



LEGISLATIVE FORUM – CEDAR FALLS

February 10 @ 9:30 am - 12:00 pm
Central Rivers AEA, 1521 Technology Pkwy
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613 + [Google Map](#)
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WE MUST CREATE MORE K12 OPPORTUNITIES

Iowa's route to a high-skill, high-wage economy depends on great local schools that prepare students for work and life. Iowans have traditionally placed a high value on quality public schools for our kids.

Unfortunately, the Senate Republican proposal for K-12 funding will reduce opportunities again this year. [SF 2164](#) increases state funding for local schools by 1 percent for the 2018-19 school year. The bill was approved by the full Senate February 7 on a 29-21 vote. I voted "no."

When you take into account inflation, per-student funding increased by only \$33 between 2008 and 2015. That's far less than the figure quoted by Governor Reynolds, who cites selective funding numbers that don't paint a complete picture. In fact, funding has increased seven-tenths of 1 percent per year for seven years.

Iowa ranks 34th for percent of funds spent on K-12 in FY17, according to a National Association of State Budget Officers [report](#).

Nearly 200 school board members, superintendents and [Parents for Great Iowa Schools](#) advocated for our kids' education January 30 at the Statehouse. They [said that they need](#) a timely decision on state funding to plan and budget properly, and that they wish we'd provide more than what is in the Senate bill so that they can address local goals and needs.

They tell me that schools increasingly can provide only the bare minimum with the funding they're getting. That's why I voted against [SF 2164](#) and another round of inadequate funding for our public schools.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR REAL-WORLD WORK

February is Career & Technical Education Month, a time to recognize how much these programs do to

prepare students for high-skill, in-demand careers with good salaries.

CTE combines classroom learning, certification programs and work-based experience for a variety of fields: agriculture, food and natural resources; arts, communications and information systems; applied sciences, technology and engineering; and manufacturing, construction and health sciences.

Iowa recently modernized its Career and Technical Education programs to ensure high-quality training opportunities that allow students to move quickly from school to work. Career pathways help them gain the academic, technical and practical skills they need for true career readiness. They get meaningful experience, which helps them choose the line of work that's right for them.

By 2025, [68 percent of Iowa jobs](#) will require education or training beyond high school. Iowa will need an additional 127,700 workers with a two- or four-year college degree or postsecondary credential. Currently, 58 percent of Iowans ages 25 to 64 meet that standard.

Regional work-based learning intermediary networks—partnerships between high schools and community colleges—play a big role in expanding career learning opportunities for Iowa students. The funding the Legislature puts toward this effort is a great investment.

They connect business and education to build relationships between employers and local youth, and coordinate internships, job shadowing experiences and other workplace learning options for students.

To learn more, visit [Cedar Valley Career Connections](#).

MEDICAID PRIVATIZATION MESS CONTINUES – MUDDLING THRU

Amerigroup Iowa, one of the two private companies that run Iowa Medicaid, says it will begin accepting new Medicaid members.

That means the 10,000 members who chose Amerigroup Iowa before November 16, 2017, but were temporarily transitioned to fee-for-service coverage under the state, will be moved to Amerigroup Iowa on March 1. They will receive more information in the mail.

New Medicaid members whose coverage begins on or after May 1 can choose Amerigroup or United Healthcare. They will receive enrollment packets in the mail with details on how to select their Managed Care Organization.

About one-third of Medicaid members will not be able to change MCOs anytime soon. About 200,000 members assigned to United Healthcare without choice last fall must remain with United until their next annual change period. To switch before then, they must show “[good cause](#),” such as:

- Health care provider is not in their MCO network.
- Services are not available within the MCO network.
- MCO has provided poor-quality care.
- Can’t get services that are supposed to be covered.

To request a change for good cause, contact United Member Services at 800-464-9484 or Amerigroup Member Services at 800-600-4441. You must go through the MCO grievance process, which can take 30 to 45 days.

If your grievance is not resolved to your satisfaction, you may call Iowa Medicaid Member Services at 800-338-8366 for more help. The final decision on your MCO assignment will be made by the Iowa DHS.

The ongoing problems with privatized Medicaid are why I joined 20 other Senators in proposing [SF 2058](#), a bill to end privatized Medicaid and put Iowans back in control of a state-run system that provides affordable health care to more than 560,000 citizens.

For the latest updates, go to www.IAHealthLink.gov.

PET PROTECTIONS MOVE AHEAD

People who torture, abuse, neglect or abandon dogs, cats and other companion animals will face harsher penalties if [Senate File 2181](#) becomes law. The bill was approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee on an 8-4 vote. It is now eligible for debate by the full Senate. A related bill ([HSB 608](#)) has been approved by a subcommittee in the Iowa House.

Similar bills have reached this point in the legislative process many times in recent years, but have not been taken up for floor debate. If pet protections matter to you, please contact your legislators and let them know you want to see the law changed.

According to an [Animal Legal Defense League report](#), Iowa has some of the weakest animal protection laws, ranking 49th among all 50 states. We’ve seen a number of animal hoarding cases in which offenders are found guilty of severe mistreatment of animals, yet proceed to accumulate more animals and mistreat them.

Under [SF 2181](#), anyone who has been found guilty of animal mistreatment will face more severe penalties for subsequent offenses. Upon conviction, a court will be able to prohibit them from owning or even living in the same home with an animal.

In addition, the bill makes it a crime for a person to leave an animal in a parked vehicle when it is extremely hot or cold, and allows law enforcement to rescue animals from parked vehicles if the animal appears to be suffering.

CENTURY & HERITAGE FARM DESIGNATIONS

Through June 1, eligible farm owners may apply for the 2018 [Century Farms](#) and [Heritage Farms](#) programs, which recognize families who have owned their farms for 100 years and 150 years, respectively. A ceremony in their honor will be held at the Iowa State Fair on August 16.

GIVE BACK IOWA CHALLENGE COMING UP

The 4th annual Give Back Iowa Challenge runs from April 1 through May 31. The Challenge promotes employer volunteer initiatives and is an opportunity for employees to receive recognition by tracking and reporting their volunteer hours. Volunteering helps meet community needs and has a positive impact on business, including improved employee engagement, organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Employers with the highest average number of volunteer hours per employee during the Challenge period will be recognized. Last year’s winners include Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Iowa in Waterloo.

Complete information is available in the Give Back Iowa Challenge toolkit at volunteeriowa.org.

IOWANS CAN GET FREE TAX-PREP HELP

Low- to moderate-income Iowans, elderly Iowans and Iowans with disabilities can get free tax help throughout the state. Funding comes from the federal Volunteer Income Tax Assistance grant program.

Iowans get help from IRS-trained and certified volunteers who can determine if you qualify for tax deductions and credits. Volunteers also prepare and e-file tax returns at no cost. More than 650 volunteers prepared nearly 20,000 returns during last year’s filing season.

Find locations for tax preparation assistance at <http://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep>. More details on free tax help are available at <http://theiowacenter.org/taxes>.

Contact information - State Senator Jeff Danielson serves Hudson, Cedar Falls and Waterloo. He can be reached at 319-231-7192. E-mail him at jeffdanielson@gmail.com. Senator Danielson is ranking member on the Education Budget. He also serves on the Appropriations, Education, State Government and Transportation committees. For further information, go to www.senate.iowa.gov/senator/danielson and www.jeffdanielson.org.