Critical Race Theory Simplified

The truth is the debate around critical race theory (CRT) is nuanced, confusing and academic. Those looking for a simple explanation of CRT and the arguments for and against are often disappointed. Furthermore, political combatants on the left and the right don’t necessarily define CRT or the practical implementation of its principles the same way.

But that does not mean it can’t be clarified in a concise way.

What is Critical Race Theory?

In short, critical race theory is a pseudo-academic theory that rejects the founding principles of the United States. Like Marxism, Critical Race Theory divides society into oppressors and oppressed. Marxism bases it on class, while CRT bases this division on race. According to CRT everything is about race and power. The American ideals of individual liberty and rights are foolish nonsense put forth to further white supremacy.

CRT’s pushers begin with two assumptions. First, race is socially constructed. That means “race is a purely cultural and rhetorical phenomenon, which has no basis in biology.”

Second, racism is systemic. That means every human construction from governments to corporations to universities to K-12 schools to Mom and Pop small businesses to college football tailgates to youth sports to church bake sales have racism permanently embedded within. Those institutions, activities and interactions either build or dismantle racism and white supremacy. Literally every single person regardless of socioeconomic status, location or personality cannot help but perpetuate or undermine systems of racial oppression. There is no neutral position because CRT says neutral does not exist. Neutral or any position between being actively racist or actively fighting racism is racist. Neutral is an illusion created by racism and white supremacy.

Why is Critical Race Theory dangerous?

The theory, had it remained in college classrooms and university faculty discussions, is just another academic theory. But when CRT’s principals are put into practice in various settings, it becomes dangerous. Why? CRT defines people based on their skin color. Their whiteness, or blackness, or Asian-ness, or Hispanic-ness defines who they are, not their individual personality, hopes, and dreams.

CRT exists to destroy and tear down, not to unite and build. It is not designed to play down and heal racial differences, but to accentuate and capitalize on them. CRT’s pushers directly and actively are fighting to destroy Martin Luther King’s dream. They believe it is naïve garbage. The only way to correct the improper and immoral distribution of power is to dismantle every system in America. American society is so “systemically oppressive to minority populations, and that racism is built into the very fabric of social life;” it cannot be fixed. It can and should be
dismantled. That means even when “overtly racist policies, practices, or actions are ‘removed’ or ‘rectified,’ racism still exists—it is simply manifesting in new ways.”

But that isn’t the truly dangerous part. The truly dangerous part is “racism cannot ever truly be solved, according to CRT. Children are being taught that they live in a society that is riddled with racism and hate. They are being told that, due to factors outside their control—their melanin levels—they are oppressed, or they are the oppressors. They are also being taught that there is no resolution to this problem. Consider what havoc this is likely to wreak on young minds.

“We have a problem. You are the problem, and there is no way to fix it. You’ll never be able to do enough to repair the damage that you perpetuate simply by existing.” CRT is incredibly disempowering. Children who are placed in the ‘oppressed’ category are told that the system is rigged against them. In such a situation, why should a child make any attempt to succeed?” (Source) https://newdiscourses.com/2021/06/when-critical-theory-took-on-race/#post-4392-footnote-ref-2

Why did legislative Republicans pass House File 802?

Critical Race Theory is a Marxist inspired dogma that has converted a surprisingly high number of people in government, corporate and educational leadership positions. They are using those positions to engage in coercive political advocacy inside the workplace and inside K-12 schools and universities to reeducate young and old into their political and cultural worldview.

House File 802 was passed to reassert that the basis of public education values is found in the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution and its Amendments and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 not in a theory dreamed up by left-wing activists.

Key among those values it is the ideal of meritocracy. Throughout American history our leaders realized this ideal needed support. That is why the legal protections found in the First Amendment, the Fourteenth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Iowa Code Chapter 216 are in place. They represent the progress made towards the American ideal of equality found in the Declaration of Independence and MLK’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Yet, CRT trainings are taking place and curriculum is being taught that discriminates on the basis of race and sex.

Social justice is just a synonym for the principles of critical race theory. Teachers are pressured to be overt advocates for social justice using CRT. As such, objectivity in the classroom is seen as moral failing. CRT advocates see objectivity in the classroom as a barricade to their truth. CRT advocates are constrained by classroom objectivity and therefore objectivity is a barrier to their righteous moral crusade to rid the world of racism and should be justifiably removed.

That is why HF 802 is necessary.

What does House File 802 do?

The bill prohibits taxpayer dollars from supporting training or curricula that promotes coercive political indoctrination and racism and sexism within our universities, our public schools, our local governments or our state government departments.

What are easy ways to describe CRT?

One of the leading activists putting Critical Race Theory into actual policy at the government, corporate, university and K-12 levels is Ibram X. Kendi author of “How to be an AntiRacist” and “AntiRacist Baby” who teaches two key doctrines:

“One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist.’ The claim of ‘not racist’ neutrality is a mask for racism.” Kendi adds “There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist.’
That is like saying either you are a cop or a criminal. There is no in-between space for non-cops and non-criminals. You are either actively fighting crime or you are actively abetting crime.

The second doctrine is:

“The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.”

That is like saying the best way to drain a pool is fill it with more water.

**What to watch for from CRT disciples:**

- **“No one is teaching Critical Race Theory”**

This is semantics. CRT activists are making a distinction between teaching actual classes on the canons of CRT and classes being taught and policies being developed using the principles demanded by CRT. High school students are more than likely not signing up for a class titled “Critical Race Theory” but teachers who believe in the doctrine teach a class on US Government that teaches the US is systemically racist and that systemic racism is the one and only reason that one American may have a worse personal financial situation than another. Furthermore, the National Education Association adopted a resolution at its annual meeting held July 30-July 3, which vows to defend teachers who teach the principles of CRT in the classroom. Which begs the questions, if no one is teaching CRT in K-12 classrooms, who is there to defend?

- **“HF 802 bans racial honesty in education”**

“Racial honesty in education” is the latest phrase used by CRT advocates to attempt to make it acceptable to parents. According to the *NY Post*, NEA President Becky Pringle “will make public statements across all lines of media that support racial honesty in education including but not limited to critical race theory.” Teaching students that one race is inherently superior to another isn’t “racial honesty” it is racism.

- **“HF 802 helps mischaracterize what critical race theory really is.”**

The *Las Vegas Sun* editorialized the following on July 6, 2021, “Critical race theory is not about scapegoating white kids for the nation’s problems or forcing them into thinking they’re racists. It’s about enlightening American children of all ethnicities, and giving them the understanding they need to keep our nation moving forward toward equality and fairness for all populations.”

Two things are immediately apparent with this explanation. First, CRT by its own definitions scapegoats white Americans for the nation’s problems by teaching that they are helplessly racist. Second, CRT does not move towards equality, it moves towards equity. Those two terms are not synonyms. Equality is what America has been doing for the last 50-60 years since the Civil Rights Era by changing laws and behaviors to provide equality of opportunity. CRT has openly announced that this approach has failed. Instead CRT zealots teach the concept of “equity” which is equality of outcomes. Which, by definition, is deeply ingrained in Marxist, socialist, and communist dogmas.

- **“HF 802 bans Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training”**

The bill specifically states DEI training is not banned. What is revealed by this argument is that CRT believers appear to be intellectually incapable of conducting DEI trainings without teaching that one race is inherently racist and another is inherently doomed to victimhood.

- **“HF 802 is a political overreaction.”**

Americans and Iowans recognize racism when they see it. They recognize coercive political advocacy in the classroom and in the workplace when confronted by it. The reaction to left-wing ideology forcing its way into classrooms is genuine and comes from folks of all political parties, all races and regardless of whether or not they parents of school age children.
“HF 802 is censorship.”

The only thing banned by HF 802 is brainwashing. Individual liberty, equality of opportunity, free and open inquiry, and free speech and debate are protected by HF 802. If a practitioner wants to explain and present data that systemic racism is a cause of the disparities in outcomes for every American, HF 802 does not prevent that. Teaching that viewpoint as an unalterable and undeniable fact without allowing dissent, debate or questions is ideological reeducation and is not only not allowed by HF 802. HF 802 does not allow teaching as fact racial superiority or race based collective guilt regardless if those ideas are pushed by white supremacist groups or CRT zealots.

“Systemic racism and sexism are facts not opinions.”

If that were true, the furious counterattack against CRT would not have materialized. Clearly many Americans and Iowans see CRT principles as coercive political advocacy. Racism and sexism clearly exist. As explained earlier, CRT fanatics believe – without supporting data – that every system, every human interaction has racism as the dominant factor. Until empirical data is presented and reviewed determining systemic racism and sexism as the ONLY reason for outcome disparities in Iowa, systemic racism and sexism remains just one of many possible causes.

(Contact: Jeff Mitchell 1-5137)

Appropriations

**Fiscal Year 2021 Revenue Finishes Strong**

Fiscal Year 2021 came to an end with another month of strong revenue growth, according to the Legislative Services Agency monthly revenue memo for June 2021. For the full fiscal year 2021, the state took in $8.9536 billion in net receipts in Fiscal Year 2021. That is a $1.4067 billion increase over the same figure at the end of June 2020, which makes yearly revenue 18.6 percent higher than last year. This is well ahead of the March forecast by the Revenue Estimating Conference, which called for growth of 1.6 percent over FY 2020.

The double digit increase in state revenue is a bit larger than what will be the final numbers once the state’s books are closed. A portion of the FY 2021 increase in revenue was due to the Governor’s decision to delay many due dates for tax payments in the Spring of 2020. This meant that the state was collecting a sizeable amount of FY 2020 revenue in the early part of FY 2021. Even taking that amount out, the state still had an incredibly strong revenue year in FY 2021.

For the month of June, state revenue was again up significantly, rising by 11.7 percent or $80.8 million when compared to June 2020. This is not surprising, since Iowans had until June 1 to file their personal income tax returns. The growth was not contained to just personal income tax, as all three major components of the General Fund experienced double digit growth in June.

**Personal income tax** – With the filing deadline moved back for personal income tax, collections for June were rocketed up over last June, increasing 28.8 percent or $108.6 million. For the fiscal year, personal income tax collections were up 16.8 percent. A portion of the yearly increase was due to the tax due date delay in the spring of 2020, but even without that personal income tax collections were significantly higher in FY 2021.

**Sales and use tax** – Sales and use tax collections also grew in June, rising $38.6 million or 16.2 percent. For the year, sales and use tax collections grew by $336.2 million or 10.6 percent. Some of the increase was due to the Spring 2020 filing delay, but most of the growth occurred during the rest of FY 2021. The Revenue Estimating Conference had predicted growth of just 3.7 percent for the year.

**Corporate income tax** – June was another month of strong receipts from corporate income tax payments. Collections were up $41.2 million or 40.6 percent when compared to June 2020. For the year, corporate income tax collections
rose by 51.7 percent over the previous year. The state collected $983.8 million for the year, which is $335.1 million higher than 2020. The 51.7 percent growth far outpaced the REC’s projection of 27.8 percent growth.

**Refunds** – The amount of refunds paid out by the state in Fiscal Year 2021 was also higher in Fiscal Year 2021. The total amount of refunds paid by the state was $1.1555 billion. This is a 7.1 percent increase over the amount of refunds paid in FY 2020. Personal income tax refunds were up almost $100 million this year. While the amount of refunds was higher, the amount didn’t reach what had been predicted by the REC. They predicted refunds would grow by 10 percent.

While we have now reached the end of the fiscal year, the state’s books on Fiscal Year 2021 do not officially close until the end of August. During this time, revenue that should be counted as part of FY 2021 will continue to come in, which will change the numbers slightly. Even without those potential changes, Fiscal Year 2021 was a very strong year for state revenue.

(Contact: Brad Trow 1-3471)

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**Agriculture**

**Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Tests Foreign Animal Disease Response Plans**

On Wednesday, June 30, 2021, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) issued a press release in which Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig announced that on that day, today that the IDALS hosted a day-long tabletop exercise to test its foreign animal disease response plans. State and federal animal health officials worked alongside producers and agriculture industry leaders to prevent and prepare for a potential foreign animal disease outbreak at a livestock show. The exercise is part of the Department’s ongoing commitment to preparing for a potential foreign animal disease outbreak.

*Previous foreign animal disease planning workshops and tabletop exercises*

IDALS has participated in a series of foreign animal disease workshops and tabletop exercises over the past several years to strengthen its response plans. In September 2019, IDALS and 14 other swine-producing states participated in a four-day African Swine Fever workshop led by the United States Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) to test current foreign animal disease response plans. Each day of the exercise focused on different tactics that would be deployed during an outbreak — detection, containment, eradication and cleaning and disinfection. In December 2020, the Department co-hosted a foreign animal disease planning and preparation workshop with USDA-APHIS, with support provided by the Iowa State University Center for Food Security and Public Health. The two-day tabletop exercise brought state and federal animal health officials, Iowa livestock producers and industry representatives together to test the state’s plans to distribute a Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) vaccine if an outbreak occurs.

Practicing good biosecurity every day on the farm is the best way that farmers can protect their livestock from any infectious disease, including a foreign animal disease. IDALS is partnering with the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University to host a series of webinars about biosecurity and species-specific foreign animal diseases. To register for an upcoming webinar or watch a previous recording, visit [iowaagriculture.gov/foreign-animal-disease-webinars](http://iowaagriculture.gov/foreign-animal-disease-webinars).

Livestock producers in Iowa should register their livestock facilities with IDALS’ [Premises Identification Program](http://www.idals.state.ia.us/index.php/premises-identification). It is critical that producers keep their contact information, including a phone number and email address, up to date so state animal health officials can contact them if a foreign animal disease outbreak occurs.
The Department, working in conjunction with Iowa State University, developed a video showing livestock producers how to set up a vehicle cleaning and disinfection corridor to protect their farms and neighboring farms during a foreign animal disease outbreak. All vehicles, trucks, trailers and equipment entering or exiting a farm during a foreign animal disease outbreak should be properly cleaned and disinfected to help prevent pathogens from spreading to other locations and livestock. The video is a free resource for livestock producers and is available on the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship’s biosecurity web page.

If a foreign animal disease breaches U.S. borders, it will take a quick, coordinated response from state, federal and private animal health experts to mitigate the spread of the disease.

IDALS launched the IowaFADefense program to train veterinarians how to rapidly detect, respond to and contain foreign animal diseases affecting livestock and poultry. The program will also increase the number of veterinarians who are trained and able to assist IDALS and USDA in responding to a foreign animal disease outbreak. The IowaFADefense program is free to Iowa veterinarians.

IDALS also released an online video explaining how veterinarians licensed to practice in Iowa can obtain or renew their USDA Category II accreditation status. If a foreign animal disease outbreak occurs, the Department may call upon private Category II Accredited veterinarians to assist with the disease response. These and other foreign animal disease preparedness and response resources are funded through the state’s Foreign Animal Disease Preparedness and Response fund. During the 2021 session, the Iowa Legislature renewed its commitment to continue supporting the Department’s emergency response planning and coordination efforts and appropriated a 50% increase in state general funding for this purpose..

To learn more about the state’s foreign animal disease response plans, visit iowaagriculture.gov/animal-industry-bureau/animal-disease-response.

**USDA to Provide Pandemic Assistance to Livestock Producers for Animal Losses**

On Tuesday, July 13, 2021, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Services Agency (FSA) issued a press release announcing that livestock and poultry producers who suffered losses during the pandemic due to insufficient access to processing can apply for assistance for those losses and the cost of depopulation and disposal of the animals. The announcement is part of USDA’s Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative. Livestock and poultry producers can apply for assistance through USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) July 20 through Sept. 17, 2021.

**PLIP Program Details**

Eligible livestock must have been depopulated from March 1, 2020 through December 26, 2020, due to insufficient processing access as a result of the pandemic. Livestock must have been physically located in the U.S. or a territory of the U.S. at the time of depopulation. Eligible livestock owners include persons or legal entities who, as of the day the eligible livestock was depopulated, had legal ownership of the livestock. Packers, live poultry dealers and contract growers are not eligible for PLIP.

PLIP payments compensate participants for 80% of both the loss of the eligible livestock or poultry and for the cost of depopulation and disposal based on a single payment rate per head. PLIP payments will be calculated by multiplying the number of head of eligible livestock or poultry by the payment rate per head, and then subtracting the amount of any payments the eligible livestock or poultry owner has received for disposal of the livestock or poultry under the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or a state program. The payments will also be reduced by any Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP 1 and 2) payments paid on the same inventory of swine that were depopulated.
There is no per person or legal entity payment limitation on PLIP payments. To be eligible for payments, a person or legal entity must have an average adjusted gross income (AGI) of less than $900,000 for tax years 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Applying for Assistance
Eligible livestock and poultry producers can apply for PLIP starting July 20, 2021, by completing the FSA-620, Pandemic Livestock Indemnity Program application, and submitting it to any FSA county office. Additional documentation may be required. Visit farmers.gov/plip for a copy of the Notice of Funding Availability and more information on how to apply. Applications can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. To find your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov/service-locator. Livestock and poultry producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer assistance.

(Contact: Lew Olson 1-3096)

Economic Growth

$2.6 Million Goes to Downtown Revitalization Projects

Recently the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) announced $2.6 million in grant funding to help 26 communities across the state revitalize their downtown districts. The grants were awarded through the Community Catalyst Building Remediation program. Each community was awarded a $100,000 grant to help redevelop or rehabilitate underused buildings as a way to stimulate economic growth and reinvestment in the community. Some of the projects awarded the grant this time include: Compadres Building in Monticello, Tierney Building in Waukon, and the Feed Shed Restaurant in Mingo.

The Community Catalyst program was created in 2018 and is funded through an appropriation from the Iowa Legislature. Cities apply following approval of a pre-application. Projects are scored based on criteria that include impact, funding/partnerships and incorporation of sustainability, and smart growth principles. At least 40 percent of the grants are awarded to cities with populations of less than 1,500, according to program rules. Cities are required to provide financial and/or in-kind resources to supplement these projects.

(Contact: Kristi Kious, 2-5290)

Education

Department of Education Releases New Guidance on Republican Education Changes

The Department of Education has issued guidance on the many changes passed during 2021 and placed them on their website. In total, there are nine new sets of guidance with plans to also hold webinars to discuss.

• Intellectual Freedom, Diversity Training, and Pledge of Allegiance

Several pieces of legislation created new substantive requirements concerning equity and inclusion, as well as student free speech for elementary and secondary schools. This guidance is structured around the following bills:

• House File 744: Student Free Speech,
• House File 802: Parameters for Racism and Sexism Training,
• House File 847: Education Practices, and
• House File 868: Education Appropriations.


Two bills were signed into law that affect the operations of new charter schools in Iowa. House File 813 establishes new procedures for charter schools effective July 1, 2021. Division IX of HF 847 modifies chapter 256E by clarifying charter school governing board requirements, chief administrator requirements, student enrollment deadlines, and requirement for submission of an annual report.

• School Accreditation and Improvement Changes (includes Flexible Student and School Support Program) (https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/2021-07-02_AccreditationandSIGuidancev2.pdf)

This guidance summarizes new accreditation and school improvement requirements or changes to existing requirements made in Code for Iowa districts and accredited nonpublic schools. The guidance includes information from two bills: House File 868, Division III: Accountability and Administrative Measures and HF 847, Division I: Education Program Standards and Funding.


The 2021 legislative session included several bills that impact school finance. The bills discussed in this guidance range from Supplemental State Aid, transportation equity, and supplemental weighting for English learners to the teacher salary supplement balance, limited general fund transfer to the student activity fund, and operational function sharing plus more.


The purpose of this guidance is to provide parents and guardians with updated information following several changes to Iowa law regarding open enrollment as discussed in previous newsletters. This document is organized around the following topics: Application Information and Deadlines, Appeal Process, Athletic Eligibility, and Transportation.

• Open Enrollment Transportation Assistance (https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/2021-07-02_OETransportationAssistanceGuidance.pdf)

This guidance simply walks through who qualifies and how.


Updated chart to reflect changes made in legislation.

• Changes to Athletic Eligibility (https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/2021-07-02_AthleticEligibilityGuidance.pdf)

As discussed in previous newsletters, there were changes that impact athletic eligibility. This guidance is a concise document reflecting those changes done in House File 847.


Senate File 517 adds that while participating in the Legislative Page program at the Iowa State Capitol, a student is
excused from the PE requirement and is exempt from the physical activity requirements of the Healthy Kids Act.

House File 793 adds that a student enrolled in a Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) program shall not be required to participate in PE activities or to meet the physical activity requirement of the Healthy Kids Act but shall receive one-eighth unit of PE credit (or the equivalent) for each semester of JROTC the student completes.

Future newsletters will go more in depth on a few of these issues, but it’s important to see how a lot of the education legislation Republicans passed is being implemented and making such an impact, even if it seems small. We hear a lot about a few topics, but there is much more that was done in the interest of Iowa’s students. Looking at all these documents it is clear who House Republicans have in mind when passing bills: the students.

(Info from Iowa Department of Education)

(Contact: Kristin Rozeboom, 1-3015)

Environmental Protection

DNR Derelict Building Grant Program Awards
Grants to Rural Communities

On Thursday, July 1, 2021, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) DES MOINES – The DNR Derelict Building Grant Program awarded grants to nine small, rural Iowa communities to help deconstruct or renovate abandoned structures, remove asbestos, and limit construction and demolition materials going to the landfill.

The DNR Derelict Building Grant Program was instituted by statute to help rural communities with populations of 5,000 or less remove environmental hazards, improve community appearance and minimize costs by recycling and reusing building materials through deconstruction or renovation of abandoned, derelict buildings. DBGP funding is awarded annually on a competitive basis with cash matches required. Applications for the next funding round will be due on Feb. 25, 2022.

For more information about the grant program, application forms and resources, visit: www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/LandStewardship/WasteManagement/DerelictBuildingProgram.aspx.

(Contact: Lew Olson 1-3096)

Human Resources

Free Home COVID Tests Available

Iowans are now able to receive a free COVID test kit through Test Iowa at-home, a partnership between the Iowa Department of Public Health and the State Hygienic Lab. You will be able to pick up a test kit from 125 pick-up sites throughout the state or have one mailed to your home. Each kit includes step-by-step instructions on how to collect a saliva sample and return the sample by UPS. Results will be sent through email.

To learn more, click here and check out testiowa.com.
Republican Led Legislature Prioritizes Mental Health

This year, the Iowa Legislature and Governor Reynolds prioritized improving Iowa’s mental health system by creating a long-term sustainable funding stream for Iowa’s Mental Health and Disability Services (MHDS) System, ensuring that Iowans have timely access to mental health care through telehealth, and provided significant funds to mental health providers through Iowa Medicaid.

Legislators hear often from constituents regarding the high cost of property taxes in Iowa, as well as the need for additional mental health treatment options. Senate File 619 accomplished both issues by reducing property taxes statewide by almost $100 million by phasing out the mental health property tax levy and created long-term sustainable funding to support Iowa’s community-based system to support local mental health providers. This legislation ensures state oversight of the 14 Mental Health and Disability Services Regions to drive outcomes improvement for adults and children with mental health conditions.

Specifically, the legislation distributes state general fund dollars to the MHDS Regions on a per capita basis and based on performance based contracts with the Iowa Department of Human Services. The state appropriation begins this fiscal year at $50.4 million, and increases over the next few fiscal years to $120.28 million, $127 million, and then $133.7 million. Starting in Fiscal Year 2026, the MHDS Regions will receive an increase by 1.5% if state sales tax growth allows.

This legislation also ensures proper oversight with state dollars going to local budgets by requiring state approval of each budget and maintains that ending fund balances remain at a reasonable level. If a Region’s ending fund balance exceeds these thresholds, the state will route funds away from the Region and into an incentive fund. This incentive fund was appropriated $3 million to start and will be used to improve outcomes for Iowans with mental health conditions.

This legislation was strongly supported by mental health advocates statewide, including NAMI. This bill was a long time coming, and House Republicans are proud to have voted to move the responsibility of funding the MHDS system away from property taxpayers and to the state with long-term sustainable funding.

Importantly, this bill also expands access to mental health care through telehealth which will ensure that every Iowan has timely access to mental health care, especially rural Iowans. Lastly, the FY2022 Health and Human Services Budget provided an additional $33.5 million in rate increases through Medicaid, in addition to the almost $1 billion spent annually by Iowa Medicaid on mental health treatment.

- Psychiatric Medical Institutions for Children (PMICs) receives a $10.3 million increase
- Home-Based Habilitation (helps high needs individuals with mental health conditions out of the hospital and jail, and in their communities) receives a $20.5 million increase
- $2.7 million buydown to reduce the children’s mental health waiver waitlist
- Increase rural psychiatric residency funding by $200,000 (total $600,000) to continue to expand the number of psychiatrists in rural Iowa.

(Contact: Natalie Ginty 5-2063)

Information Technology

Iowa Broadband Grant Program Now Open

The Office of the Chief Information Officer on July 1 issued Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) #006 making available $97,500,000 in new program funds under the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant program.
The Application Acceptance Window is open from July 1, 2021 through July 28, 2021 at 5:00 PM CDT at which time all Applications must have been received. Applications submitted after this time will not be accepted.

For information on these broadband grant funds please refer to the link below. This link makes available all application materials. [https://ocio.iowa.gov/empower-rural-iowa-broadband-grant-program-notice-funding-availability-006](https://ocio.iowa.gov/empower-rural-iowa-broadband-grant-program-notice-funding-availability-006)

Questions submitted during the Question and Response period are posted here as Addendum #1: [https://ocio.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/written_questions_and_answers_nofa_006.pdf](https://ocio.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/written_questions_and_answers_nofa_006.pdf).

The window to receive a binding response from the Office to written questions is closed, however assistance is available to Applicants during the Application Window at ociogrants@iowa.gov.

(Contact: Ben Gentz, 1-3452)

**Labor**

**Iowans’ Unemployment and Injury Benefits Increase**

Iowa Workforce Development announced on June 30th that there will be an increase to the amount of maximum weekly benefits paid to unemployed Iowans and to workers injured on the job that began July 4, 2021. A statutorily required annual review of wages covered by unemployment insurance has triggered the increase. The average annual wage for insured Iowa workers increased to $52,130.71 in 2020, up from $48,455.86 in 2019.

Under Iowa law, the number of people covered by unemployment insurance and their gross wages are primary elements of a formula Iowa Workforce Development uses each year to compute maximum and minimum benefit amounts paid to jobless workers. The new rates are:

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<th>Number of Dependents</th>
<th>Maximum Percentage of Statewide Average Weekly Wage</th>
<th>Maximum Weekly Benefit Amount Effective 7-4-2021</th>
<th>Minimum Weekly Benefit Amount Effective 7-4-2021</th>
<th>Current Maximum Weekly Benefit Effective 7-5-2020</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Iowa Workforce Development officials noted that about half of those eligible for unemployment insurance benefits have enough earnings to qualify for the maximum benefit. The 2022 taxable wage base will be $34,800.

The new benefit payment schedules apply to individuals who file new unemployment insurance claims for the week beginning July 4, 2021, and to workers injured on or after July 1, 2021. Individuals currently receiving benefits from state or federal programs will continue to receive the same weekly benefit amount.

Beginning July 1, the workers’ compensation maximum weekly benefit for temporary total disability, healing period, permanent total disability and death will rise to $2,005. For permanent partial disability, the weekly maximum will be $1,845.
Natural Resources

New State Park Trail App Available

The Iowa DNR has developed an online mapping application to help visitors navigate trails in state parks.

Through GPS and mobile data, the application can be accessed on mobile phones and helps the user identify trail names, trail heads, acceptable trail use (i.e. hiking, biking, etc.), and distances. The application is web-based rather than downloadable from an app store, so data service availability could be a factor when using the trail map application. To access trail maps, go to iowadnr.gov/stateparks and click on Iowa State Park Trails.

(Contact: Ben Gentz, 1-3452)

Public Safety

Iowa State Patrol Officers Head to Texas for Border Security Mission

Governor Kim Reynolds has authorized 29 Iowa State Troopers to deploy in Southwest Texas on the U.S.-Mexico border. The Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, had asked multiple states to assist in border security issues as the massive influx of illegal immigrants continues.

The Emergency Management Assistance Compact allows states to help each other when there is a disaster or emergency. In these instances, the state asking for help can reimburse assisting states, but in this case, Governor Reynolds has said Iowa will pay for the deployment of the Troopers. Help is also coming from Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Nebraska, Ohio and South Dakota.

While the U.S.-Mexican border is over 1,000 miles away from the State Capitol, the impact of so many illegal immigrants is reaching the American heartland. Illegal drugs and human trafficking issues can be traced back to the border crisis. With thousands of people coming in each month, it is difficult to stop criminals and protect individuals. The Governor hasn’t said exactly what the state troopers will be doing, but an increased law enforcement presence will help with a variety of public safety concerns.

The State Troopers that have been deployed volunteered to assist in Texas and are expected to be on the border for 16 days. Officers will be paired with Texas State Troopers and Texas Rangers.

(Contact: Amanda Wille, 1-5230)
U.S. Supreme Court Upholds Ballot Harvesting Laws

This legislative session House Republicans passed multiple pieces of legislation that protect the integrity of elections in Iowa. One measure included in Senate File 568 prevents what has been called “ballot harvesting.” In Iowa, voters are allowed to vote with an absentee ballot by mail. The voter requests a ballot from their county auditor and receives their ballot in the mail, fills it out and returns it to the county auditor’s office. Under the newly enacted laws, there are several ways a voter can do this.

First, the voter can put their completed absentee ballot in the mail at the post office, any postal service mailbox, or with their mail carrier.

The second option is to return it directly to the county auditor’s office either in person at their office or anytime at the official designated ballot drop box outside the office.

The third option is someone in the same household or an immediate family member may return the completed ballot on their behalf. Additionally, for voters who suffer from a physical disability can complete and sign a designation of a delivery agent who can return the completed ballot for the voter. These delivery agents complete a receipt when retrieving a ballot from the voter and when they deliver the voter’s ballot. Upon delivery these agents are required to provide their ID and relevant contact information with the auditor’s office. Delivery agents cannot return more than 2 ballots for a general election. These delivery agents cannot be the voter’s employer, an agent of their employer, an officer or agent of a union, or a person who is acting as an agent for a political party.

While these laws are straightforward and based on common sense, Democrats looking for looser ballot security have cried voter suppression and racism over these ballot harvesting safeguards. These measures are in place to ensure that the ballots cast by absentee voters are truthfully delivered and delivered by a known person. Without these provisions in Iowa Code, paid political operatives, regardless of their affiliation with candidates, can go door to door and accept absentee ballots or persuade a voter to complete a ballot for them. Registered voter lists are publicly available and without these laws, campaigns and special interest groups could even be able to target opposite parties and collect ballots and not return them.

With increases in absentee voting, other states have seen the importance of preventing potential ballot harvesting and other foul play associated with absentee ballots. Arizona enacted very similar ballot harvesting prevention laws and were quickly challenged in court by the Democratic National Committee looking to capitalize on lax ballot security laws. The DNC’s opinion is that any requirements around accountability for returning an absentee ballot are really voter suppression and racist. However, the United States Supreme Court did not agree with the Democrats. On July 1, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Arizona’s integrity based ballot harvesting laws. Justice Alito wrote in his majority decisions that “the strength of the state interest – such as the strong and entirely legitimate state interest in preventing election fraud – served by a challenged voting rule is an important factor.”

Listening to Iowans, House Republicans have made election integrity a top priority. Voter ID laws along with other election security measures are widely supported by Iowans. This session Republican members passed two comprehensive bills to ensure that integrity. Democrats fought every measure to prevent cheating while Republicans moved to secure our elections. This Supreme Court decision makes it clear that taking measures to prevent absentee ballot harvesting and tampering is well within the right of the state.

(Contact: Jason Covey 1-3626)
Transportation

Newly updated 511 system provides even more updates to Iowa Drivers

Iowa’s 511 website and app (www.511ia.org), provides drivers with the most up-to-date traffic-related information in the state, including winter weather and construction. Recently, the website and app have been updated after extensive feedback from the public on how to improve the site.

The 511 system allows you to set up an account that alerts you of activity such as construction or incidents on routes or areas you have saved.

This update also provides a new Weekly Construction Digest email out to those that sign up for updates on pre-defined areas that include major construction projects, metro areas, or regions of the state. The site has also gotten rid of the previous “trucker mode” and now has a separate “commercial vehicle” tab. To learn more about the updates to 511, click here and here.

(Contact: Natalie Ginty 5-2063)

Ways & Means

Breaking Down 2021’s Tax Omnibus: Division 1 “Getting Rid of the Triggers”

Over the course of the next several weeks, this space in the newsletter will go into detail about each division of Senate File 619—most commonly referred to as the “tax omnibus.” Some weeks will cover multiple, smaller divisions, and by the end of all 28 Divisions—Iowans should have a pretty good handle on the bill.

Division I of Senate File 619 is entitled “Future Tax Changes.” This section is commonly referred to as “removing the triggers.” This means that the triggers required to enact the further tax cuts provided for in 2018’s tax reform bill (Senate File 2417) are no longer applicable. Because of this division, the cuts will go into effect January 1, 2023.

The triggering events set forth in the 2018 tax bill were:

• Previous fiscal year net tax receipts (FY 22 receipts for TY 23) equal or exceed $8,314,600,000.
• Previous fiscal year net tax receipts (FY 22 receipts for TY 23) equal or exceed 104% of net tax receipts from fiscal year prior to that fiscal year (need 4 percent growth).

This year’s tax omnibus repealed those triggering events—and the tax cuts will take place on January 1, 2023. So, what are the tax changes that will take place on that day? Quite a few!

• Individual tax rates are lowered.
• The tax tables are reduced to four brackets.
• Federal deductibility is eliminated.
• Iowa returns start with federal taxable income (instead of federal adjusted gross income) This automatically makes the qualified business income deduction 100 percent of the federal credit and incorporates federal itemized or standard deduction amounts.
• Eliminate most Iowa-specific adjustments (capital gains deduction, health insurance premiums deduction). However, a few adjustments could still be made (529 plans, pension exclusion, social security, etc).
• Eliminate the Iowa Alternative Minimum Tax.
Next week the focus will be on Division II of the tax omnibus—Child Dependent and Development Tax Credits.

(Contact: Kristi Kious, 2-5290)