

Opinion

# Drug prices shouldn't be a mystery

By Rep. Ashley Hinson

When you go to the pharmacy, the price shouldn't feel like a mystery. Nor should you be faced with sky-high costs for medication you need.



Rep. Ashley Hinson

But for too many Iowans, pharmacy benefit managers — the middlemen in the

drug supply chain — are driving up costs behind the scenes while families pay the price.

That's why I supported new reforms to finally hold PBMs accountable. These reforms force more transparency, set fair rules for Medicare contracts and prevent PBMs from profiting off higher drug costs.

These changes help lower costs for patients and keep local pharmacies open in Iowa com-

munities. It's a good step toward ending shady middleman practices.

However, we have a lot more to do to meaningfully lower health care costs and ensure America's patients have access to affordable health care. I'll keep pushing back on PBMs' unfair and deceptive pricing schemes against Iowa patients!

**PROTECTING IOWA'S DRIFTLESS AREA**

The Driftless Area is a special place for families across Iowa — home to family farms, incredible wildlife and some of the most beautiful landscapes in our state. That's why I recently reintroduced bipartisan legislation to empower farmers and landowners with conservation tools and protect this one-of-a-kind region for generations to come.

The original program ran from 2012 to 2017,

and it worked. It helped reduce flood risk, protect wildlife habitat, and safeguard the land and water that make the Driftless Area such a treasure.

Now, we have the opportunity to bring this proven program back and build on its success — at no cost to the taxpayer.

**AROUND IOWA**

My team enjoyed connecting with local leaders at the Dubuque

Area Chamber Membership Breakfast and participating in a "Power Hour" chief chat with Dubuque's firefighters and police officers. We're proud to support the first responders who serve and protect our community.

The team also made several stops around Delaware County, including visits to Dundee, Delhi, Hopkinton, and the Colesburg Public Library.

Opinion

# Put Iowa first by keeping funds local

By Abram Tubbs and Doug Benjamin

A debate that could impact the direction of our economy for decades is brewing at the Iowa Capitol.

A recent study by the Common Sense Institute revealed that public entities like schools, cities and counties are holding nearly \$2.5 billion of taxpayer dollars outside of Iowa financial institutions through vehicles called joint investment trusts. In doing

so, they're denying their communities the positive benefits that come when money is reinvested in the local economy.

In community banking, the dollars in an account don't sit idle — they fuel local lending and build wealth. Deposits in your local bank help fund home mortgages, finance small businesses and provide credit for the agriculture industry.

This cycle of local deposits and local lending keeps money where it

matters most — in our communities, helping it grow and thrive.

When these dollars leave our state through these investment trusts, it shrinks our economy and tax base — making it even more difficult to fund local governments.

Unfortunately, billions of dollars in deposits have already left our hometown banks, and there's a real risk of losing billions more. In turn, that could cost Iowa billions in lending capacity and the eco-

nomie growth that would result.

Even worse, joint investment trusts paid kickbacks of nearly \$2 million to private associations in Iowa in 2025 to incentivize the removal of these deposits from community banks and the communities they serve.

The good news is, there are relatively simple solutions to this issue. The Iowa Legislature should place explicit limitations on the amount of local

government funds that can be invested outside their community. This will help ensure these taxpayer dollars are available to support lending by local institutions, further strengthening our small-town economies.

I also encourage school board members, city councilors and county supervisors to consider the broader impact of their decisions. Let's keep taxpayer money local and give our communities a better chance

to thrive.

Through action on this issue, our elected officials can put Iowa first — keeping funds local and fueling our economy.

Abram Tubbs is CEO and chairman of the board at Ohnward Bank & Trust in Monticello and Co-CEO of the parent company, Ohnward Bancshares in Maquoketa. He is also the current chairman of the Iowa Bankers Association.

Doug Benjamin is CEO of Keystone Savings Bank in Marengo.

Opinion

# School funding set in Iowa legislature

By State Rep. Dean Fisher

As I write this, we are in our final hours of "funnel week." In order



Dean Fisher

Friday, Feb. 20.

That deadline creates a flurry of activity as we press to get our individual bills through their subcommittees and through the full committee. Several of the bills I've filed have passed the funnel deadline, includ-

ing a bill to give courts greater subpoena powers over online transactions by those that are behind on child support, a bill to make it illegal in Iowa to give an employer a false Social Security number, a bill to make it illegal to falsely claim education credentials and a bill to strike land use planning principles from the code.

This week, much progress was made on securing a final deal for Supplemental State Aid for K-12 Schools. On Monday Feb. 16, the House Appropriations Committee met to pass the Senate's SSA bill, SF 2201 with an amendment.

While the Senate's bill originally called for set-

ting SSA at 1.75%, our amendment set SSA at 2.25%. It also included \$14 million to increase pay for educational support staff (para-educators). Our goal in fighting for this funding every year for the past few years is to raise the pay for our paraprofessionals who do such essential, difficult work.

Throughout the week, House and Senate leadership worked to settle on an SSA bill that could pass both chambers. The final agreement includes several provisions. It sets SSA at 2%. This brings the SSA to \$8,148 per student, an increase of \$160 over last school year. It makes changes to the enrollment count process

to ensure schools are funded accurately based on their actual student numbers.

It shifts the funding source for the budget guarantee to the state, ensuring local property taxes don't rise to meet the budget guarantee requirement. House Republicans also secured \$7 million of the \$14 million we originally proposed to increase pay for paraprofessionals.

House Republicans will continue to fight for the other \$7 million in the appropriations negotiations later in session.

We often hear the complaint from the Democrats that we are "underfunding public

schools," but the numbers seem to tell a different story.

According to the most recent Certified Annual Report related to Iowa school funding, Iowa public schools spent \$23,711.08 per K-12 student during the 2023-2024 school year. The total number of students that school year was 483,698.7. The average class size in Iowa is roughly 20 students.

That means Iowa is spending almost \$474,000 per classroom. The average teacher salary in Iowa is about \$63,500. With benefits included, it is about \$85,000. That means roughly \$389,000 of non-teacher salary spending per classroom!

That is hardly "underfunding public schools."

Iowa's K-12 public schools receive funding from three levels of government. Local, state and federal governments all provide various amounts of tax dollars for K-12 school districts.

Across all three levels of funding plus various other financing sources, the total amount of taxpayer funding in the 2023-2024 school year for public schools was about \$11.6 billion. That is certainly a significant taxpayer investment into Iowa's K-12 public schools.

As always, I look forward to seeing you at the Capitol, or in the district.

Opinion

# Find purpose, encourage those around you

By J.O. Parker, Poweshiek County Chronicle Republican

Debbie and I watched Hollywood Week on American Idol on Monday night.

As we watched the various performers and listened to the judge's comments, I started thinking about how hard that would be to be a judge on show of that caliber.

Some of the performers knocked it out of the park while others struggled and faltered. What I noticed is some performers make too many excuses and then beat themselves up for missing it or not going on to the next round.

Folks, that is life.



J.O. Parker

Sometimes you have try again.

Sometimes you have to go back to the drawing board and reevaluate and give it another shot.

I pray for those folks, that they find their purpose and fit in life.

Anyway, I judge 4-H photography. I don't begin to claim that my judging skills are on the same level as American Idol judges, because they are not.

But they are important to the young people I judge.

My goal in being a judge is to help young people improve. Some years ago I was asked to meet with 4-H'ers at the Grinnell Drake Library for a pre-county fair photo judging session.

I worked with extension staff to give 4-H'ers tips on making better photos.

This young 4-H member from Jasper County, who was in a Grinnell 4-H Club, brought me a photo of a herd of cows next to a barn.

I scanned the photo with my eyes before turning to the young man and asking, "What is your focal point or subject?"

I explained that he had a photo of all these beautiful cattle, but what makes it a good photo? What draws your attention to the cattle?

I asked a little more about the cows and where he took the photo. Then I asked him to return to the barn and get close up of one of the cows and focus on that animal.

I could see that a light bulb went off.

He returned and brought home a beautiful photo of a cow chewing its cud, almost with grace.

That photo won a blue ribbon at the county fair and then went on to win blue at the Iowa State Fair.

It was a proud moment for me as a photography judge.

Sometimes the key isn't being the best or having the best, but giving your best in everything you do.

It may not make the final cut, but what a proud feeling it is to know that you gave it your all.

Moving on I've been struggling with a number of health issues for almost a year now.

To be honest, I'm getting kind of tired of it all.

First, it was colon cancer, and then I had a blood clot in my right leg during the summer months. And since last fall, I've been dealing with some back issues.

Somehow I developed a

bulging disk in my lower back, and that has put pressure on my sciatic nerve. I've had a couple cortisone shots, and I am currently going to physical therapy in Grinnell.

It's been slow going, and I'm doing my best to push through the pain.

I know that this too will pass. Better days are ahead.

I encourage you this week to go out and give your best. Don't settle for second. Learn from your experience and challenges and make the best of every day of your life.

And while you are at it, smile and encourage those around you. And if you have a few extra dollars, do something nice for someone else.

Have a great week, and always remember that "Good Things are Happening" every day.