

A Busy First Week of Session!

The first week of the legislative session went quickly by with big activities each day! On Monday, other legislators and I were sworn in to office, promising to uphold the U.S. constitution and the Iowa constitution. Tuesday the governor gave the Condition of the State address laying out her priorities. On Wednesday we heard from the Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court, Susan Christensen, on the state of the judiciary. Thursday the Adjutant General of the Iowa National Guard spoke about the status of the National Guard. On Friday we watched the governor get sworn in to office and attended the Inaugural Ball.

I am looking forward to seeing you at my town hall meetings, all of which will be held on Saturday mornings. These meetings are scheduled all over my district in Bremer, Butler, Chickasaw and Floyd counties and are set as follows:

Saturday Jan. 28th in Waverly at the city library from 9 to 10 a.m.

Saturday Jan. 28th in Charles City at the Floyd County Museum from 11 to Noon

Saturday Feb. 4th in Greene at the city library from 9 to 10 a.m.

Saturday Feb. 4th in New Hampton at the city library from 11 to Noon.

Saturday Feb. 11th in Sumner at the city library from 9 to 10 a.m.

Saturday Feb. 11th in Nashua at the Nashua Welcome Center (Gateway to Northeast Iowa Welcome Center) from 11 to Noon.

Saturday Feb. 18th in Parkersburg at the city library from 9 to 10 a.m.

Saturday Feb. 18th in Denver at the community room from 11 to Noon.

Saturday Feb. 25th in Fredericksburg at the city library from 9 to 10 a.m.

Saturday Feb. 25th in Allison at the city library from 11 to Noon.

In the Iowa Senate I serve on the following committees: Education, Health and Human Services, State Government, Justice Systems Appropriations, and as Vice-Chair of Veteran Affairs.

School Choice – First out of the Gate

The governor's top priority this session is expanding educational choice and it was the first bill heard in committee this week. The room was packed, with both supporters and opponents.

Here are the provisions of her Educational Savings Account (ESA) bill:

1. Parents who choose to enroll their child in an accredited private school will receive \$7598 (if SSA is raised 2.5%), 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.
2. ESA's will be available to students based upon the following eligibility:
 - a. Year 1 – 2023-2024:
 - i. All Kindergarten Students
 - ii. All Public School Students
 - iii. Private school students at or below 300% Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is \$83,250 for a family of 4
 - b. Year 2 – 2024-2025:
 - i. All Kindergarten Students
 - ii. All Public School Students
 - iii. Private school students at or below 400% FPL, which is \$111,000 for a family of 4
 - c. Year 3 – 2026-2026:
 - i. All K-12 Students in Iowa, regardless of income
3. School districts will have the flexibility to use unspent and ongoing funding from the special categorical funding streams received from the state-Teacher Leadership Compensation, Professional Development, Talented and Gifted, and Teacher Salary Supplement-as are needed for expenses in the district. Districts will be able to use this money as though it were part of their general fund. There is currently almost \$100 million unspent in these funds and almost \$250 million allocated to these funds each year.
4. These special categorical funding streams for the public school will remain with the public school. It's estimated that Iowa's public schools will retain about \$1205 worth of this special funding per student who resides in their district, yet chooses to attend a private school. This money is in addition to the property tax revenue schools

currently receive for a student who resides in the school district, whether that student attends the public school or not.

Contrary to what I've heard, this is not a voucher program. Vouchers go straight to the school bypassing the family. With ESA's, the money would go into an account for the student. The family would then decide what school to send their child. The money would follow the student to the school of the family's choice, like it does for the Iowa Tuition Grant.

Why I Support It: 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. All parents should have a choice regardless of zip code or income. Parents are the best ones to decide the educational setting for their children and the state should support that as the education of children affects the state's future. One particular educational setting does not work for all students, whether it is public school, private school or homeschool. Sometimes students that do not thrive in one setting will thrive in a different setting. This legislation will further open the options for educational settings for students, ensuring more students will have the opportunity to thrive in a setting that fits them.

Governor's Budget Proposal

Briefly, here are highlights of the governor's budget & policy proposals:

- 1) Fiscal Year 24 budget increase of \$274.6 million. This is 3.3% higher than the current Fiscal Year 23
- 2) \$83 million increase for Supplemental State Aid (SSA) for schools, which is a 2.5% increase
- 3) \$107 million for Educational Savings Accounts (ESA's) described above
- 4) \$12.5 million increase for the Regents schools
- 5) \$5.5 million increase for community colleges
- 6) \$1.26 million increase for the Iowa Tuition Grant
- 7) \$15 million for Nursing Home Rebasing
- 8) Expanding MOMS program to support women in crisis pregnancies
- 9) Establish four 1-year OBGYN fellowships to practice in rural and underserved communities for 5 years
- 10) Establish a Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) license

- 11) \$12 million increase to expand the Health Careers Apprenticeship Program
- 12) Realignment of 37 cabinet agencies to 16 cabinet agencies
- 13) Limitations on ESG (Economic, Social, and Governance) scores usage associated with state funds

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