



STATEMENT

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IFP Statement: ‘Historic’ session not a label of pride Legislative session hits working families and traditions of good governance

***Statement of Iowa Fiscal Partnership
Mike Owen, Iowa Policy Project***

To describe the 2017 Iowa legislative session as “historic” is not a label its leaders should wear with pride.

Iowans needed a legislative session that worked to raise family incomes and expand educational opportunity. Iowans had long demanded water-quality improvement measures. Many called for lawmakers to address the lack of fairness, adequacy and accountability in a tax system laden with special-interest breaks and costly subsidies to corporations.

Instead, Iowans got a continued ratcheting down of funding for PK-12 public education. There were significant and serious cuts in post-secondary education that will lead to tuition increases. We saw cuts to early-childhood education and other programs that serve our most at-risk children and neglect of the child-care assistance program that helps working families struggling to get by.

The Legislature continues to demand little or nothing of industrial agriculture in cleaning up the mess it has left in our waters. Lawmakers tried to dismantle the Des Moines Water Works board, limited neighbors’ right to complain in court about pollution, and eliminated scientific research at the Leopold Center. Their ultimate action on water merely diverts resources from other priorities, such as education and public safety.

Lawmakers largely left the tax issue to the next session. An overture in the House to reform Iowa’s reckless system of tax credits was a welcome acknowledgment that this issue needs attention, but devils in the details make further discussion of this issue during the interim even more welcome.

Perhaps as troubling as the destructive nature of policy content this session, Iowa’s image of adherence to good governance took a big hit. The most controversial policy changes came not through collaborative, public discussion in committee, let alone the 2016 political campaigns, but were often dumped into lawmakers’ laps with little opportunity for amendments.

In what could accurately be called a “session of suppression,” lawmakers achieved:

- Wage suppression, with a bill to preempt local minimum wage increases while refusing to raise Iowa’s repressive, 9-year-old minimum of \$7.25.
- Workplace suppression, gutting collective bargaining protections for public employees, and making it more difficult for Iowans recover financially from injuries on the job.

- Health-care suppression, achieved in workers' compensation legislation while also refusing to reverse Governor Branstad's disastrous move to privatize Medicaid.
- Local suppression, whacking at local government control in a variety of areas: minimum wage, legal defenses against concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), fireworks sales, and collective bargaining options.
- Voter suppression, with a bill to make it more difficult for many citizens, particularly low-income and senior voters, to exercise their right to vote.
- Suppression of children's healthy development, with additional cuts to Early Childhood Iowa and Shared Visions that will reduce access to critical home visitation, child care and preschool services for some of our most at-risk youngsters.

Some legislators may boast of a "historic" session. History will mark 2017 as a low point in Iowans' respect and care for each other, a legacy that will not be celebrated when future Iowans look back on this session and the closing act of Governor Branstad's long tenure in office.

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The Iowa Fiscal Partnership is a joint public policy analysis initiative of two nonpartisan, nonprofit, Iowa-based organizations — the Iowa Policy Project in Iowa City, and the Child & Family Policy Center in Des Moines. Reports are available at www.iowafiscal.org, and on the websites of the two partner organizations, www.iowapolicyproject.org and www.cfpciowa.org.