

H&N
Chevrolet-Buick

2026 CHEVROLET EQUINOX!
MANY NEW MODELS ARRIVING DAILY!

OVER 8 IN STOCK!

Come check out the #1 selling sub compact SUV in Northwest Iowa!

Myles Musser | 260-5158
Jack Dodson | 515-720-5368
Brian Fassbender | 363-0545
Dave Gruhlke | 712-540-7036

713 Grand Ave. Spencer
(712) 262-3230
www.hnchevy.com

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026

SPENCER REPORTER



SERVING CLAY COUNTY

22 EAST FOURTH STREET • 712.262.6610 • SPENCERDAILYREPORTER.COM

5 THINGS TO KNOW

1. FILM SERIES KICKS OFF ON FEB. 23

CORRECTION

The Films for the Cinematically Disadvantaged series returns to the Carey's Electronics, 220 Grand Ave., Monday, Feb. 23, the first of five consecutive Mondays. Please note that the location was incorrect in last Friday's edition, and we apologize for the error. Carey's Electronics and Arts on Grand sponsor the films. The Feb. 23 film is "La Chimra," and the description says "Just Out of Jail, crumpled English archaeologist Arthur reconnects his wayward crew of accomplices, a happy-go-lucky collective of grave robbers who survive by looting Etruscan tombs and fencing the ancient treasures they dig up." There is no charge, but donations will be appreciated.

2. EGGS & ISSUES IN SPENCER FEB. 21

The second of a series of legislative updates happens Saturday, Feb. 21, 9-10:30 a.m., at Spencer City Hall, when the Spencer Chamber hosts its Eggs & Issues meeting.

3. SEX TRAFFICKING FILM FEB. 26

"Gridshock," 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.

4. 'THE SOUND OF MUSIC' FEB. 27-28

Spencer Community Theatre will stage "The Sound of Music" Fridays and Saturdays, Feb. 27-28, at 7:30 p.m., in the SCT Playhouse. The musical will be performed Sunday, March 1, at 2 p.m. The musical will be performed again Thursday, Friday and Saturday, March 5-7, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available at the box office Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., at 712-262-7336, or one hour prior to each performance, or online at sctplayhouse.com. The playbill for the show will be published in the Feb. 24 edition of the Spencer Reporter.

5. WATCH FOR PROGRESS 2026

The Spencer Reporter's Progress 2026 will be published in the Friday, Feb. 27, edition. It will feature the Citizen of the Year announcement, as well as features on local businesses and organizations.

COUNTY ATTORNEY WORKING WITH REP. JONES ON BILL TO PROTECT CHILD SEX ABUSE VICTIMS



On Feb. 4, Rep. Megan Jones, R-Sioux Rapids (far left), welcomed a group of constituents, including Clay County Attorney Travis Johnson (second from left), to the state Capitol to advocate for HF2135, a bill that would create limits on discovery depositions involving minor victims. Also pictured are Rep. John Wills, R-Spirit Lake, Sen. Lynn Evans, R-Aurelia, and constituents. (Photo submitted)

Bill aims to limit victim trauma as criminal cases play out

NICK LOWREY
News Editor
nlowrey@spencerdailyreporter.com

Iowa is one of two states that allow victims of child sexual abuse to be forced into a deposition and questioned by their alleged abuser's defense lawyers before trial.

In such cases, young victims are forced to relive their abuse under questioning from a hostile attorney, sometimes while their accused abuser is in the room or watching via webcam. The victims' parents aren't allowed in the room, though a third-party victim advocate is allowed. Still, the whole experience is both traumatic and unnecessary, said Clay County Attorney Travis Johnson.

"I've seen hundreds of kids get deposed, and it is rare that they don't break down," Johnson said. "These are children who are traumatized by the abuse, and they are traumatized again every time they have to relive it."

That's why he's been working with state Rep. Megan Jones, R-Sioux Rapids, on a bill that would put new limits on when discovery depositions involving minors are allowed and how they can be conducted. Jones agreed to sponsor and file what has become House File 2135 in the 2026 legislative session.

"We need to have this discussion," she said. "We're talking about victims here, people who, through no fault of their own, got dragged into a situation because of someone else. And so we need to talk about how we can do the least amount of damage to them moving forward."

Johnson, who prosecutes between 15 and 17 child sex abuse cases each year, said child victims of sexual abuse typically have to recount their story multiple times before their case is resolved, and each time is traumatic. First, they're interviewed by investigators; in some jurisdictions, this can mean multiple interviews, but best practices call for a recorded forensic interview conducted by investigators who specialize in interviewing child sexual abuse victims. When a victim is deposed, Johnson said, prosecutors prepare the victim for questioning by watching their forensic interview. Then the victim is forced to recount their alleged

abuse under questioning from an often hostile defense lawyer. Finally, a victim must be prepared to testify during trial, which means watching their interview again, recounting the abuse in court, and facing yet more questions from defense lawyers.

Often, a deposition is so traumatic that the victim or their family decides that testifying during a trial isn't worth the extra anguish it would cause them and asks the prosecutor to make a plea deal, even if it means a lesser sentence for the abuser. Johnson said about 20% of the child sex abuse cases he prosecutes end that way. He said forcing a child victim who's already suffering from "trauma fatigue" to testify through a subpoena isn't something he's usually willing to do.

"I've definitely given better deals because the family doesn't want to hurt their child anymore," Johnson said.

There's not much that can be done about the need to interview a victim in a criminal investigation. Nor can much be done about the need for a victim to testify during a trial. Defendants have a constitutional right to face their accusers and question

HOUSE FILE 2135
continued on 3A

LEVY INCREASE
continued on 3A

State Patrol identifies victim in fatal Iowa Lakes bus crash

RUSS MITCHELL
Managing Editor
news@spencerdailyreporter.com



Carter Johnson

Iowa Lakes Community College and the Iowa State Patrol on Thursday confirmed that Carter "Tater" Johnson, a 19-year-old freshman from Rapid City, South Dakota, was the student athlete who died when his baseball team's charter bus left the roadway and rolled into a ditch at 11:06 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 11.

The Lakers were about 70 miles into a 600-mile trip to play a series of games starting Thursday at North Arkansas State.

An Iowa State Patrol accident report suggests the team's bus driv-

er "failed to negotiate a curve" on Iowa Highway 4 near Twin Lakes and overcorrected.

Lt. Aaron Smidt of the Iowa State Patrol called the Calhoun County "S" curve "an active area for us."

"We've had, I believe, four fatalities at that location in the last 10 years," he said.

Two of the 33 occupants were thrown from the bus and trapped under the wreckage, according to the crash report.

During a press conference Thursday at the Estherville campus, Smidt confirmed that players in a trailing Iowa Lakes Commu-

nity College van saw the rollover and tried to save Johnson's life.

"I was on location myself," the patrol lieutenant said. "First responders did make note that CPR provided by those student athletes was very impressive."

The other 32 occupants sustained varying degrees of injuries.

"I can't go into any detail with that, but I can report everybody is stable," he said. "It's going to take some time for them to recover."

Iowa Lakes President Scott Stokes said the community college is providing counseling and academic support to students who were impacted by the crash.



Iowa Lakes Community College President Scott Stokes and Iowa State Patrol Lt. Aaron Smidt offer remarks Thursday, Feb. 12, in the aftermath of a bus crash that claimed one life and injured 32 others. (Photo by Russ Mitchell)

FATAL BUS ACCIDENT
continued on 3A

INSIDE
BUSINESS & AG.....7A

CLASSIFIEDS.....11A
ENTERTAINMENT.....8A

FRIENDS & FAMILY.....6A
OPINION.....4A

RECORDS.....5A
SPORTS.....9A-10A, 12A

ISSUE 14
VOL 2026

FIND MORE ONLINE
SpencerDailyReporter.com
Facebook.com/spencerdailyreporter

7 39292 00060 2

SPENCER COMMUNITY THEATRE PRESENTS

The SOUND of MUSIC

DIRECTED BY LARRY UNTIET

SHOWTIMES

FEBRUARY 27-28, 2026 • 7:30PM
MARCH 1, 2026 • 2:00PM
MARCH 5-7, 2026 • 7:30PM

Purchase tickets at sctplayhouse.com, or stop in the box office M-F 10 to 5, or one hour before performance time

ADVANCED OPENING
\$25 PER TICKET
AT THE BOX OFFICE

OR SCAN CODE TO BUY ONLINE
CALL 712-262-7336 FOR MORE INFORMATION