

Capitol Update

with State Representative Skyler Wheeler

House District 4,

This was an incredibly busy week. I personally ran House File 348, which I will explain below, regarding instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in elementary schools. Below are highlights from bills we passed this week.

This week, Iowa House Republicans passed Senate File 75 to establish licensure in Iowa for Rural Emergency Hospitals. This bill was a priority bill for the caucus from Day 1 of the 2023 Legislative Session. A rural emergency hospital is a health care facility that maintains a 24-hour emergency room, but does not include acute inpatient care. Establishing licensure in Iowa for this kind of health care facility allows them to be more successful by receiving reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid at a higher rate.

House File 135 is aimed at providing more transparency for students at the state's Regent Universities. This bipartisan bill requires the Board of Regents to publish a report that includes information on income, debt, and post-graduate degree completion by major, institution, and class. This bill will allow students to make informed decisions about their futures.

House File 623 prohibits transgender surgeries and harmful hormonal therapy from being used on Iowa children. Two hospital systems in Iowa perform these therapies or surgeries on children. Unity Point provides hormone therapy and puberty blockers, and UIHC provides hormone therapy, puberty blockers as well as top surgery to children. Importantly, there is very limited data available on the long-term effects of this type of treatment.

The few studies that have tracked long-term effects do not support the idea that this treatment lowers the rate of suicide in transgender individuals. Children are just too young to make these permanent decisions. In many ways, we limit children and their parents from making choices they are too young to make. A child can't smoke cigarettes or gamble, even with parental consent. Under current practice, these children are being allowed, or even encouraged, to make these permanent decisions, with life altering consequences such as sterilization, before they have been given the opportunity to grow up and learn more about themselves. This law will help give Iowa children the time to mature and grow into themselves before making such a life-altering decision.

Another bill passed prohibiting any classroom instruction on gender identity and sexual orientation in K-6th grade. We send our kids to school to learn reading, writing, math and science. This bill will allow teachers to use their time on those topics and leave discussions on social issues to the parents. Teachers should teach and parents should parent. This bill was amended to make clear that this is not about limiting all discussion around LGBTQIowans. It is to prohibit instruction, curriculum or promotion of these topics in school. Students with same-sex parents or teachers in a same-sex marriage would not be limited from talking about those relationships.

HF 597 removes sexually explicit materials from schools. This bill requires that all books in school libraries must be age appropriate and expands the definition of age appropriate in code to include what is NOT age appropriate. Age appropriate does not include any material with descriptions or visual depictions

of a sex act. I apologize for the graphic nature of this discussion, but because of the very graphic books that have been found in Iowa schools, I want to be clear about what we're talking about here. A sex act is defined as:

•“penetration of the penis into the vagina or anus; contact between the mouth and genitalia or by contact between the genitalia of one person and the genitalia or anus of another person; contact between the finger or hand of one person and the genitalia or anus of another person.” There is more, but I think you get the idea.

I still cannot believe that this is a bill we need to pass. But unfortunately, books that contain images or passages of exactly the sexual acts I just outlined have been found in Iowa schools.

If you find yourself skeptical that this material could possibly be in Iowa schools, please take the time to follow the links and view the passages and images from these three examples.

•*Let's Talk About It* contains sexually explicit illustrations with instructions, tips and suggestions on how to perform various sex acts along with masturbation. The book also suggests safe ways to consume porn.

•*Gender Queer* contains graphic illustrations of oral sex.

•*Push* contains detailed and disturbing instances of incest and sexual molestation.

Iowa Cattlemen's Association day at the Capitol was this week. I had the chance to chat with some future cattlemen: Kayle Englin, Merritt and McCoy Moss of Sioux County!

Thanks and God Bless!

Skyler Wheeler, House District 4, (712) 441-7444

Editorial

Some members of the Iowa Senate do not think that public notices published in newspapers remain relevant and necessary. A bill filed in the newly formed Technology Committee just over a week ago moved through committee in two days and last week moved through the Ways & Means Committee in one day. Senate File 546 would result in removing a major component of government transparency. This legislation would require legal notices to be posted on a website controlled by the very government legal notices are designed to oversee and notices would not be required to published in a local newspaper.

This is the wrong move today, tomorrow and for the future. Government transparency is more important than ever. In truth it is critical.

While The Rock Valley Bee and other Iowa newspapers have an economic interest in seeing that the public notice publishing requirement remains, the issue goes far beyond a few dollars. Maintaining the legal requirement to publish government actions and meetings in local newspapers is crucial for ensuring accountability and keeping the public informed of important information that affects people's lives. And it is the job of our local newspapers to serve as a check on government, not the government to check itself.

The proposed savings under the guise of modernization would come at a very high cost to Iowa's communities.

While many people now browse digital platforms for information, not everyone has access to the internet or the technological know-how to navigate online platforms. And the staggering amount of information available online, representing every viewpoint, degree of accuracy, hidden agendas and motivations from every philosophy and side of the political spectrum, makes it more and more likely public notices posted online would be lost among the chaff. Worse, they may be

vulnerable to manipulation or not easily accessible through search algorithms.

By publishing public notices in newspapers, government bodies can ensure that critical information is available to everyone in a format that has stood the test of time for accuracy and accessibility. It requires governments provide timely information for citizens to participate in their government. The notices are appearing in the communities in or very near where the decisions are made. Public notices cover a range of activities – bids and leads for public projects, minutes from government meetings, foreclosures, petitions, election information, water quality reports and other information that is important to citizens and vibrant communities.

The basis for public notices published in newspapers remains as important as ever:

- Requiring an independent, third-party to publish the notices in accordance with the law helps prevent government officials from hiding information they prefer the public not to see. The government cannot be in charge of holding itself responsible. A public notice must be published in a forum independent of the government. As an independent and neutral third party, a newspaper has an economic and civic interest in ensuring that the notice delivery requirements are followed.
- Publishing the notice in a newspaper ensures that the information is widely accessible to the public. Unlike social media or other online platforms, newspapers are trusted sources of information that are available to everyone, regardless of whether or not they have access to the internet or social media accounts. This helps to ensure that all members of the public have an equal opportunity to be informed and involved in government decision-making.
- A public notice must be archived in a secure and publicly available format. Newspapers have always fulfilled this requirement because a public notice

published in a newspaper is already archivable and accessible. This is particularly important for notices that contain information about government decisions and actions that impact individuals and communities for years to come. Requiring governmental bodies to publish legal notices in newspapers ensures that this information is always accessible.

- The public must be able to verify that a legal notice is not altered after being published. In a newspaper notice, an affidavit is provided by the publisher, which can be used in an evidentiary proceeding to demonstrate that a true copy was published as well as the exact wording that was used. Legal notices published in newspapers are subject to public scrutiny and can be easily monitored by journalists or concerned citizens. This guarantees that governmental bodies are held accountable and acting in the best interests of their constituents.
- Community newspapers have established relationships with readers and have a deep understanding of the issues and concerns that matter most to them. When public notices appear in newspapers, government bodies can tap into these relationships.
- Newspapers have a long history of serving as watchdogs for their communities, holding local officials accountable and shining light on issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. By requiring government bodies to publish public notices in newspapers, we are ensuring that these important watchdog functions are preserved and that the public has access to information that might otherwise be hidden from view.
- Many newspapers also publish the public notices on their websites and nearly all public notices across the state are also uploaded to a centralized website at iowanotices.org, a site run by newspapers at no additional cost to government or

taxpayers. It is available for those who prefer accessing an electronic version.

There may be parts of the country where newspaper readership is receding, but not in Iowa. Iowa has 241 community newspapers with one or more newspapers in every county. Market research conducted in 2022 showed 84% of Iowa adults read local print or digital newspapers. And newspaper readers are more engaged in their community. Newspapers reach 93% of Iowans who report, “I feel that I have a responsibility to help share the future of my community.”

It is true that newspapers charge a nominal fee, set by Iowa law, for publishing legal notices. This is a very small price for freedom, as it is typically under 1% of any government body's spending. All Iowans should demand more scrutiny of government affairs, never less.

While the bill does not prohibit local government bodies from publishing public notices in newspapers, it removes the current requirement for doing so. Removing the legal requirement would most certainly result in local governments discontinuing all public notice publications in their local newspapers. But the long-term costs communities and citizens would pay far exceed the price paid by government bodies to publish legal notices in newspapers.

We believe that requiring governmental bodies to continue publishing legal notices in local newspapers is crucial for ensuring transparency, accountability, and accessibility in government decision-making. Newspapers – especially Iowa newspapers – remain a trusted source of information that is widely accessible and easily searchable.

As a newspaper, we strongly urge Iowa's senators to vote “no” on this short-sighted bill.

As should all Iowans.

On behalf of the SIOUX COUNTY SPORTSMEN'S CLUB BOARD, we wish to say a 'BIG THANKS' to the following area businesses and individuals. Your support is greatly appreciated and helped make our 26th Annual Banquet, which was held March 4, 2023, at the Dordt University Rec Center, a great success!

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Midwest Paint & Body
Midwest Pro Manufacturing
Mike's Service Garage
MJ's Concrete
MJs Sinclair/EZ Wash
Moeller Insurance Agency
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Perspective Insurance
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Thanks again for everything!
Sioux County Sportsmen's Club Board
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