



# 2017 Legislative Session in Review

Prepared by the Senate Democratic Staff

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## **Fighting the attack on working families and vulnerable Iowans**

This year, legislative Republicans and out-of-state special interests rammed through laws that are making Iowa a less attractive place to live, work and raise a family. They are driving down wages, cutting health care and degrading the quality of life for hard-working Iowans.

Because the priorities of legislative Republicans are out of whack, they managed to turn Iowa's \$928 million surplus into a \$130 million deficit. The problem is compounded by policy changes and budget cuts that are causing Iowa to lose federal funding and matching funds to many state agencies and programs.

All of this could have been avoided if the Branstad-Reynolds Administration had delivered on their promises to increase family incomes by 25 percent and to create more than 200,000 new jobs; and if legislative Republicans had focused on strengthening our schools, building the skilled workforce that Iowa employers need and improving quality of life for all Iowans.

Instead, they continue their big tax giveaways to out-of-state corporations, which now top \$500 million annually and are the fastest growing part of the state budget. This approach has slowed the state's economy, left the budget in the red, and made it harder—not easier—to attract and retain the top-notch workers that every Iowa community and business wants.

To fix their budget woes, Republicans have made massive cuts that force students and families to pay for their failed policies. The worst of the GOP budget includes:

- Higher tuition at community colleges and state universities
- Cuts to early childhood education and preschool
- Underfunding K-12 students and schools
- Slashing help for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault
- Eliminating a successful family planning programs and rejecting \$3 million in federal funding
- Reducing REAP funding and eliminating support for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at ISU
- Paying for fewer correctional officers at Iowa's already overcrowded prisons
- Cutting job training & assistance for Iowans with disabilities
- Slashing funding for child care assistance & grants for foster kids to go to college

Republicans are also transferring \$131 million from the state's Cash Reserve Fund to fill their budget shortfall. Paying it back means more cuts next year. This is fiscally irresponsible, bad budgeting.

Democrats continue to stand up to the attack on hard-working Iowans. We won't support unnecessary cuts that threaten public safety, the quality of higher education and job training, and the safety net provided by social services. Economic prosperity and fiscal responsibility will return when the Governor, Lt. Governor and legislators work in a bipartisan way to make smart investments in Iowa and Iowans.

We must change course and make working families a priority again by:

- Investing in K-12 schools and preventing more school closures, especially in small towns and rural areas
- Keeping down the cost of college and job training
- Making health care accessible to all Iowans
- Paying fair, living wages to all workers
- Re-examining tax breaks for big, out-of-state corporations

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## ***Education & worker training***

### **Bipartisan successes**

Helping schools use limited resources effectively by allowing them to spend various categories of school funding on a broader range of expenses that still achieve the intended goals ([HF 564](#)).

Allowing some unused school funding to go into a “Flexibility Account” to be used in a broader fashion to achieve the intended goals ([HF 565](#)).

Expanding the ways Iowans can earn a high school equivalency diploma when they meet academic standards. New pathways include a test battery, credit-based measures, and attaining academic credentials of equivalent or greater rigor ([HF 473](#)).

### **Republican failures**

Limiting Iowans’ ability to get ahead with mid-year cuts of more than \$26 million to education, community colleges and state universities ([SF 130](#)).

Failing our schools with inadequate funding that doesn’t keep up with inflation, let alone make up for years of unmet needs. School superintendents say this will cause teacher layoffs and larger class sizes ([SF 166](#)).

### **Missed opportunities**

Creating greater equity among school districts with consistent per-pupil school funding ([SF 455](#)).

Fixing the huge disparity in school transportation costs so that each student gets the same amount for their education once they arrive at the school doors ([SF 455](#)).

Improving efficiencies by offering financial incentives for school districts to share administrative functions ([HF 633](#)).

Clarifying that FFA programs qualify as Career Technical Education (CTE) programming ([HF 648](#)).

Providing necessary help for students learning English ([SF 427](#), [HF 6](#)).

Providing necessary help to better ensure low-income pupils can succeed in school ([HF 8](#)).

Including age-appropriate information on dating violence and prevention in human growth and development instruction ([SF 119](#)).

Offering financial incentives to expand Iowa’s preschool offerings to meet needs ([SF 136](#)).

### **Bad ideas stopped**

Taking \$200 million from public schools, and eliminating the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Public Television ([SF 29](#)).

Instituting a political party litmus test for university faculty ([SF 288](#)).

Banning teachers and school leaders from voicing their opinion on education issues ([HSB 47](#)).

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## ***Jobs & economy***

### **Bipartisan successes**

Offering incentives for smaller communities to increase affordable housing for working families ([SF 488](#)).

Increasing opportunities for local small businesses that make and sell Iowa beer, wine and distilled spirits ([HF 607](#)).

Adding to the list of invasive plants that can quickly crowd out corn and soybean crops. Palmer Amaranth is an edible flowering plant that can no longer be imported, sold or distributed in Iowa ([HF 410](#)).

Helping thousands of Iowans become homeowners and boosting our economy by providing a state income tax exemption for First-time Homebuyer Savings Accounts ([SF 505](#)).

Ensuring state-provided Apprenticeship Training funding goes to Iowa residents only ([HF 231](#)).

### **Republican failures**

Passing an anti-worker, anti-growth budget that significantly cuts Economic Development funding ([SF 130](#), [SF 513](#)).

Lowering wages and stepping on local communities by rolling back minimum wage increases already in force in four counties—Polk, Johnson, Linn and Wapello ([HF295](#)).

Preventing local governments from setting better standards for minimum wage, hiring practices, leave, benefits, scheduling or other terms of employment ([HF295](#)).

Interfering with efforts to ensure high-quality local construction by eliminating Project Labor Agreements and pre-qualification questionnaires on complex public improvement projects ([SF 438](#)).

Driving down wages in rural areas by eliminating the requirement that prevailing wage rates be paid to laborers and mechanics on federal construction contracts ([HF 203](#)).

Hurting Iowa jobs and businesses by removing the Buy American requirement that U.S. steel be used on federal construction projects ([HF 203](#)).

Hurting 185,000 family budgets and the communities where they live and shop by prohibiting public employees from collectively negotiating terms of employment, including health insurance and safety ([HF 291](#)).

Cutting protections for Iowans hurt on the job through no fault of their own, reducing an employer's liability for injuries, and encouraging employers and insurance carriers to avoid paying claims ([HF 518](#)).

Eliminating funding for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, which jeopardizes a successful program that has encouraged entrepreneurship and small business development across the state ([SF 510](#)).

### **Missed opportunities**

Stimulating and diversifying economic and agricultural development by creating a marketing and production program for industrial hemp, which is a low-input, sustainable cash crop ([SF 329](#)).

Saying “no” to tax relief for Iowa farmers, small businesses, teachers and families by refusing to couple state taxes code with federal changes ([SF 428](#)).

Raising the minimum wage for hard-working Iowans ([SF 156](#)).

Preventing bad employers from stealing wages from their workers ([SF 80](#)).

Ensuring equal pay for equal work ([SF 340](#)).

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## ***Health & health care***

### **Bipartisan successes**

Ensuring timely, appropriate help for kids with autism spectrum disorders ([HF 215](#)).

Limiting the harmful effects of congenital Cytomegalovirus (CMV), which can cause hearing or vision loss, lack of coordination, muscle weakness, cognitive impairment and seizures ([SF 51](#)).

Reducing breast cancer deaths by requiring that mammography reports sent to patients include information on breast density if the patient has dense breast tissue ([SF 250](#)).

Improving mental health and disability services in rural areas by allowing counties to equally share in regional funding ([SF 504](#)).

Ensuring appropriate treatment for sick and disabled Iowans by allowing a physician to override an insurance company’s step therapy protocol in certain cases ([HF 233](#)).

### **Republican failures**

The Republican-controlled House failed to approve an expanded, comprehensive medical cannabis program to properly treat more Iowans with debilitating conditions, and allowing medical cannabis to be grown, manufactured and dispensed in Iowa ([SF 506](#)).

Cutting help for abused kids, the elderly, and sick, disabled and vulnerable Iowans by reducing access to quality health care, mental health care and other critical services at a time when the safety net for our most vulnerable is already in trouble ([SF 130](#), [HF 653](#)).

Cutting help for Iowans trying to give up smoking and other tobacco products by \$1 million ([HF 653](#)).

Cutting \$8 million for Department of Human Services field operations. These are the people who protect children and seniors from abuse ([HF 653](#)).

Increasing the cost to Iowa taxpayers with a new State Family Planning Program while reducing the number of Iowa health care providers ([HF 653](#)).

Making it harder for Iowa parents to find out if their family qualifies for Medicaid and Hawk-I health insurance ([HF 625](#)).

Increasing the likelihood of unintended pregnancies and abortions by shutting down a successful family planning program ([HF 653](#)).

Making it more difficult for lowans to get fair compensation when they've suffered at the hands of a negligent health care provider ([SF 465](#)).

Making it extremely difficult for lowans who are sick or dying from asbestos exposure to be adequately compensated for their pain and suffering ([SF 376](#)).

Continuing Iowa's Medicaid privatization mess that has dramatically increased costs to taxpayers, forced businesses to close and hurt the health care of thousands of vulnerable lowans; and refusing to consider marginal improvements ([SF 368](#)).

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## ***Safe communities***

### **Bipartisan successes**

Expanding the criminal offense of "sexual exploitation by a school employee" to include full-time, part-time and substitute employees, as well as volunteers and contract employees ([SF 238](#)).

Allowing survivors of sexual assault to get a sexual abuse civil protective order to keep abusers away from them, their home and their place of work ([SF 401](#)).

Enhancing public safety by improving law enforcement and emergency communications systems ([SF 500](#), [HF 467](#)).

Making roads safer by requiring drivers to remove their vehicle from the traveled portion of the road if it was damaged in an accident, but is operable and can be reached safely ([HF 313](#)).

Saving lives by making texting while driving a primary offense. That means law enforcement can pull over a driver and ticket them if they see the driver texting ([SF 234](#)).

Stopping deceitful and damaging adoption practices that harm Iowa's families by toughening penalties for scamming prospective adoptive parents ([SF 433](#)).

Charging a motorist with reckless driving (a Class "C" felony) when texting while driving causes an accident that seriously injures or kills another ([SF 444](#)).

Protecting kids by updating the definitions of "child in need of assistance" and "child abuse" to apply in additional cases with dangerous substances in the home, including cocaine, heroin and opioids ([HF 543](#)).

Cracking down on stalking and domestic violence, and enhancing monitoring and penalties for violations ([HF 263](#)).

Expanding the definition of "criminal stalking" to include repeated use of an electronic device to track a person's whereabouts with no legitimate purpose ([HF 263](#)).

Reducing drunken driving fatalities and other drug and alcohol-related crimes by establishing 24/7 Sobriety

program in counties that want to try this accountability-based program ([SF 444](#)).

Requiring temporary staffing agencies to do background checks on employees for nursing homes and assisted living centers ([HF 576](#)).

Prohibiting government offices open to the public (including public libraries and schools) from using a monitoring device where a person expects privacy, such as in a toilet, bath, shower or locker room ([SF 499](#)).

### **Republican failures**

Jeopardizing the safety of lowans, neighborhoods and communities by cutting services for victims, reducing access to the courts, delaying prosecution of crimes and making prisons even more dangerous ([SF 130](#), [SF 508](#), [SF 509](#)).

Hurting kids with cuts to the Court Appointed Special Advocate program, which will no longer be available in all in all 99 counties ([HF 640](#)).

Hurting elderly, disabled and vulnerable lowans by cutting inspections of nursing homes ([HF 640](#)).

Putting food safety at risk with cuts to the Iowa Department of Inspections & Appeals ([HF 640](#)).

### **Missed opportunities**

Reducing fatalities by updating Iowa law for safely passing bicyclists on our roads. Improving safety for all road users by requiring bicycles to use a rear light visible from 300 feet between dusk and dawn ([SF 450](#)).

Helping fire fighters and other public safety organizations raise money for charity or local public safety efforts from passing motorists. "Filling the Boot" is not legal in every Iowa community ([SF 163](#)).

Helping victims with crime-related expenses that may arise years later and ensuring family members are compensated for lost wages when attending court proceedings ([SF 276](#)).

Protecting students from worsening a concussion injury and requiring school coaches to be certified in CPR ([HF 563](#)).

Protecting the health of students and educators by requiring radon testing in public schools ([HF 7](#)).

Requiring that human growth and development instruction include age-appropriate information on dating violence and prevention ([SF 119](#)).

Implementing health and safety checks for homeschooled students, in light of instances of child abuse and child death ([SF 138](#)).

Establishing training requirements, procedures and prohibitions on physical restraint and seclusion of students by school districts and accredited nonpublic schools ([SF 204](#)).

Training school personnel on suicide awareness, suicide prevention and on crisis plans ([SF 378](#)).

Protecting all students by strengthening anti-bullying policies and programs ([SF 390](#)).

### **Bad ideas stopped**

Ending licensing for such occupations as social work, mental health counselors and respiratory therapists ([HSB 138](#)).

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## ***Quality of life***

### **Bipartisan successes**

Protecting homebuyers by ensuring construction lien disclosures before the sale of a house ([HF 541](#)).

Keeping traffic moving efficiently by updating traffic laws for turns on red. On a red light, a driver may turn right from all lanes designated for right turns, or left from all lanes designated for left turns on a one-way street ([HF 372](#)).

Protecting kids by providing consistency in child custody laws for married and unmarried couples, including completing a court-approved Children in the Middle course ([HF 253](#)).

Reducing harassment and invasion of privacy by making it illegal to share images of another person in the nude or engaged in a sex act without their consent ([HF 526](#)).

### **Republican failures**

Failing to pass any legislation to seriously address the state's unsafe drinking water.

Scaling back nuisance protections for local residents in the vicinity of animal feeding operations ([SF 447](#)).

Cutting funding for state parks to such an extent that some will likely close ([SF 510](#)).

Cutting the Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP), which supports cities and counties that want to enhance quality of life through urban conservation and by developing natural, cultural and historic resources ([SF 510](#)).

Emptying the Cultural Trust Fund account, which provided grants to arts and cultural organizations throughout Iowa ([SF 130](#)).

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## ***Good government***

### **Bipartisan successes**

Using resources efficiently by giving county auditors the flexibility to combine staff and polling locations when low voter turnout is expected in primary and general elections ([HF 471](#)).

Protecting the rights of lowans by setting higher standards for law enforcement to seize property— especially money and cars—that may be related to a crime ([SF 446](#)).

Saving taxpayer dollars by ensuring private parties cover more of the costs of civil services they require from county sheriffs, such as bills of sale and deeds for land sold ([SF 501](#)).

Ensuring indigent lowans obtain legal counsel when they're charged with a crime that carries the possibility of jail or prison time ([SF 374](#)).

### **Republican failures**

Eliminating the Watershed Improvement Funding Program, which encourages cooperative projects within watersheds ([SF 510](#)).

Delaying access to justice and necessary services with cuts that require further scaling back clerk of court hours and specialty courts ([SF 508](#), [SF 509](#)).

Preventing local governments from voluntarily entering into agreements with local contractors that ensure good-paying jobs, quality work and cost-effective projects ([SF 438](#)).

Weakening the rights of thousands of Iowans by making it more difficult for them to vote in elections, including elderly and disabled Iowans, college students and others ([HF 516](#)).

Creating a costly registration card program for voting ([HF 516](#)).

### **Missed opportunities**

Establishing a better way for Iowans to identify themselves at the polls by allowing them to present common forms of ID (Amendment on floor).

### **Bad ideas stopped**

Jeopardizing the drinking water of nearly a million Iowans, raising water bills and robbing local taxpayers of a major asset by dismantling Des Moines Water Works ([SF 456](#)/[HF 484](#)).

Ending retirement security for public employees, including teachers, fire fighters, and police officers ( [SF 45](#)).

Discouraging Iowans from filing legitimate lawsuits by placing a financial burden on plaintiffs, even before the case is heard by a judge or jury ([SF 71](#)).

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## ***Veterans & service members***

### **Republican failures**

Decreasing funding for National Guard readiness centers, armories and facilities, and upgrades to Camp Dodge sewers, which causes Iowa to also lose significant federal matching funds ([HF 643](#)).

Cutting 20 percent from the Veterans Home Ownership Program ([HF 653](#)).

Cutting \$1 million from National Guard Tuition Assistance, a 24 percent decrease from what the Legislature originally approved and the Governor signed ([HF 642](#)).