



This Week @ Iowa Capitol | Week 9 | March 13, 2026

Busy Week Behind, Funnel Week Ahead

It has been a busy week at the State Capitol as legislators prepared for the second legislative “funnel” deadline. By the end of this week (March 20), bills will need to have passed one chamber and cleared the committee in the opposite chamber to remain eligible for consideration for the rest of the session. It takes a lot of work to advance that far, which is why only a few of the bills introduced each year make it through the second funnel deadline.

The Senate does not plan to debate this week, so any bills that have not yet been sent to the House are most likely dead for the rest of the session. This includes [SF 2087](#), which would have counted participation in a vocational rehabilitation program as a “work search activity” for unemployment benefits. Unfortunately, that bill looks like it will die after next week.

The House is only planning to debate on Monday, so any bill left on their debate calendar after that will also likely meet a similar fate. The debate list has not yet been released but will be posted [here](#) sometime before Monday afternoon. These bills will need to appear on that list in order to keep moving through the process:

- [HF 2203](#) permits all types of **epinephrine delivery systems** to be administered in schools (not just epi pens). Nurses and schools both support this change (and no one is registered against it), so we’re not sure why it has stalled.

- [HF 2599](#) clarifies that a person and their **service animal** can be in any location where it is legal (that is, state law is more restrictive than federal law, so this bill just makes sure Iowa law does not restrict where a person can otherwise legally be with their service animal).
- [HF 2659](#) establishes an **affordable housing task force**. Many advocates have said it is hard to find affordable housing and next to impossible to find accessible housing that is affordable.
- [HF 2681](#) allows video recording systems to be placed in **special education classrooms**. Some parents think this could help with bullying and safety, while others say the bill lacks the required privacy protections that would make this legal under federal law.

Next week's Capitol Chat (March 20, Noon-12:30 pm) will review the bills that are still alive. You can register for that [here](#).



Week in Review

There were several bills on our watch list that saw movement in the last week. They include:

- **Accessible Prescriptions ([HF 2585](#))**: This bill requires pharmacies to provide an accessible prescription information option for low-vision or blind lowans. The House passed this bill unanimously (90-0) on Monday and the Senate wasted no time in passing it out of committee on Thursday. During the subcommittee meeting, legislators talked to advocates from the Iowa Council of the United Blind and the National Federation of the Blind/Iowa, who talked about how new technologies can help avoid potentially deadly medication mistakes. This bill is now safe from the funnel deadline.
- **Civil Rights Protections ([SF 579](#))**: On Tuesday, the Governor signed this bill that bans cities and counties from passing a city ordinance or local laws that are more protective than the state's **civil rights protections (Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1965)**. Even though this is going after communities who have added protections for their transgender citizens, disability advocates have been concerned about the implications for a city that may go above and beyond to create an inclusive community. The bill is now law.
- **Special Education Schools ([SF 2404](#))**: On Tuesday, the Senate passed ([32-13](#)) this bill to allow the Iowa Department of Education to allow one urban and one rural school to educate students with complex behaviors or students receiving special education services in a separate, segregated school. Funding for this would need to be appropriated, to the tune of about \$4.5 million. Parents of students receiving special education are confused and worried about this bill. If students with disabilities are forced to be isolated from their non-disabled classmates, that's a violation of federal law (IDEA). The bill is now in the [House Education Committee](#), which must approve the bill before Friday, March 20 if it is to stay alive. This is our bill of the week this week — [you can find it here](#).
- **Disruptive Students ([SF 2428](#))**: The Senate also passed this bill over to the [House Education Committee](#) on Tuesday — but this vote was unanimous (45-0). The bill tweaks the process for dealing with “disruptive students,” clarifying that it does not only apply to violent disruptions. It adds that all policies that deal with disruptive students must comply with federal disability policy (ADA, IDEA, FERPA). This bill must also make it out of the Senate committee prior to March 20 in order to stay alive.

This week, the Iowa House passed their version of “public assistance reform.” The bill ([HF 2716](#)) included an expansion of the Medicaid for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MEPD) program to allow people to earn up to 300% of the federal poverty level. This means a person on MEPD can earn about \$7,000/year more

and stay eligible for MEPD. While it does not change asset levels, it does exempt one car, pension income, and all spousal income. In addition to getting rid of the "marriage penalty," the bill also improves independence by allowing people to pay their MEPD premiums electronically.

Many advocates have had a hard time supporting this bill because it includes a number of changes that will end up causing many children and families from losing their food assistance and potentially their health coverage.

Before debating the bill, the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services had provided legislators with a "[fiscal note](#)" that explains how much the change in the MEPD program will cost the state. They estimate the cost as \$1.9 million in the first year, growing to \$5.7 million in the second year. Iowa HHS based these estimates on the number of people who were historically turned away from the program because they earned too much money.

[Rep. JD Scholten](#) (D-Woodbury) sponsored a full [Work Without Worry amendment](#) on behalf of his friend, advocate Alex Watters. "Don't we want to enable Iowans with disabilities to enter the workforce and advance their careers without the fear of losing their essential health care?," asked Scholten during debate. "By increasing or eliminating asset limits, we allow people with disabilities to save for things like a down payment on a house. By eliminating spousal income toward eligibility, we will empower people with disabilities to get married and have families. Other states have done this. Last year, Tennessee completely removed income and asset barriers with a unanimous vote."

Ultimately, the amendment was defeated ([31-62](#)) because of concerns about cost. Thanks to the many advocates who continued to ask legislators to "Let Us Work," Rep. Austin Harris further amended the bill to eliminate all spousal income and disregard one car as an asset.

"The fiscal note that we received while we were beginning debate, in my opinion, is way off," remarked Rep. Austin Harris, the bill's floor manager. "I think the best part of the bill has to do with Work Without Worry. Yes, I know some would like to have seen us go further than that, but this is a start. I think it is without a doubt a step in the right direction. We anticipate there will be some additional costs, but I don't think the costs that are reflected in the fiscal note take into account that these people are going to be able to earn more, which means they are going to pay more in taxes, which means they might be able to get off other public assistance like section 8 housing or SNAP. So there's going to be cost savings to that...We have people who are on welfare who are begging us to let them work more."

You can watch the full debate on this bill [here](#).

Budget & Election News

There were two big announcements this week that will factor into legislative moods in these final weeks of session. First, legislators got a better read on the budget situation after the Revenue Estimating Conference met on Thursday, March 12. This three-person panel of economists looks at Iowa's revenues (the money the state collects in taxes, fees, fines) and estimates how much money the state will have to spend on services. The news is not great.

- Estimates for the current fiscal year were lowered by \$46 million.
- Estimates for the next budget year (FY 2027) were lowered by \$27 million.
- The Governor recommended spending \$9.6 billion for FY 2027 (which begins July 1, 2026). That is a 2% increase, and is \$1.2 billion higher than the revenues available to spend.

You read that right — the state is collecting \$1.2 billion LESS than what it is spending. That means our state has been taking money from its savings accounts to keep from cutting budgets. Fortunately, the state has more than \$5 billion in a taxpayer relief fund that is intended to help do this, has full reserves, and about \$1.5 billion in ending fund balance to use to make the budget work. However, Iowans are worried if this is sustainable. With a war in Iran, gas prices rising, tariffs continuing to keep the cost of goods high, stress on agricultural and manufacturing jobs, and general uncertainty about the cost of living, it is concerning that Iowa is now running on a deficit budget.

So what does this mean for next year's budgets? Legislators will likely hold the line on spending, sticking with a status quo (level) budget. There will be increases for education (schools already got a 2% increase) and there will be increases for Medicaid (but just to keep things the same). Beyond that, Medicaid is likely to stay pretty flat and there won't be a lot of extra money for new projects. You can see the spreadsheet with these new numbers [here](#).

The other big news this week was on the election side. **Friday, March 13 was the deadline for legislative candidates to file their campaign paperwork with the Secretary of State.** That means we now know which State Representatives and State Senators are retiring, which ones are running again, and who have challengers in the June primary or in the November general election.

You can see the candidate list [here](#), House district map [here](#), and Senate District map [here](#).

State-Wide Office Surprises

- Secretary of State Paul Pate does not have a Democratic challenger.

- Julie Stauch, a Democratic candidate for Governor, will not appear on the ballot after having issues with her signatures. That leaves only Rob Sand on the Democratic side.

State Senators Retiring (9)

- Sen. Tom Shipley (R-Senate District 9)
- Sen. Julian Garrett (R-Senate District 11)
- Sen. Cherielynn Westrich (R-Senate District 13)
- Sen. Izaah Knox (D-Senate District 17)
- Sen. Ken Rozenboom (D-Senate District 19)
- Sen. Mike Bouselot (R-Senate District 21) — *running for Senate District 23*
- Sen. Jack Whitver (R-Senate District 23)
- Sen. Bill Dotzler (D-Senate District 31)
- Sen. Zach Wahls (D-Senate District 43) — *running for US Senate*

State Representatives Retiring (17)

- Rep. JD Scholten (D-House District 1)
- Rep. Tom Jeneary (R-House District 3)
- Rep. Zach Dieken (R-House District 5)
- Rep. Matt Windschitl (R-House District 15)
- Rep. Josh Turek (D-House District 20) — *running for US Senate*
- Rep. Jennifer Konfrst (D-House District 32)
- Rep. Ruth Ann Gaines (D-House District 33)
- Rep. Barb Kniff McCulla (R-House District 37) — *running for State Senate*
- Rep. Jon Dunwell (R-House District 38)
- Rep. Rick Olson (D-House District 39)
- Rep. Heather Matson (D-House District 42)— *running for State Senate*
- Rep. Eddie Andrews (R-House District 43) — *running for Governor*
- Rep. Shannon Latham (R-House District 55)
- Rep. Timi Brown-Powers (D-House District 61)— *running for State Senate*
- Rep. Lindsay James (D-House District 71)— *running for US Congress*
- Rep. Bob Kressig (D-House District 75)
- Rep. Monica Kurth (D-House District 98)

About half of the legislators up for re-election have no opponent in the November election (12 Senate seats, 43 House seats). Only three Senators have an opponent in the June primary: Senators Lynn Evans, David Rowley, and Annette Sweeney. There are ten Republican Representatives that will have a primary opponent: Representatives Brett Barker, Mike Bergan, Jane Bloomingdale, Mark Cisneros, Helena Hayes, Christian

Hermanson, Chad Ingels, Brian Lohse, Carter Nordman, and Devon Wood. Only one Democrat faces a primary opponent: Rep. Ken Croken.

Those that do not have an opponent in the November general election are not out of the woods yet. The opposing political party still has time to nominate a candidate (deadline is August 19, 2026).

Around the Capitol

Iowans with disabilities are at the State Capitol **every week** the Legislature has been in session. Here's proof!



Cindy Ray and Helen Mejia, advocates from the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa, waited late into the evening to witness their accessible prescription label bill pass the Iowa House. They are standing with Rep. Brett Barker (R-Story), a pharmacist who is the lead sponsor of the bill.



The Iowa DD Council also hosted advocates from Hand in Hand of the Quad Cities this week.

If you are wondering what a Capitol Advocacy Day with the Iowa DD Council looks like, [here's a view](#) from 5th graders, Breckan and David, who tagged along with their parents for Hand in Hand Parent and Participant Day. We think they did a great job on this video! Thank You to Governor Kim Reynolds and the many legislators who participated in the making of the video. [Check it out here.](#)

Mark Your Calendars!

Iowans with disabilities will again be gathering at the State Capitol to show broad support for Iowa Medicaid, Work Without Worry, and other policies that help Iowans with disabilities thrive in their community.

Find out more and register to attend Disability Advocacy Day [here.](#)

With Medicaid, We Can:

**Live.
Work.
Play.
Flourish.**

April 1st
Iowa State Capitol Building

Common Coalition | BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION IOWA | The Arc IOWA

Find all the bills we are tracking at:
iowaddcouncil.org/bill-tracker

Take action on bills by emailing your legislators at:
iowaddcouncil.org/take-action-center

Find local legislative town hall meetings in our calendar
at: iowaddcouncil.org/calendar

Find our bills of the week at:
iowaddcouncil.org/bill-of-the-week