

PEN CITY CURRENT

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Wednesday, May 12, 2021 | 8 pages | Volume 5 • Issue 98



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State to cut jobless benefits

GOVERNOR: Reynolds says federal pandemic benefits will end June 12

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

DES MOINES – Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds announced today that the state will step away from many of the federal jobless benefits propping up displaced workers during the pandemic.

The state will halt four federal pandemic-related unemployment benefit programs including: Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), and Mixed Earners Unemployment Compensation (MEUC) effective the week

ending June 12.

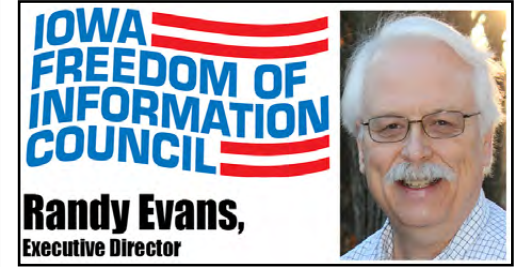
The state will continue to provide regular state unemployment benefits to those eligible.

“Federal pandemic-related unemployment benefit programs initially provided displaced Iowans with crucial assistance when the pandemic began,” Gov. Reynolds said.

“But now that our businesses and schools have reopened, these payments are discouraging people from returning to work. Our unemployment rate is at 3.7 percent, vaccines are available to anyone who wants one, and we have more jobs available than unemployed people.”

See REYNOLDS, page 8

OPINION



Water quality is a problem of population

Through the years, the Iowa Legislature is the place where Iowans gather to debate the biggest issues and challenges facing our state. It has been this way for 175 years.

The 2021 session is days from adjournment, but there has been precious little time spent discussing one of the thorniest problems confronting this state in decades or looking for solutions.

The issue is the quality of our water.

Our lakes, streams and rivers are so polluted with agricultural runoff that experts urge people, for health reasons, to not swim in many lakes and to avoid eating fish caught in certain rivers.

While most lawmakers dodge this issue, a University of Iowa researcher has become a no-nonsense voice on the problem and its solutions.

Chris Jones is a scientist at the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research. Water quality is his area of expertise. He says many Iowans do not grasp the magnitude of the water problem in our state or the reasons for it.

“Iowa has around 3 million people, a total that has not changed much over the last 80 to 90 years,” Jones wrote on his blog. “People are large animals, and as such our bodies produce a lot of waste. That being said, we produce much less waste than the animals we eat.”

A feeder pig, for example, is about the same size as a human. A piglet weighs about 3 pounds at birth and about 250 pounds when it is slaughtered six months later.

“Everybody knows Iowa has a lot of livestock,” he wrote. “If you are like me, maybe you have heard that our state has enough animals to effectively be as populous as

See EVANS, page 8

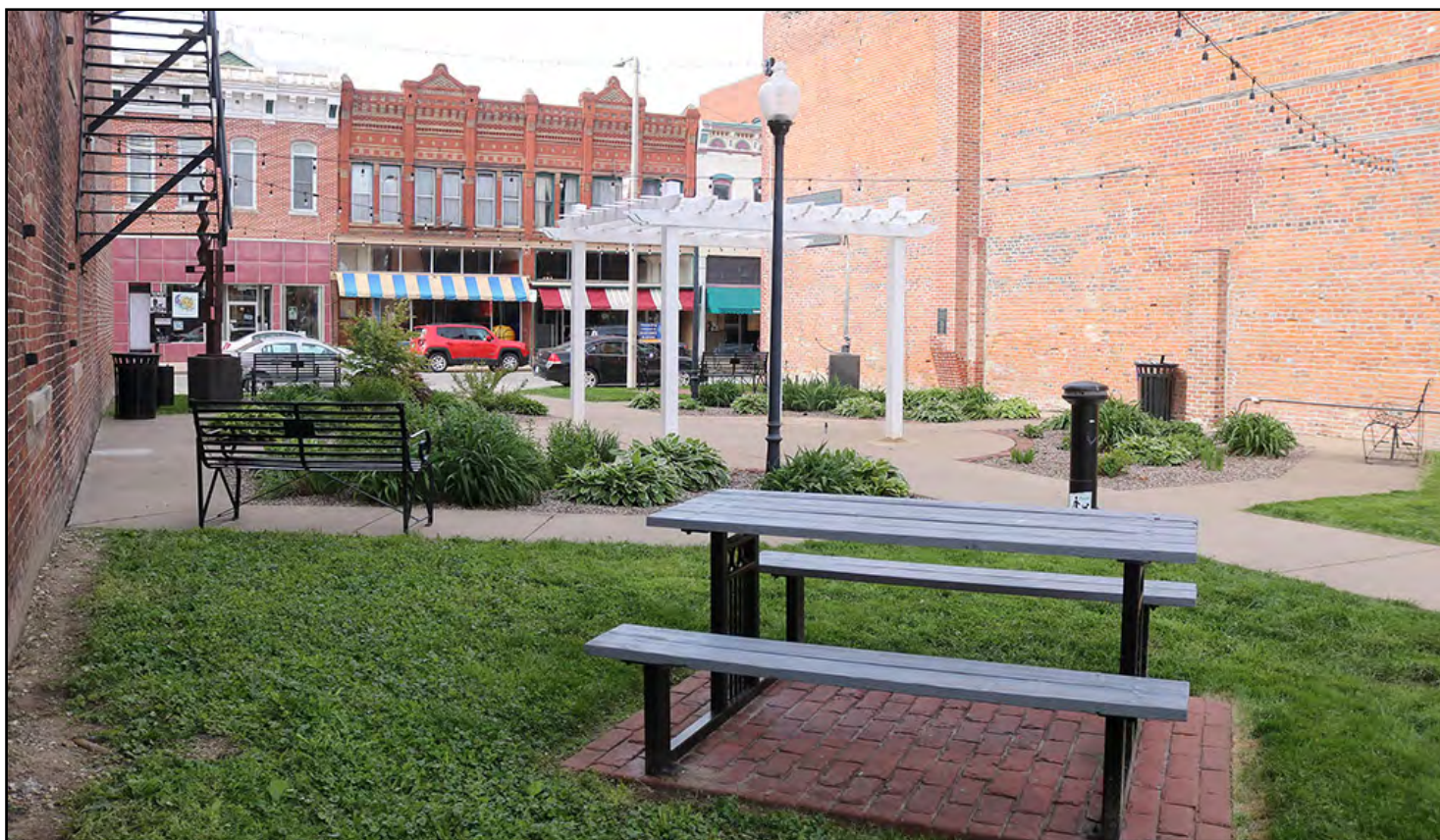


Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

The Fort Madison Beautification Foundation will be holding a reception at the Pocket Park in the 800 block of Avenue G in historic downtown Fort Madison Thursday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. for visitors to get a chance to experience the upgrades and improvements that have taken place.

POCKET PARK

Beautification group to host event Thursday downtown

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Area residents will be able to get an up-close look at the improvements in the Pocket Park in the middle of downtown Fort Madison Thursday afternoon.

The Fort Madison Beautification Foundation, formed in 2020, will be hosting a gathering at the park to highlight the improvements the group has made over the past year and half.

The foundation is a non profit organization dedicated to improving the community one small project at a time and assumed

ownership of the Park located in the 800 block of Avenue G.

City Councilwoman Rebecca Bowker has been spearheading the effort and said the space is now a quaint gathering place that is speckled with greenery and seating.

“What was missing was broadband con-

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WEATHER

WED 12 May..... Scattered Clouds, 60° F/ 38° F
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Lee County News/From the Front

Park reception Thursday 4 to 6 p.m.

PARK - Continued from Page 1

nectivity," she said.

The foundation took advantage of the Governor's Urban Revitalization plan to increase broadband in rural areas throughout Iowa. The COVID 19 pandemic amplified the need for free wifi for school, work and personal reasons.

On Thursday May 13th from 4 to 6 p.m. the foundation is hosting a party to kick off the free wifi for our downtown area and introduce the park to new visitors. The event will include free music and beverages.

The park was originally owned by a Self-Sustaining Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) and then by Fort Madison Main Street. When those two groups folded, the park was transferred to the newly-created foundation in 2020.

"We knew it had some challenges but we wanted to make that a priority," Bowker said Tuesday.

"Part of our commitment was to bring more people to the downtown space and progressive communities across the country have been using WIFI to attract visitors so

we went that direction."

The foundation was able to secure a \$7,000 grant as part of the urban revitalization program to help secure WIFI in the park with a match of about \$5,000.

Other improvements have included a new purgola, refinished park benches, additional trash cans, and landscaping enhancements.

"We wanted to take little steps that made a big impact," Bowker said.

She said downtowns are heart of rural America and the foundation thought the park could be complimentary to any progress that would take place.

"Our foundation has been thrilled to see the level of commitment that has been, and continues to come to downtown Fort Madison and we hope to see that continue," Bowker said.

"But we just don't want to focus on downtown. Our goals are to reach out to the whole community, but funding and resources are always a challenge."



County to pay Youngs \$442K for ambulance property

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – With a July 1 deadline looming for the county to assume ownership of ambulance services countywide, an agreement has been reached to purchase property and equipment from the current ambulance provider.

On Monday, the Lee County Board of Supervisors approved a purchase price of \$442,500 with half of the money due on June 7, 2021 and the second half payable to Lee County EMS Ambulance Inc., on Sept. 27, 2021. The vote was unanimous 4-0 with Ron Fedler absent.

The purchase agreement includes 12 pages of items including facilities in Fort Madison, Donnellson and Keokuk, a 2018 Ford conversion ambulance, all ambulance and medical supplies, and office and facilities supplies.

County Auditor Denise Fraise said the agreement is all inclusive and includes everything down to bandages.

"We modeled it after Washington County and (County Attorney) Ross (Braden) went in and cleaned it all up," Fraise said.

The payments will be-

come part of a fiscal year 2021 budget amendment.

Budget Director Cindy Renstrom said four departments needed to have amendments including the sheriff's department for damaged vehicles. The insurance proceeds and a COVID-19 grant are also in the amendment.

"The ambulance service we are going to go ahead and make a payment this year to the Youngs to purchase the buildings and the equipment and we didn't have that budgeted," she said.

The auditor's office saw additional expenses for elections including the special elections, but she said some COVID -related grant funds were also included in that amendment.

The public hearing on that amendment will be May 24 at 9 a.m. Renstrom said that will be the last amendment the county will be allowed to do before June 30.

In an unrelated issue, supervisors also approved an amendment to an agreement with Motorola to usher in the new digital communication systems for county emergency responders.

Lee County Sheriff Stacy Weber said there was some language in the proposal that could have saddled the county with

additional costs in years 4-10 of the agreement for maintenance and services.

"There was some penalty for not using some services in years 4-10 and we didn't feel that was right to have to pay for those services, so we've gone back and forth on that and cleaned it up," Weber said.

"We were trying to make sure down the road we wouldn't be on the hook for fees or penalties, but Ross weeded it out. I'm glad the legal beagles were on point for us."

The amended agreement adds a section that allows the county out of the maintenance and support agreements with 180 days written notice, but they can't get out of the agreement for mere convenience without paying Motorola a portion of the discounted service agreement for those years.

Supervisor Rick Larkin said a fire in Fort Madison again showed how poor communications are with the current system. The fire in the 1200 block of Avenue D had fire-fighters in the basement and command outside couldn't communicate inside.

"That's the whole thing," Board Chair Matt Pflug said. "These folks can't talk to each other in dangerous situations."



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Pen City Current and www.pencitycurrent.com are products of Market Street Publishing, LLC. Pen City Current is published Sunday through Friday mornings by 6AM.

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Sports

Bloodhounds shut out Burlington 8-0 to sweep SEC

BY JOHN BOHNENKAMP
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - It's the things you don't see, Fort Madison soccer coach Kevin Wellman said, that makes the Bloodhounds special.

Take, for example, the Bloodhounds' trip on Saturday for their match at Iowa City Liberty.

"They were playing some '80s music, and it was a sing-along on the bus," Wellman said. "I turned around to look and there were probably 12 kids singing along to a couple of songs. They were having a great time. Really high spirits."

The mix of players from Fort Madison and Holy Trinity is working.

"They want to be together," Wellman said. "They're hanging out together on weekends. They want to be together."

"It's just great to be a part of."

The Bloodhounds finished an undefeated run through the Southeast Conference on Tuesday night, defeating Burlington 8-0 at the Baxter Sports Complex.

Fort Madison, ranked 12th in Class 2A by the Iowa High School Soccer Coaches Association, went 10-0 in conference play. The Bloodhounds, 12-1 overall, haven't lost since the season-opening overtime loss to Notre Dame.

"It's a huge deal," Wellman said of the run through the conference. "Huge deal. It was one of our team goals when we set out on the season. And we accomplished it. It's always awesome to accomplish your goals."

"Sometimes you get complacent against a team you've (already defeated). We didn't do that. We made sure we took care of business."

The progress, Wellman said, could be seen in the difference between the two matches against the Grayhounds. Fort Madison had a 5-1 win at Burlington on April 22, but this match wasn't nearly as competitive.

"Our timing between our midfielders and forwards is a lot better," Wellman said. "The last time we played them, we were offside several times. And I think that



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison's Renzo Eid (15) punches in a goal off the side of his foot in the second half Tuesday against Burlington. Eid scored off an assist from Xander Wellman who came streaking in from the left side. The Hounds won 8-0 and went undefeated in Southeast Conference play.

was a product of it being not at the right timing. We fixed that. And I think that's part of the reason we had a better attack."

Fort Madison dominated this match, scoring five goals in the first half.

Jacob Pothitakis had three goals, two in the first half. Mitchell Pothitakis scored twice, and Will Larson and Renzo Eid each scored once.

Burlington rarely challenged against Fort Madison's de-

fense. The Grayhounds (4-9 overall, 4-6 conference) played the final 2:16 down a player after Kristoffer Hollerauer was sent off after his second yellow card.

Fort Madison closes the regular season on Monday at Mediapolis.

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Sports

Knipe takes 3rd at girls SEC tennis meet

BY PCC SPORTS

FAIRFIELD – Fort Madison’s Molly Knipe captured 3rd place in the Southeast Conference girls tennis meet Monday in Fairfield.

Knipe, who came into the tourney seeded No. 2 battled her way through a 7-5 first set win over Keokuk junior Julia de Gala in the first round. de Gala got to the main round after beating Grace Hecox of Burlington, 6-4, 6-4 in a play-in.

After the close first set, Knipe shut out de Gala in the second set 6-0 to advance to the semifinals against the hosts No. 6 Nellie Higdon. Higdon who knocked off Mt. Pleasant’s Savanna Walls 6-4, 6-4 to advance, beat Knipe 6-2 in the first set.

However Knipe battle back in the second set pushing a 6-6 tie and forcing a tiebreaker. Higdon slipped into the finals with a 9-7 tiebreaker win. Higdon would end up falling to top-seeded Tess Paton of Fairfield 6-3, 6-1.

Knipe would move into the 3rd place match against Burlington’s Emily Woodsmall where Knipe would win in straight sets 6-2, 6-3.

Fort Madison’s Rachel Hellman was seeded No. 9 and had to play Keokuk’s No. 8 Jasmine Saunders in a play-in match. Hellman would come back from a 2-6 loss in the first set to take a 7-6 second set win with a 7-3 tiebreaker. Then she won the two set tie breaker 10-1 to move into the main bracket against eventual champion Paton.

Paton would shut out Hellman 6-0, 6-0 pushing Hellman into the consolation side of the bracket where she knocked off Mt. Pleasant’s Maggie Fitzpatrick 6-0, 6-3 before falling to Walls 6-0, 6-0 in the fifth-place match to take sixth place, three above her seed.

In doubles play, the No. 5 seeded duo of Lauren Otte and Sky Lawson fell to No. 4 Emily Mosley and Macy McGinity after taking the first set 6-1. The Burlington girls then took the second set 6-2 and won the tie-



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison’s Molly Knipe captured 3rd place at the Southeast Conference girls tennis tournament Monday in Fairfield.

breaker 10-4 to fall into the consolation bracket where Fairfield’s Abby Schaefer and Lauren Kraemer moved on with 6-1, 6-1 wins over the Lady Hounds.

Otte and Lawson then took on Mt. Pleasant’s Malena Yocum and Morela Ellas for seventh place and ended up with the win 6-0, 6-1.

Kayla Kruse and Elizabeth Stuekerjuergen came into the bracket with a No. 10 seed. and fell 6-1, 6-0 to Olivia Jones and Sydney Wells, moving into the 9th place match where a bye in the other play-in left them with no opponent and the win by default.

On Saturday, the Lady Hounds got just one win in an 1-8 loss to Camanche in a triangular at Muscatine. Nauda Ruston and Laruen Otte knocked off Ana Lev and Makailla Hughes 8-6 at No. 3 doubles for Fort Madison.

The Bloodhounds got two wins in the second match of the day against Muscatine in a 2-7 loss. Ruston got an 8-3 win over the Muskies Grace Brookhart at No. 6 singles and Otte and Ruston again got a win at No. 3 doubles over Brookhart and Shelby Grady.

HTC’s Robu wins SEISC girls golf title

BY PCC SPORTS

FORT MADISON – Holy Trinity Catholic’s Ali Robu carded a 90 on the Crusader’s home course at Sheaffer Memorial Golf Course Monday afternoon to win the Southeast Iowa Superconference girls golf meet.

Robu led a field of 51 edging New London’s Taylor Phillips by one shot for the medalist honors. Phillips shot a 45 on the back nine, one stroke better than Robu, but her 46 on the front nine included a double bogey on the par 3 No. 5 that gave Robu the meet.

Robu carded a birdie on the 298 yard par 4 hole No. 2 to highlight a 44 on the front nine, which was one better than Columbus’ Jobie Lekwa. The HTC senior recorded 2 pars on the 18-hole event to go along with the birdie, while putting together a string of eight straight bogeys coming in.

Lekwa took 3rd place overall with a 96 tied with Danville’s Natalie Wilcox.

Central Lee’s Karissa Moeller shot a 132 to tie for 28th place overall. Ellie Herdrich carded a 145, Mercedes Kirchner came in with a 159 and Emma Harvey had a 256 for the Lady Hawks who finished 9th overall with a 692.

Robu was Holy Trinity’s only participant so the Crusaders didn’t figure in the team scoring. New London won the team scoring with a 404 figuring the top four golfers on each team.

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AGENDA**

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Thu, May 13, 2021
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- 1 Approve Agenda
- 2 Discussion and Possible Action on Displaying

Turbine in Estes Park
3 Adjourn

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From the Front

Area legislators back Reynolds move to end extra benefits

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Lee County Economic Development Group President Dennis Fraise said across the board this is the worst jobs landscape in decades and in his opinion it's time to reassess those benefit packages.

"There's no question that almost all of our employers have openings. If you want a job, there is a job for you. It may not align with what you need or require, but a lot of our employers are struggling to find enough people," Fraise said.

"There are a lot of people through the pandemic that were, and still are, hurting and I think the extra unemployment was certainly a needed and necessary component of the recovery. But if we lower back to a normal amount of employment will it have a positive impact? My guess is that's going to be part it."

The governor also said effective June 13, 2021, Iowa will no longer waive employer charges for COVID-related unemployment insurance claims.

"Regular unemployment benefits will remain available, as they did before the pandemic, but it's time for everyone who can to get back to work," Reynolds said. "This country needs to look to the future, and Iowa intends to lead the way."

Fraise said it's not a local or even statewide issue. He said most of the nation is rethinking the current federal benefits structure.

"A lot of states are taking a hard look at unemployment benefits and I would think it has something to do with the recent jobs report," Fraise said.

"There was disappointment in the number of jobs created, but we need more data to know what the relationship is. In my opinion, it is time to roll it back. If it puts more people into the workforce, then it's time to do that."

Fraise said he was sympathetic to the people who've been hit hardest by the pandemic, but if the economy is opening back up and you can still make more money staying at home, then the programs need reevaluated.

He has also been vocal about the county needing to take steps to stem off what he calls a "cold winter" for employers.

"This is the tip of the iceberg and in the next decade winter could be here. The pandemic has exasperated that situation because there have been so many unforeseen consequences," he said.

"This is the worst time a lot of our employers have had, and that's from fast food, to downtown businesses, to resorts, to industrial. It's across the board and I'm not sure we've ever seen a cycle like this."

State Sen. Jeff Reichman (R-Montrose) said he supported the move and said Reynolds has been a leader among the nation's governors in handling the pandemic.

"Iowa was named the No. 2 state in the country in getting back open," Reichman said. "She's doing the right thing here."

State Rep. Martin Graber (R-Fort Madison) said he's spoken with other legislators around the state and no one is saying they have too many employees.

"Just like school, if we want to get to a sense of normalcy, we have to get back to normal. There are lots of positives here and Iowa's employers need people. We just have to get back to work."

"There are lots of jobs out there. There are vaccines available if you want one," he said.

Iowa livestock produces waste equal to 134 million people

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California. It's bigger than that. Much bigger."

That feeder pig excretes 3 times as much nitrogen as a human, 5 times as much phosphorus and 3.5 times as much solid waste, Jones said.

In 2019, Iowa had about 24 million hogs, 250,000 dairy cattle, 1.8 million beef cattle, 80 million laying chickens and 4.7 million turkeys. The equivalent-sized human population that would generate the same amount of waste as these animals is staggering, Jones said.

Iowa hogs produce waste that is equivalent to 83.7 million people, he wrote. Our dairy cattle produce waste equivalent to 8.6 million people. Beef cattle wastes are equivalent to 25 million people, laying chickens are equivalent to 15 million people, and turkeys are equivalent to 900,000 people.

"In total, these five species generate the waste equivalent to that produced by about 134 million people," Jones wrote. "Managing waste from these animals is possibly our state's most challenging environmental problem."

There is a lot of crop land onto which farmers can apply this waste. But the time in which to do this without damaging crops is not large, he said, and wet, cold and hot weather can limit applications.

"There are only a precious few weeks in a year when this Mount Everest of waste can be applied to corn and soybean fields. And there can be no doubt that the sheer amount ... have consequences for water quality."

We often hear people saying that we all want clean water. But Jones is blunt here: "Clearly, we do not all want clean water, at least not in a meaningful way. When it comes to our lakes and streams, we may all agree that the concept of clean water is a good one, but a critical mass of someones and somethings is holding us back from getting it."

He continued: "When will farmers and the industry in general ever take responsibility for the negative consequences that happen beyond the field? It's pretty clear the 'feed the world' virtue-signaling is designed, at least in part, to excuse the environmental wreckage produced by the system."

We need to be mindful of livestock production's importance in the rural Iowa economy, with the jobs at confinement facilities, in trucking, equipment sales, construction and meat packing.

"I firmly believe that if we are to solve problems, we all ought to be able to talk about them openly, especially when they involve things we hold in common like our lakes, streams, air and wildlife," he said.

Jones does not believe voluntary action alone will

solve Iowa's water problems. Instead, he believes the state must act to reduce the problem.

Iowa should ban row crop agriculture in what is called the 2-year flood plain. About 400,000 acres of crops are planted there each year. About every other year, this land floods and washes fertilizer and pesticides into nearby streams.

Iowa should ban fall tillage because it increases soil erosion. The state also should ban the application of manure onto snow and frozen ground.

"I get that the manure pit may fill up faster than expected," he wrote. "Again, not my problem. Build a bigger pit."

Jones also favors requiring farmers to adhere to Iowa State University's fertilization guidelines. And he favors changing the regulations for animal confinement facilities.

"How do we give farmers license to do whatever they want with inputs and then ask the taxpayer to mitigate the pollution? It's insanity," he said.

And this is the debate you won't hear at the Legislature, unfortunately. This is an important debate for Iowa's future, because there is a lot at stake — jobs, economic livelihood, and the quality of life for everyone.

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