

# OPINION

GUEST COMMENTARY

## Older Iowans — don't miss out on new tax savings

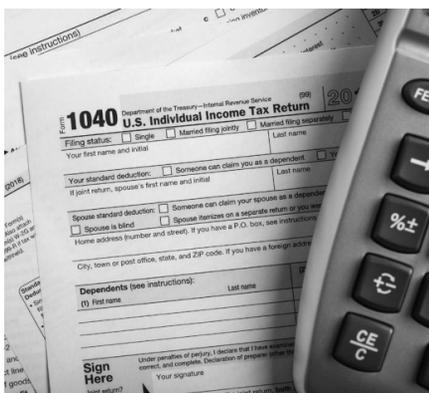


CHUCK GRASSLEY  
U.S. SENATOR

### Q: WHAT DO IOWA SENIORS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW ENHANCED TAX DEDUCTION?

A: The Republican-led Congress last year passed historic tax relief for Americans that included a new enhanced tax deduction for seniors effective for tax years 2025 through 2028. These

savings are geared to help older taxpayers living on fixed incomes make ends meet. Iowans need to be aware of this new provision when they file their tax returns so they don't miss out on the savings. For tax year 2025, taxpayers must have been born before Jan. 2, 1961 to qualify. The enhanced tax deduction allows eligible seniors to deduct up to \$6,000 (individuals) or up to \$12,000 (filing jointly) on their tax returns. The deduction gradually phases out for individual taxpayers with income above \$75,000/\$150,000 for joint filers. This enhanced deduction that President Donald Trump signed into law on July 4 as part of the landmark Working Families Tax Cuts Act adds up to sizable tax savings for seniors. Keep in mind, the enhanced deduction increases the amount of income seniors can earn before owing federal income tax in addition to any other deductions they may qualify for, including the standard deduction and additional standard deduction for the elderly or blind. For the 2025 tax year, the standard deduction and additional deduction for the elderly amount to



\$34,700 for those married filing jointly or qualifying surviving spouse; and, \$17,750 for single. Combined with the enhanced tax deduction, qualifying seniors' income up to \$23,750 for individuals and \$46,700 for married seniors filing jointly is shielded from federal income tax. I hear regularly from Iowa seniors who stretch every dollar to pay the bills. I'm glad the Working Families Tax Cuts law will allow them to keep more of their own money in their pockets.

To claim the deduction, individuals must have a valid Social Security Number that is issued by the Social Security Administration before their 2025 tax return is due. Important: On IRS Form 1040 or 1040-SR, check the box indicating you are 65 or older. The IRS will automatically add the enhanced deduction amount for eligible filers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### HOUSE FILE 2135

We call on the Iowa House and Senate to quickly pass HF 2135 to protect our children from rapists. All hail Rep. Megan Jones for sponsoring HF 2135, and Reps. Rick Olson, Samantha Fett and Charley Thomson for recommending it from the Judiciary Subcommittee on Feb. 4.

If a man rapes his daughter in Iowa, as soon as a complaint is made, the child is immediately interviewed on video by a trained, objective interviewer who works for an accredited child advocacy center. This video is the best oral evidence of what the child has suffered. The child is forced to relive every horrendous moment of her torture.

Abominably, the man's attorney can demand a deposition. The attorney can compel the girl to once again relive her entire torture. And additionally, the attorney can repeatedly attempt to trap the child in accusations of dishonesty and perjury.

If the case goes to trial, the rapist's attorney can once again attack the child, this time in a public setting. Because of the high risk of inflicted trauma through these attacks, mothers shield their daughters by allowing the rapist father to plead to a lower charge. The man goes to prison, but he comes back onto the street to find more victims.

HF 2135 will stop these dangerous and unnecessary depositions. HF 2135 will allow the courts to prosecute and sentence child sexual predators for their actual crimes.

We call on the Iowa House and Senate to quickly pass HF 2135 to protect our children from rapists.

— BENJAMIN UNSETH, SPENCER

### VOTE BATES FOR WARD 4 CITY COUNCIL

I am writing today because I am amazed that 83 Spencer citizens, knowing their candidate lost when the Spencer City Council, in a fiscally responsible decision to save the taxpayers of Spencer roughly \$8,000, by interviewing all of the candidates interested in the Fourth Ward City Council seat and then voting for the candidate they felt best suited for the job, rather than going to the expense of a special election.

Because of the flood and other issues, this council is facing some really tough budgeting concerns and tacking on another \$8,000 because a group of disgruntled voters were unhappy with the council's choice is an unnecessary expense. Since you are such forward-looking citizens, I have an easy solution for the 83 of you who found it was necessary to solicit or sign this petition: Each of you send in \$96.39 to the city of Spencer for election expense, which will hopefully cover the total election expense.

For the other voters of the Fourth Ward, please get out and vote for Duane Bates. I have known Duane and served on a couple of boards with him and known him for many, many years. He is a true supporter of all that is really good about Spencer, northwest Iowa's "success city." He has supported many, many projects, all for the good of Spencer, and is truly a positive individual who can really read a financial statement, has great ideas and, in my opinion, would be a total asset to the Spencer City Council and the citizens of Spencer!

— TOM R. HOWE, SPENCER

THE COMMSTOCK REPORT

## The ICE man cometh for livestock producers



DAVID KRUSE  
COMMSTOCK INVESTMENTS

Feed costs are favorable, but a number of major challenges are contributing to cost inflation in the pork and other livestock industries. We all know that hog barns, feedlots and dairies use a strong component of undocumented immigrants in their labor force. Super-charged Immigration enforcement is no longer a potential threat that is coming ... ICE is here, and it is having an impact on the labor force used by livestock producers in this region. Workers are gone ... disappeared. For example, ICE was reportedly waiting outside the school in Sibley for the parents to come pick up their kids so they could move on them. Many other cities and counties are reporting visits by ICE, with one report of ICE visiting a county jail, which is actually where they ought to be checking (Cerro Gordo County). They had none ... just American criminals. That is dominantly the case. Hog producers tell me that the workers they typically hire to wash barns are gone. Regular employees are absent, and replacements are nowhere to be found. There is a critical labor shortage in livestock barns developing in this region. As the crux of the worker shortage has to do with immigration enforcement, not everyone will be sympathetic to farmers, but it is what it is.

All the news is about Minneapolis, where ICE made headlines. I am told in first-hand accounts from contacts there that whatever we were seeing happening on the regular news ... that it was far worse. The impact ripples outward. It sets the tone for the labor force of the entire region. I have talked to a producer that was going to try to find a buyer that he could lease/sell his barns to as he could not find help. He said that there has not been a new barn built here in five years and that some sow herd liquidation is resulting from the labor crisis. He was getting \$39.50 per pig space, and he believed that was going to go up \$2 to \$3 per pig or no one is going to go through what they have to go through to get labor. The \$2 to \$3 will not likely cut it. A hog producer told me that he had two barns that were empty waiting for pigs, and he was burning dryer gas, like it was money, keeping them thawed out during the arctic blast. He said that he was too old for this, and I would guess that is a common demographic today with producers that tend to barns. Larger integrated companies who run the barns fare no better with labor. With ICE around, many workers have gone to ground. If ICE stays around, they will eventually move to wherever they can feel safe. Until recently, that was here. Workers with years of livestock experience are now being caught up in the ICE dragnet.

While specific 2026 reporting did not focus on a single, major meatpacking raid in the first few weeks of the year, immigration enforcement and anxiety among immigrant communities are rising from them just being nearby. ICE shows up anywhere in a packing plant town and worker absenteeism rises. ICE is playing with fire with the food supply chain. For someone who is worried about affordability, this will not reduce food prices.

The general consensus that I get from the Ag sector is that what they think about it makes

a difference if they are dependent on undocumented workers in their business or not. Nothing is as big a problem if it doesn't directly impact you. An example being cattle producers having no problem with President Donald Trump until he said that beef prices were too high. Even if they employ no undocumented workers, they are spread throughout the food supply chain so that the indirect impact is unavoidable. Fewer hogs weaken the corn market.

The consensus opinion is that everyone wanted the southern border closed and the worst of the worst apprehended and deported. The first was accomplished, and they have made great progress on the second. Keep at that. They now go after anyone who looks the least bit suspicious or has the wrong name, and even take American citizens into temporary custody before clearing them. Being a citizen initially gets you no softer treatment. I have a nephew and son-in-law who now carry their passports on their person.

The intent of this orchestrated domestic turmoil is meant to purposely deter prospective immigrants who once saw the U.S. as being that shining city on a hill from coming here. I expect this will have success. The administration is tightening down on legal immigration as well, so that is not an option. Only Microsoft can afford those visas.

One result of the labor supply, supply chain disruption is that pork prices and subsequently hog prices are going to rise. Beef prices have set the benchmark for higher demand. Obstacles to herd expansion in the hog industry are structural rather than cyclical that will have to be overcome. Here is a true story. A few decades ago, I was standing in a neighbor's yard who was having a farm sale. The auctioneer was about to sell some farrowing crates. Someone commented that the hog industry did not have to worry about integrators taking over because "it was too much work to raise hogs." Could not have been more wrong. The industry was about to adopt a new generation of production facilities. This was about the time when IBP sent buses to Mexico to bring back workers. You can see that this has a long history as well as a long history of not dealing with it. Those immigrants were never given an opportunity for citizenship and are now being treated as illegal despite a long residency, breaking no laws while being here and contributing to community and economic development. They are being rejected by those that do not know them determined to deport them. Their progeny became citizens by birthright, were educated, have become successful and do not work in the same industry that their parents did. These families made a generational sacrifice to follow the only route open to them to become Americans.

There is truth to the statement that raising hogs is a lot of work. The industry will have to adapt again to reduce labor. The current generation of pork production technology is still too labor-intensive and a new one will have to replace it. Industry productivity gains have been phenomenal and have resulted in maintaining pork production from fewer sows. Building designs that reduce labor will require higher capital expense. Robotics and AI will play a major role in the next-generation pork industry. Anyway ... 2026 is going to be a tough year to run hog barns and dairies, finding workers to employ in our food supply chain.



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Forms must be submitted no later than two weeks prior to the wedding date.

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