drastically cutting the amount of money given to local nonprofits.

During the Finance Committee's second meeting held Jan. 15 at City Hall, City Manager Kevin Robinson presented a proposal that would cut the amount of city sales tax revenue available to local nongovernment groups by almost 70% compared to last year's budget.

He said the city's current practice of allocating sales tax revenue to outside groups can actually force the city to borrow money and use property taxes to fund certain city projects it wouldn't otherwise need to.

Robinson presented data showing how many of its sales tax dollars Spencer has regularly been allocated to nongovernmental groups, such as the Clay County Council on Aging or Arts on Grand. City Finance records show that sales tax allocations, including LOST and hotel/motel tax revenue to nongovernment groups, grew from \$267,300 in fiscal year 2017 to \$508,700 in the current fiscal year, FY 2026. Meanwhile, the state legislature and Gov. Kim Reynolds have recently introduced bills into the 2026 legislative session that would place limits on cities' revenue growth.

"What is driving urgency here is the

combination of the governor's proposals, which are going to significantly impact our revenue streams, and a clear trend — if you look at the numbers, we cannot sustain the way we've been allocating funds," Finance Committee Chair Loren Reit said.

The governor said, during her Jan. 13 Condition of the State address, that her plan calls for \$3 billion in property tax relief over six years, paired with stricter limits on how cities can use debt service levies and economic development tools such as Tax Increment Financing, threatening to shrink local budgets and, likely, leading to big changes in how cities, counties and even school districts deliver their services.

"That's \$3 billion of reduced budget in local government over the next six years," Robinson said. "(The governor) also said that the debt service levy in the future could only be used for infrastructure. So the relevance is that it really narrows what we can use our general obligation debt for."

Both the LOST and hotel/motel taxes were originally approved by voters and have some built-in restrictions on their use. In the case of the LOST, the ordinance creating it included provisions to give Spencer schools 25% of the revenue and another 10% to the Clay County Fair as incentives to convince voters to approve the measure. In FY 2026, Spencer schools received \$540,000, and the fair got \$216,000.

Informal agreements reached during the LOST approval campaign included creating a way for nongovernment groups to get some of the money, too. Meanwhile, at least half of hotel/motel tax revenues, roughly \$200,000, must be spent on recreation, culture or entertainment — things that might attract hotel visitors. The other half can be spent on any legal purpose.

In that spirit, his family is throwing what they call "one hell of a party" starting at 5 p.m. Friday, Jan. 16, at Snappers in Okoboji.

Parks, the founder of Parks Marina and longtime operator of the Barefoot Bar, the Gardens, O'Farrell Sisters, Snappers and Okoboji Boat Works, passed away on Tuesday, Jan. 6. He was 81 years old.

The family asks well-wishers to wear Barefoot apparel to his celebration — and perhaps consider

The push to change how the city allocates its sales tax dollars has been brewing since 2025. But, in the wake of the June 2024 flood, the Finance Committee and City Council decided to wait on major changes.

"We kept the amounts the same that they got the previous fiscal year, and then we kept the funding sources the same," Reit said. "We just didn't mess with it."

That approach allowed the city to fulfill longstanding commitments to local organizations, even as new requests emerged.

This year, staff projects the city will have \$450,000 from hotel/motel tax and \$390,000 of unobligated funds from LOST available for city projects or outside agency and NGO allocations. The proposal Robinson presented Jan. 15 would cap the amount of LOST and hotel/motel revenue available to nongovernment groups at \$150,000. City staff also proposed using funds from the city's Tax Increment Financing fund to support economic development groups such as the Spencer Chamber of Commerce and Iowa Lakes Corridor Development Corporation.

Robinson also called for the finance committee to consider implementing a public transit property tax levy of up to 9 cents per thousand dollars of value to help fund the local public transit authority, Rides. Federal and state public transit grants have been drying up in recent years, and Rides has been asking local governments for more funding as a result.

Last year, Rides asked Spencer for \$20,000. This year, the organization is asking for \$35,000, an amount that isn't likely to shrink any time soon.

The committee will meet again next week and decide whether to cap NGO allocations and begin discussing the next phase of the city's budget process, the capital improvement plan.

Guard members killed in attack honored

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Maj. Gen. Stephen Osborn, the adjutant general of the Iowa National Guard, began his 2026 Condition of the Guard address Thursday by honoring the loss of two National Guard service members.

Osborn's remarks come just over a month after Sgt. William Nathaniel Howard of Marshalltown and Sgt. Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar of Des Moines, were killed in Palmyra, Syria, during an attack by a lone gunman associated with the Islamic State group. Three other Iowa National Guard members were injured, and another U.S. civilian was killed in the Dec. 13, 2025, attack.

"We begin today with heavy hearts, reflecting on the profound loss of two of our finest soldiers," Osborn said. "Yet even in this time of sorrow, we have witnessed something powerful — the strength, the unity and the compassion of the state of Iowa. On behalf of the entire Iowa National Guard, I want to express our deepest gratitude for the overwhelming outpouring of care and respect shown to our fallen heroes and their families."

Osborn thanked Iowans for their support of the National Guard, the soldiers and their families following the attack, in addition for the continued support of the three Guard members who were injured. He also honored the more than 1,800 Iowa soldiers and airmen who are still deployed in the Middle East, where they "continue to carry out critical missions that are ongoing, demanding and vital to our national security."

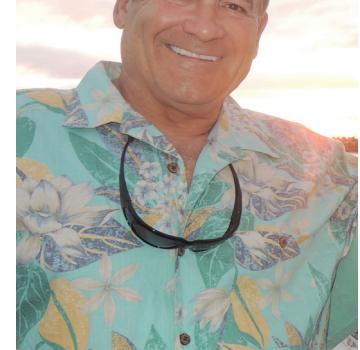
Lt. Col. Jeremy Taylor, deputy state chaplain in the Iowa National Guard, was brought to the podium to lead the chamber in prayer honoring Torres-Tovar and Howard, saying "these young men, Lord, were willing to walk through the shadow of the valley of death, doing what they loved and serving others."

"They embodied what you taught us that there is no greater love than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends," he said.

In her Condition of the State address Tuesday, Gov. Kim Reynolds also honored the Iowans who died in the attack. Howard's wife, parents and brother attended the address while the Torres-Tovar family held a memorial service at their local church Tuesday night. Reynolds said "their service lives

GUARDSMEN HONORED

continued on 2A



Marina district icon Butch Parks passes away

RUSS MITCHELL

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