

NEWSLETTER

infoNET NEWSLETTER

The infoNET Newsletter helps advocates with disabilities stay up to date on current issues in the Legislature, the governor's office, and U.S. Congress. It also provides information on how to be a more effective advocate, how to connect with other advocates, and when there are opportunities to bring your issue to the attention of lawmakers and opinion leaders.

Current Newsletter PDF

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Fall Issue | October 21, 2025

This newsletter is published quarterly. For more current information, check out our [weekly reports](#) during the legislative session and [breaking news](#).

Federal Government Shuts Down

When people disagree, they usually talk about their differences and work out a compromise. Unfortunately, that did not work for our Federal government, despite the fact that Republicans control the White House (President) and Congress (US House of Representatives & US Senate). All three of these bodies must agree to a budget, or there is no money to keep our Federal government open.

When Congress and the President could not agree on the Federal budget by the start of the new federal fiscal year (October 1, 2025), the Federal government shut down. This is a very fluid situation. By the time you read this, Congress may have already solved the budget problem and the government could be back to normal. Either way, the shutdown is affecting people with disabilities.

When the federal government shuts down, services may stop or be delayed. It may be hard to get help from a federal agency as some staff are laid off. Generally, social security (SSA, SSI) payments and Medicare coverage are not affected, but there may not be enough staff to help with any troubleshooting. Here are a few ways government shutdowns [impact people with disabilities](#):

- **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicare, Medicaid enrollments, and appeals:** Even though benefit payments are protected, the administrative functions — processing new applications, appeals, reviews, and recertifications — may slow down or stop. This can cause long wait times, delays in appeals, or gaps in care.
- **Disability Determination Services:** These state-level agencies, funded in part by federal resources, may send staff home or reduce operations, meaning that medical and vocational evaluations essential for disability adjudications are delayed.
- **Civil Rights complaint processing:** Government offices that investigate disability discrimination in education, housing and employment may be laid off or operate at reduced capacity, slowing enforcement of rights.

Some government-funded programs like **vocational rehabilitation** may be reduced or delayed.

• **Organizations that serve people with disabilities** (nonprofits, service providers) may face problems if federal funding is paused. Many people with disabilities don't have extra money to handle delays. When services are slow or uncertain, it can make life harder and push people into crisis.

Trump Administration Actions Weaken Disability Protections

Since taking office in 2025, the Trump administration has made several [executive orders](#), and policy changes that many disability organizations view as targeting disability rights or weakening protections under “**DEIA**” (**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility**). The administration says that DEIA programs are wasteful, divisive, or unfair. Here are a few examples:

- **Executive Order 14151 (“Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs And Preferring”):** This order ends federal DEIA programs and offices. It stops many services that help people with disabilities, removes accessibility projects, and takes away some accommodations.
- **Executive Order 14173 (“Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity”):**

This order canceled and limited rules for federal contractors. It ended Executive Order 11246, a rule from 1965 that required fair hiring and affirmative action for companies with federal contracts. Affirmative action is an active effort to improve employment and educational opportunities for minorities, individuals with disabilities, and women. Ending this 1965 Executive Order removed hiring goals for people with disabilities and takes away the legal basis for many other disability inclusion requirements in federal contracting. This triggered:

- **Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) Defunding and Regulatory Rollback:** After Executive Order 14173, the Trump administration suggested cutting OFCCP funding and shutting down parts of its work. They wanted to stop requiring contractors to ask about disabilities, remove the 7% hiring goal for people with disabilities, and reduce enforcement. Federal contractors were asked to submit information to show how they are “winding down” these activities.
- **Dismantling Federal Agency Civil Rights & Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Offices:** Under a Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) initiative, many civil rights, equal opportunity, and EEO offices have been downsized, restructured, or eliminated. This includes closure of the Social Security Administration's Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity, cuts in the Labor Department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, and reductions in agency DEIA offices.

- **Education Department Changes, Layoffs, and Less Civil Rights Enforcement:** US Secretary of Education Linda McMahon cut about 1,300 staff, including many in the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The Department of Education is now doing fewer civil rights investigations, especially for disability discrimination. There is also a proposed [executive order](#) to “dismantle” the Department or move its work, including oversight of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act) protections. This plan is being challenged in court.

- **Other Actions that remove supports for people with disabilities:**
 - The [removal of interpreters](#) from some federal briefings and removing and suppressing of accessibility offices or programs in agencies.
 - Guidance changes in the Department of Justice backing [rollback of ADA or accessibility guidance](#).
 - The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and other agencies issuing memos to [enforce the DEIA orders](#), requiring removal or reporting of “disguised DEIA programs.”
 - [Eliminating the Administration for Community Living \(ACL\)](#), the central institutional body that managed many disability and aging programs. This agency was created to better coordinate services to individuals that need long term supports and services.

- **These are executive orders or rule changes that have been announced, in public comment period or in the final stage of adoption.**
 - The Trump Administration is preparing to [propose a rule](#) to cut Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and strip eligibility for low-income older people and severely disabled adults and children
 - The Trump Administration has proposed an [executive order](#) and “movement” to eliminate mailed in paper ballots and some voting machines. They are also looking at a second step to require documentation of citizenship in order to fill out a federal voter registration form (Iowa accepts these forms as well as state registration forms). That may require people to pay for a certified copy of their birth certificate, which can take a lot of time depending on which state a person was born.
 - Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) intends to [rescind a final rule](#) by the Biden Administration that requires minimum staffing standards for Long-Term Care Facilities/Nursing Homes.
 - The U.S. Department of Labor published a [draft rule](#) that would exclude home care workers who provide essential medical and personal care from minimum wage and overtime pay protections as set out more broadly by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), a federal law.
 - The Trump Administration [withdrew a Biden Administration rule proposal](#) that would not allow people with disabilities to be paid less than minimum wage. This is an “equal pay for equal work” issue.
 - The US Department of Education [proposed a rule](#) to stop collecting certain data from states about students with disabilities. This information was collected to make sure students with disabilities
 - U.S. Department of Education is [canceling millions of dollars in grants for special education](#) teacher training, parent resource centers and more saying that they don't align with Trump administration priorities.
 - New and existing buildings receiving funds from the U.S. Department of Energy won't have to meet accessibility requirements in a [fast-tracked rule repeal](#). The effective date of the draft final rule published was delayed for seven months (until December 10, 2025).
 - The Trump Administration [stopped all federal funds \(\\$2.6 million/year\) for the SOAR program](#), which is Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Outreach, Access and Recovery. SOAR helped low income people and veterans access federal disability benefits and prevent homelessness.

Many disability organizations are tracking these and many other changes and their impact on people with disabilities, including students with disabilities. It is important to have an open conversation about these changes with disabilities at the table. If these changes concern you, talk to your [US Representative](#) and our state's two US Senators ([Sen. Joni Ernst](#) & [Sen. Chuck Grassley](#)). Ask them to make sure people with disabilities are at the table when decisions are made, and that important disability protections are not weakened.

DID YOU KNOW?

More than **1 in 4 adults** in the United States have a disability. Since 2019, the disability community has **grown faster** than the overall population—12% compared with 3.6%.

State Faces Budget & Medicaid Shortfall

Turning to state news, Iowa lawmakers will have their own budget challenges when they start their 100-day legislative session on Monday, January 12, 2026. A panel that looks at the Iowa's state tax revenues met on October 16 and found that our state is spending about \$1.3 billion more than what it is collecting from taxpayers. This is because the state cut income taxes several years ago. Here are highlights:

- **Iowa's current budget is \$9.4 billion.** Iowa is only collecting \$8.5 billion, leaving the State almost \$1 billion short.
 - This is a 9% drop in revenues.
 - \$198 million of that is due to federal “Big Beautiful Bill Act” passed by Congress earlier this year.
 - For next year, the year legislators will budget for in the 2026 session, the revenue gap is worse (\$1.3 billion).

- **Iowa currently has \$1.9 billion ending fund balance and \$4 billion in Taxpayer Relief Fund.** The State will use these funds to make up the difference, but those funds will only last a few years if our state's economy improves.

This panel (called the “[Revenue Estimating Conference](#)”) will look at these numbers again in December. By law, the Governor will use the December estimates when she presents her budget. The Legislature will go off the lesser of two estimates - December 2025 and March 2026.

Medicaid Budget Also Experiencing Shortfall

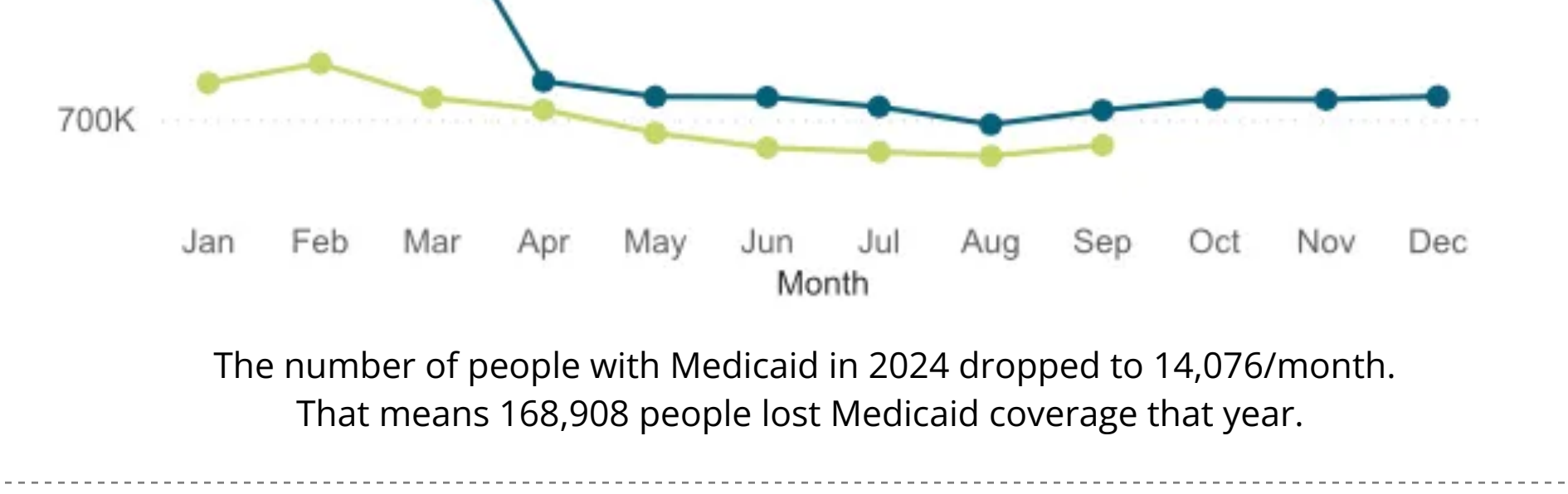
Iowa spends about \$2 billion each year on Medicaid alone. That is about 20% of the state's total budget. For the past few years the State had extra money in the Medicaid budget. There are two main reasons for that fund balance. First, the Federal government increased its share of Medicaid costs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the Federal government did not allow states to drop people off Medicaid during the public health emergency, even if they were no longer eligible. Once that ended, thousands of Iowans lost Medicaid coverage.

These two changes helped the State keep a balance - extra money - in the Medicaid budget. That balance is slowly going away, and the State will now have to add money to the Medicaid budget **just to keep services the same**. That makes it even harder to advocate for more services, Work Without Worry, waiver reform, and increasing salaries for direct care professionals.

Here's a quick look at the status of the Medicaid budget:

- **June 30, 2024:** Iowa Medicaid ended its fiscal year with a balance of \$307.1 million.
- **June 30, 2025:** Iowa's Medicaid balance went down to \$105.7 million.
- **June 30, 2026:** Iowa Medicaid is expecting to be short \$75.9 million.
- **For Fiscal Year 2027:** Iowa Medicaid is expecting to be short \$180.7 million. This includes the 2026 shortfall and adds \$18.7 million because of a drop in federal match rate. This estimate does not include the \$114 million MCO capitation rate increases expected. Fiscal Year 2027 begins on July 1, 2026 and it is the budget that Iowa lawmakers will be adopting in the 2026 legislative session. This means Iowa will need to come up with \$180.7 million more (plus the \$114 million in MCO increases) just to keep Medicaid services and provider rates the same. If the State wants to remove people from the HCBS waiver waiting lists or increase HCBS provider rates, lawmakers will have to find money on top of that \$180.7 million to do it.

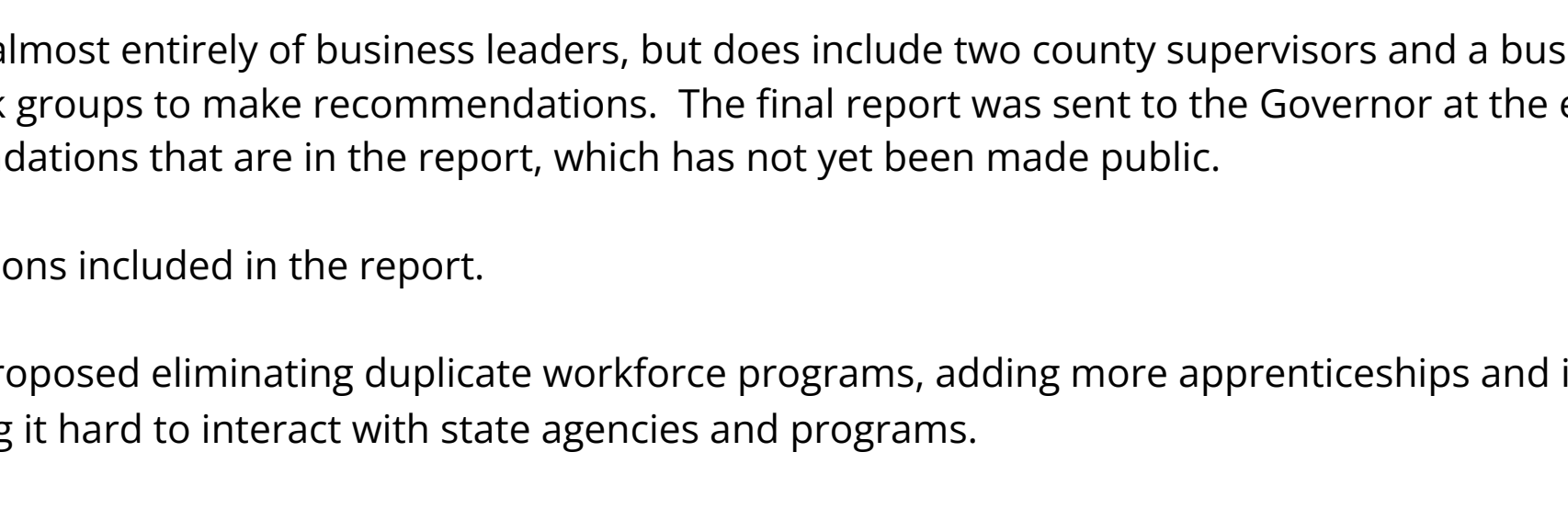
To be successful in getting funding for Medicaid, advocates need to focus on the **investment** that is made in funding Medicaid services, and the **return on that investment**. Iowans with disabilities who receive community-based services can work, avoid hospital or institutional care, and contribute to the state's economy at a lower cost.



Medical Assistance Enrollments

Data as of:

Oct-2025



Governor's DOGE Task Force Recommendations

Governor Kim Reynolds has made reorganizing state government a top priority since she took office in 2017. This year she appointed a “DOGE” Task Force to look for ways state and local governments can deliver services more efficiently (at less cost) and effectively (better service). DOGE stands for “Department of Government Efficiency.”

The [DOGE Task Force](#) is made up almost entirely of business leaders, but does include two county supervisors and a business college representative. Over 180 days, these 13 leaders met in work groups to make recommendations. The final report was sent to the Governor at the end of September. Governor Reynolds is currently reviewing the recommendations that are in the report, which has not yet been made public.

There are about 45 recommendations included in the report.

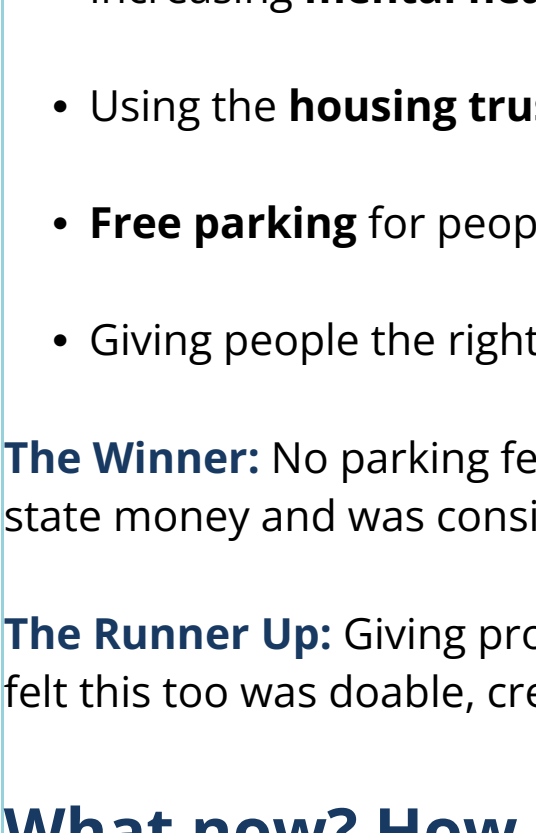
- The **workforce committee** proposed eliminating duplicate workforce programs, adding more apprenticeships and internships, and creating a “red-tape hotline” to help anyone finding it hard to interact with state agencies and programs.

- The **technology committee** suggested updates to government technology, using more cloud services, sharing state government technology resources with local governments, and providing a single user login for Iowans to pay their taxes, submit documents for state contracts, or renew their driver's license.

- The **return on taxpayer investment committee** was to find ways to stretch the tax dollar further (that is, not cutting spending but “spending smarter”). They suggested performance-based pay for teachers who help students succeed and score higher on standardized tests. They also recommended giving all public employees other options for retirement. Another recommendation was for cities and counties to share services with each other or state government.

These recommendations were just made public as we published this issue. You can find them [here](#). It is hard to know if these can be easily translated into a bill for lawmakers to consider in the 2026 legislative session and if (or how) these recommendations will impact Iowans with disabilities. Stay tuned for our analysis of these recommendations - we will discuss them in our [next Capitol Chat on October 31](#).

Carlyn's Corner: We Hear You! New Law & Policy Ideas



It may seem like we do a lot of “talking” through these newsletters and our Capitol Chats. We want more opportunities to hear from you as advocates and learn about what you want to change in Iowa. At our annual [Make Your Mark](#) conference last month, we took more time to do just that with the 200 advocates in attendance - and we made a “game” of it!

Each year Iowa legislators are invited to be on panel at [Make Your Mark](#) to share advice and wisdom about changing policy for the better. Those able to attend this year represent districts in the Des Moines area—Sen. Tony Bisignano, Rep. Eddie Andrews, Rep. Rob Johnson, Rep. Mary Madison, and Rep. Heather Matson. But this year, not only did they share their wisdom, they also listened and judged the lunch “policy game.” In our “game” 18 roundtables of advocates came up with their best ideas for new laws and policies they want passed. **Here are the new law/policy suggestions that legislators judged (in no particular order):**

- **Work Without Worry:** Removing asset/income limits for Medicaid and enacting [Work Without Worry](#) was suggested by multiple tables.
- **Uniform Accessibility Law:** Requiring our state government to provide more accessible communications so people can understand the information provided.
- Increasing **DSP (direct support professional) salaries** automatically every year.
- **Expanding HCBS options**, including more access to health care and healthy foods.
- Giving **employers tax incentives** to hire people with disabilities.
- Enacting **universal healthcare** or Medicaid for everyone.
- Increasing **mental health funding** and finding/recruiting/retaining healthcare providers.
- Using the **housing trust fund** to help prioritize hiring people with disabilities.
- **Free parking** for people with disabilities.
- Giving people the right to **choose a dentist** in any community.

The Winner: No parking fees for people with an accessible parking tag or license. Legislators chose this suggestion because it was creative, it didn't cost the state money and was considered “most likely to pass.”

The Runner Up: Giving providers receiving money under the Housing Trust fund priority if they hire people with disabilities as part of their work. Legislators felt this was doable, creative and does not require more money to make it happen.

What now? How do you pass a new law or policy?

Our September Capitol Chat featured [Shanna Sieck](#), a true advocate in action. Shanna is the founder of [Mason's Light House](#), which will be a pediatric palliative care center in Iowa. Because of Shanna, Iowa is the first state to have a special Pediatric Palliative Care Center license, which was needed for Mason's Light House.

When her family was going through something unimaginable - losing their young son to a terminal illness - Shanna thought about other families. She wanted them to have a place to go for care and comfort in Iowa, rather than driving hours away from home like her family did. To achieve her goal, Iowa law had to be changed. Without any political experience she set out to make that change earlier this year and did it in one legislative session - something that rarely happens. Shanna shared the steps she took and tips for advocates who want to work with legislators to make change:

- **Know which policymakers you need to contact.** Start with your own Representative and Senator. They can help you decide if it is a state, federal or local issue and who to contact.
- **Be able to describe the problem clearly and what outcome you want.** How will this affect Iowans? Who will it affect and how can they be helped? What needs to change? Do you know what part of the law needs to be changed?
- **Back up your problem with stories and data.** She could tell her own story, but having information on how many people are affected, costs and potential impact and examples from other states could help.
- **Offer solutions that are innovative.** When Shanna was able to show that investing in this kind of care would save the State of Iowa money, it helped her make the case.

- **Know what your policymakers value and align your solution with their values.** Saving money is always important. But if it costs money, how does that investment help them and their constituents? What's worth the investment to them?
- **Build a movement—ask for help!** Shanna did a lot on her own, but she also had to get legislators and others on her side as champions. They then could sell the idea to other legislators, in their own words. Get expert advice too.

- **Be ready to spend time on it.** You'll need to contact many people and attend meetings. Create tools and share information to tell your story. A short video can help others understand the need.
- **Be personal, polite, patient, prepared and persistent!**
- **DON'T GIVE UP!** If you are interested in working on a change in policy or a new law, contact us at the Iowa DD Council. We can help!
- **Get tips directly from Shanna by watching the September Capitol Chat video [here](#).** This is also available with ASL interpretation.

New Leaders, New Committee Chairs, Special Elections

The months between legislative sessions are the off-season. But 2025 has proven anything but typical. Leadership changes, several special elections, and changing committee assignments have made the usually quiet year very busy. Several significant leadership changes are opening up some important committee positions.

- **Rep. Stebbay Kaufmann (R-Wilton)** has been elected as the new **House Majority Leader**, taking over for **Rep. Matt Windschitl (R-Missouri Valley)**, who is stepping away from state politics to run for Congress. Rep. Windschitl plans to retire from the Legislature at the end of his term in December 2026.

- Rep. Kaufmann's move into leadership left the powerful **House Ways & Means Committee** Chair vacant. His promotion triggered a series of changes across other key committees, including **Agriculture, Commerce, Health & Human Services, and Transportation**. Here are the new leadership assignments for those committee:

- **Rep. Austin Harris (R-Moulton)** will chair the HHS Committee.
- **Rep. Carter Nordman (R-Dallas Center)** will chair the Ways & Means Committee.
- **Rep. David Young (R-Van Meter)** will chair the Commerce Committee.
- **Rep. Dan Gehlbach (R-Urbandale)** will chair the Education Budget Subcommittee.
- **Rep. Megan Jones (R-Spencer)** will chair the Transportation Committee.
- **Rep. Brooke Boden (R-Indianola)** will chair the Local Government Committee.
- **Rep. Tom Determann (R-Clinton)** will chair the Veterans Affairs Committee.
- **Rep. Derek Wulf (R-Hudson)** will chair the Agriculture Committee.
- **Rep. Devon Wood (R-New Market)** will chair the Natural Resources Committee.
- **Rep. Jeff Shipley (R-Birmingham)** will chair the International Relations Committee.

- On the Senate side, **Sen. Mike Klimesh (R-Spillville)** has taken over as **Senate Majority Leader**, following **Sen. Jack Whitver (R-Grimes)** decision to step down while undergoing treatment for brain cancer. Sen. Whitver also plans to retire at the end of 2026.

- Sen. Klimesh's promotion opens up the **Senate Health & Human Services Committee** chairmanship, as well as the **Vice Chair** position on the **Health & Human Services Budget Subcommittee**. **Sen. Kara Warme (R-Ames)** has been tapped to take over those positions.

Governor Kim Reynolds has called **six special elections** in 2025.

- **Chris Cournoyer** vacated her Senate seat to become **Lieutenant Governor** — replaced by **Sen. Mike Zimmer (D-De Witt)**.
- **Martin Graber** passed away early in the session — he was succeeded by **Rep. Blaine Watkins (R-Fort Madison)**.

- **Sami Scheetz** resigned his House seat for a position on the **Linn County Board of Supervisors** — **Rep. Angel Ramirez (D-Cedar Rapids)** was elected as his replacement. Of note, she has still not been assigned committee positions.
- **Sen. Rocky DeWitt** died earlier this summer — **Sen. Cateelin Drey** won the special election to fill his seat. She has also not yet been assigned to committees.

- Most recently, **Rep. Mike Sexton (R-Rockwell City)** resigned on September 19 to become the new **USDA Rural Development State Director**. The special election to replace him in [Horse District 7](#) has been set for **December 9, 2025**.

- During our [Make Your Mark](#) legislative panel discussion, we all got news alerts that **Sen. Claire Celsi** was moved to hospice care. Sadly, Sen. Celsi died in early October at the age of 59. The Governor has set this special election for **December 30, 2025**. If you live in [Senate District 16](#), you might want to plan to vote by mail or early at the Auditor's office, especially if you have plans to leave the state for the holiday break!

Meanwhile, top agency officials are preparing for transitions as Governor Reynolds ends her time as Governor at the end of 2026. Most notably, Health and Human Services Director **Kelly Garcia** — head of Iowa's largest state agency — stepped down on October 10. While she will stay in Iowa and work remotely, her next role has not yet been announced. **Larry Johnson**, who has led the Department of Inspections, Appeals, and Licensing (DIAL), will step into the role of HHS Director for the remainder of the Governor's time in office.

Iowa also has a new Medicaid director - **Lee Grossman**. Director Grossman is an Iowa native, but most recently led Idaho's Medicaid program. Hopefully many of you have been able to meet him virtually on the monthly Medicaid member town halls. You can register for future Medicaid Town Hall meetings [here](#).

News

verage wage for workers with disabilities under section 14(c)

\$4.15
Per Hour

Trump Administration Stops Plan to End Subminimum Wage

July 23, 2025

Trump Administration Will Continue to Allow Businesses to Pay People with Disabilities Less Than Minimum Wage



Sioux City Special Election Update

By amy · July 14, 2025

Special Election Set, Candidates Picked for Senate District #1



Session Ends, Bill Tracker Updated

May 23, 2025

Iowa's Legislative Session Has Ended

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