

2023 Legislative Session Accomplishments - Part 1

I will cover the accomplishments of the 2023 legislative session in 2 parts, first this week and then next week. The legislative session for 2023 ended on May 4th, 2023. It was a productive session and many of the issues on which I have campaigned and worked, made significant and in some cases, historic, progress! I hope you can see that, even though work remains for us to do, promises were kept and that we did what we said we were going to do and what we were elected to do.

Budget, Taxes, and Jobs

When I campaigned for office I said I would work for: fiscal responsibility and a balanced budget, lower taxes, and an economic climate favorable to more and better job and career opportunities

What we did:

Balanced the Budget: We passed a conservative budget that puts taxpayers first as we have done for the past decade, one that spends \$8.5 billion, close to last year's budget. This is a fiscally responsible budget that fills the emergency reserve funds to their required levels while leaving a healthy ending balance which allows us to be able to respond to unexpected expenses or shortfalls. At the same time, we made sure the essential priority functions of state government were funded, like education, workforce programs, Medicaid, nursing homes, services for the disabled, mental health, HHS case work, public safety, the prison system and our court system. Basically, we are managing the budget the same as you have to do in your home or business.

Property Tax Reform: We have been hearing about the high cost of property taxes and increased property valuation assessments from constituents. The bill we passed is the first of a multi-year effort to rein in property taxes. Total property tax relief is \$100 million. It provides a series of controls to protect taxpayers in which levy rates are automatically reduced when the growth in assessment values goes past a certain level. It simplifies and consolidates the number of levies and reinstates hard levy caps. There are also increased property tax

exemptions for seniors 65 and over and veterans. Local governments will be required to contact property owners and notify them of upcoming changes to their property tax bill. Bond issues are restricted to be voted on only in the November general election when voter participation is the highest.

SNAP (Food Stamp) Reform: This bill is designed to address the large overpayment (not fraud) SNAP rate in Iowa identified by the federal government. It establishes income, asset, and identity verification requirements for the SNAP program and improves the processes and technology to establish the eligibility of an applicant in real-time. The income test for Iowa currently is 160% below the federal poverty level (FPL). This does not change that. This reform will likely find some are disenrolled from SNAP but that will be because they weren't eligible from the start. This is to ensure that only those who are truly in need are eligible and will get the benefits and to provide accountability for taxpayer dollars.

Youth Employment Bill: Allows youth 14-17 to work longer hours, thus helping mitigate workforce shortages. This bill balances safety, educational, and developmental concerns while removing arbitrary and antiquated barriers for ambitious young Iowans wishing to work and earn money.

Fresh Milk Bill: This bill provides for the on-farm, small scale production and sale of raw, unpasteurized, ungraded milk. The bill helps to meet the niche market demand while promoting strong, local connections between consumers and producers.

Midwifery: Allows the licensing of the practice of certified professional midwives. Establishes a Board of Midwifery under the Board of Nursing. Allows a midwife to administer certain drugs. Requires insurance to cover the services of certified professional midwives. Requires a midwife consult with a doctor or certified nurse midwife (different from a certified professional midwife) in the case of high-risk pregnancies.

Rural Emergency Hospitals: This creates a new license for rural hospitals called rural emergency hospitals. That means a facility that provides rural emergency health services 24/7 and does not provide any inpatient acute care. It will allow those hospitals to receive a

higher rate under Medicare, providing an extra infusion of funding for rural hospitals.

Governor's Reorganization Bill: In this bill the governor is realigning state departments in order to streamline the functioning of state government and make it more efficient. It takes 37 government agencies down to 16 and eliminates 513 currently unfilled positions.

Teacher Workforce: Eased restrictions for out-of-state teachers wanting to teach in Iowa. Allowed teacher candidates under 21 who have met the requirements to be able to teach.

Iowa Office of Apprenticeship: Established the Iowa Office of Apprenticeship to oversee the efforts to develop skills needed in industries experiencing workforce challenges.

What we still have left to do: We will continue to balance the budget and to work on the multi-year effort on property tax reform. Our goals are leaving more money in Iowans' pockets, creating an economic environment favorable for growth, and making Iowa more economically competitive with other states.

Education

When I campaigned for office I said I would work for: greater local control of schools by parents and families, protection for students from indoctrination, and expanded educational choice

What we did:

Educational Savings Accounts: We passed the governor's top priority this session, which was expanding school choice. Parents who choose to enroll their child in an accredited private school will receive \$7635, which is the amount of per pupil funds allocated annually by the state, to use for tuition, fees, and other qualified expenses. The money will go into an account for the student. Each family and child is individual and unique, so the more options we can offer parents the better student needs will be met and the better education for all our students will be. That choice shouldn't be limited to families who can afford it.

Prohibit Sexually Explicit Materials: Prohibits an educational program and library materials in our schools from allowing any material with a description or depiction of a sex act as defined in Iowa law 702.17. Right now sexually explicit material is very easy for a minor to access, even in schools as books containing this pornographic material are available there. This kind of material damages children and introduces struggles and addictions families must deal with. It fuels a variety of sexual crimes and thus it creates victims that are hurt and damaged. Government's primary responsibility is to protect the people, especially children.

Prohibits Sexual Activity & Gender Identity Indoctrination: Mandates that human growth and development curriculum (sex ed) in grades K-6 should be age-appropriate, research-based, and should not contain any instruction on gender identity or sexual activity. Most parents do not want others to teach their children about sexual activity and gender identity because they involve family religious beliefs about sexuality and sexual ethics. Many students, parents, or families do not agree with the viewpoint held by some schools regarding these issues. Therefore, teaching on this subject should be left with the family at home.

Bathroom Bill: This bill requires that bathrooms in schools are to only be used by persons of the same biological sex. This also applies to any area where a student may be in a state of undress: a locker room, shower facility or overnight accommodations. This bill is intended to protect all students' right to constitutional privacy and a safe and secure environment at school.

School Investigations Reform: Establishes several requirements preventing bad actors in schools going from one school to the next avoiding accountability and kids continuing to become victims.

Classroom Violence: Lays out guidelines for schools to use handling incidents of violence at school while still giving the school leeway to adjust based on the specific situation. This bill is intended to make school a safer learning environment for students, to give teachers back up by the administration, and to give the administrators legal back-up.

What we still have left to do: Better enforcement still needs to be implemented for those schools that persist in violating the prohibition on teaching and promoting critical race theory ideas. We need to deal with the indoctrination of critical race theory and LGBT ideology promoted at our Regents universities through means unrelated to academic freedom in the classroom. More needs to be done to protect children in the society-at-large from exposure to the sexualized culture. The preservation of access to bathrooms based on biological sex needs to be required to protect women and children in society outside of school.

Part 2 of the 2023 legislative accomplishments will be in next week's newsletter.

Feel free to contact me with ideas, thoughts, and concerns. My phone is 319-987-3021 or you can email me at sandy.salmon@legis.iowa.gov . I want to hear what you are thinking and will listen to your input. Together we will work to make a difference for the future of Iowa. Thank you very much for the honor of representing you!

Sincerely,

Sandy