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EDUCATION

C.R. board approves elementary school closures

Plan calls for eventually closing 8 schools and rebuilding 10

By Molly Duffy, The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — The Cedar Rapids school board unanimously approved a facilities plan Monday night that calls for eight elementary schools over the next two decades to be closed.

Each of the seven members voted "yes" after about 90 minutes of public comment, during which the majority of

speakers asked the board to delay the vote. At one point, dozens of people in the audience held up sheets of paper covered in signatures — those of more than 600 people who signed a petition urging the board to wait another 90 days.

A group of parents fanned out across the city — to libraries, laundromats, malls and grocery stores — to collect the signatures, they said. They found almost no vocal support for the plan.

"All told, our group heard from no more than 10 people who knew of

and supported the plan," said Dexter Merschbrock, a parent from Grant Wood Elementary. "And two of those were immediate family members of the superintendent."

Mollie Schule was one parent who collected signatures, and she told board members she did not meet a single person who knew about and supported the plan.

The only people who declined to sign the petition, she said, identified

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Jim Siskoski/The Gazette
Cedar Rapids school board member Gary Anhalt expresses support Monday for the district's facilities master plan.

ENVIRONMENT

Working together for the future



Cliff Jetter/The Gazette

Iowa City Parks Superintendent Zac Hall leads a group of University of Iowa graduate students Monday along the Iowa River at Terry Trueblood Recreation Area. The students are participating in a theme semester called "Climate for Change," and are studying environmental policy and developing a plan for sustainability improvements along the Iowa River. Last week, the Iowa City Council passed a resolution enabling the city to join the university's efforts.

Iowa City, UI team up on sustaining Iowa River corridor

By Madison Arnold, The Gazette

IOWA CITY — With help from the University of Iowa, the city's 152-acre Terry Trueblood Recreation Area is getting a new plan for improving its use to ensure it will be around for future generations.

A UI graduate student course is helping develop the plan for the city park and areas around it on the Iowa River. The work is in conjunction with a larger partnership be-

tween the UI and Iowa City put on a theme semester called "Climate for Change," which seeks to develop ideas from students, staff, merchants and residents for sustainability — that is, meeting today's needs without compromising the ability to do the same in the future.

Last week, the Iowa City Council passed a resolution enabling the city to join the

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IOWA LEGISLATURE

Iowa House set to debate water quality

But lawmakers' views in conflict as to its chances

By James Q. Lynch, The Gazette

DES MOINES — Nine months after legislators worked through the night in an unsuccessful attempt to reach a compromise on paying for water quality improvements before adjourning the 2017 session, the Iowa House will take up the legis-

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• Speaker ousts House judiciary chairman, 3A

lation today.

Late Monday, House Speaker Linda Upmeyer's office announced Senate File 512 will be brought up for debate first thing in the morning. That announcement followed a day of back-and-forth among Republican

leaders on prospects for water quality legislation this year — some much more bleak than others — and an enthusiastic progress report from Gov. Kim Reynolds on improvement efforts.

The anticipated floor debate comes after Sen. Ken Rozen-

boom, R-Oskaloosa, who floor-managed HF 512 last year, said Monday he was "guardedly optimistic" that House Republicans would approve the bill.

However, Rep. Chip Baltimore, R-Boone, who floor-managed HF 612, and attempted to substitute it for the Senate bill on the last night of the 2017 session, did not share his confidence.

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State Sen. Ken Rozenboom, R-Oskaloosa

POLITICS

Government reopens after bipartisan deal making

Democrats back down after Republican promise to take up 'Dreamers'

Gazette wires

WASHINGTON — In the end, it was neither the self-proclaimed deal making President Donald Trump nor seasoned congressional leaders who found a path to end — at least for now — the government shutdown.

Rather, the agreement emerged from a fledgling caucus of impassioned moderates from both political parties who, if they aren't sidelined in days ahead by a partisan resurgence, could grow into a new power center in the Senate.

The House and Senate approved a compromise Monday to extend government spending until Feb. 8, clearing the way for government offices to reopen today.

The deal, which was signed off on by Trump, also reauthorizes the Children's Health Insurance Program for six years and rolls back several health care taxes.

"I am pleased that Democrats in Congress have come to their senses," Trump said in a statement. He vowed to "work toward solving the problem of very unfair illegal immigration."

The deal was struck by 30 or so senators calling themselves the Common Sense Caucus.

Now many lawmakers in both parties hope the moderate group will continue to exert its influence to break the logjam, though a few ideological factions were plotting how to stamp it out.

Democrats, in particular, need to hold the center together to quickly craft an immigration deal to protect

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Schools/'Difficult decisions'

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themselves as district employees who feared retaliation.

Board members previously had said they would consider delaying Monday's vote, and they and the facilities committee behind the proposal have been criticized for not involving a representative number of low-income residents and people of color.

But after each member made brief comments, all voted for the plan, which was prompted by declining enrollment and aging facilities.

"Although it is not perfect, and I know it is not what some of you in the audience tonight wish would happen, these are very difficult decisions," President John Laverty said. "... It is my belief that we have no choice but to move forward with the framework in front of us."

The plan includes:

- 10 newly constructed elementary schools. Nine would be 600-student schools: Arthur, Cleveland, Coolidge, Erskine, Harrison, Hoover, Jackson, Pierce and Wright, with "renovations and considerations" for Harrison instead of a new building. One would be a 450-student school: Johnson.

- Three renovated, four-section elementary schools: Grant, Hiawatha and Viola Gibson.
- Eight elementary schools closed and "repurposed": Garfield, Grant Wood, Kenwood, Madison, Dixon, Taylor, Truman and Van Buren.

The board also approved a policy requiring it to conduct a "review of sites of facilities" at least once every five years. Those reviews could lead to changes to the specifics of the facilities plan.

Laverty said the policy is evidence that the board has



Summer McMurrin is among those holding up petitions at the Cedar Rapids school board meeting Monday, urging members to delay a vote on the facilities plan for elementary schools. The board, meeting at the Educational Leadership and Support Center in northwest Cedar Rapids, did not delay the vote and approved it unanimously.

listened to community concerns about the plan.

The flexibility built into the facilities plan eased board member Gary Anhalt's concerns, he said, as well as providing future opportunities for community input.

At the board's Jan. 8 meeting, he asked whether the vote could be delayed.

"All of this, in this day and age, is trust," Anhalt said, asking the public to stay involved with the plan as it unfolds. "We can put it down on paper and so on, but trust is developed not through words and talking, but through action."

Most board members, including Vice President Nancy Humbles, thanked the facilities committee and Superintendent Brad Buck for their work.

"I'm supportive of Dr.

Buck, the facility master planning committee, the district staff and community members that were involved in this community process, as well as their recommendation to the board," Humbles said. "The time is now to do something."

"We listened to everyone. We've talked to many people; we've had countless emails, countless conversations," board member Mary Meisterling added. "There is strong support in the community to move this plan forward."

The plan has an estimated cost of \$224.2 million, according to the resolution, and would be funded by an extension of the SAVE tax, an existing statewide penny sales tax whose extension could be approved by state legislators this session.

Money from the Physical

Plant and Equipment Levy, or PPEL, might also be an additional funding source.

Funds related to an extension of the SAVE tax would be available in July 2020 at the earliest.

The resolution calls for meetings with stakeholders of three schools to discuss the future of those facilities.

The district plans to meet with stakeholders at Coolidge Elementary in January 2019, to discuss how a new school at that site would be designed and built. A similar meeting will take place at Jackson Elementary in January 2020.

In January 2021, the district would meet with the Truman neighborhood to discuss closing the school and "repurposing" the building.

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Shutdown/'Now comes the test'

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"Dreamers," as the party comes under criticism from its progressive wing.

Liberals complained Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and others folded by agreeing to reopen the government after three days without extracting a firm commitment from the Republicans.

The Senate voted overwhelmingly 81-18, to pass the three-week spending bill. In the House, Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., marshaled his majority for approval, 266-150, with six Republicans and 144 Democrats opposed.

In return for Democrats' support, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., agreed to consider legislation to help Dreamers as part of an immigration compromise that also is likely to include border security and other measures. Protections against the deportation of Dreamers will end March 5 because Trump is terminating the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

"Now comes the test, the real test, of whether we can get this done," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

He promised Democrats would not relent. "To all the Dreamers who are watching today: Don't give up," he said.

Those promises, though, were met with skepticism by advocates for the nearly 700,000 young people who were brought to the United States illegally when they were children.

"It's official: Chuck Schumer is the worst negotiator in Washington," said Murshed Zaheed, political director of CREDO, an advocacy group. He said any plan that relies on GOP leaders to keep their promises is "doomed to fail."

Trump capitalized on the divisions, declaring "Democrats caved," in a fundraising email. Democrats initially were cool to McConnell's offer when it was presented Sunday, wanting more than a promise.

Fifteen Democrats, including California Sens. Kamala Harris and Dianne Feinstein, and other leading liberals, voted to continue the filibuster, as did Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent. Two Republicans, Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Mike Lee of Utah, who oppose spending levels, voted with them.

McConnell initially offered a measured tone ahead of the vote, refraining from accusing Democrats of putting "illegal immigration" ahead of the country's needs, as he had much of the weekend. But after the vote, he resumed blasting Democrats.

Even so, he promised to give immigration a fair airing. "Let me be clear: This immigration debate will have a level playing field at the outset, and an amendment process that is fair to all sides," he said.

For many, the gatherings of the Common Sense Caucus in the office of Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, offered a glimpse of how a new Senate could break from partisanship to govern.

The group included red state Democrats, Sens. Joe Manchin, D-Va.; Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D.; and Joe Donnelly, D-Ind., and others such as Sens. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., and Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., all up for re-election in the fall.

Among the Republicans were dealmakers Sens. Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker of Tennessee and Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake, but also newer brokers like Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., who is running the GOP's re-election committee, and Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., a former governor.

The path ahead, though, remains difficult with some 17 days to reach consensus on major issues, including spending levels, disaster relief and opioid funding.

The immigration debate will be most daunting, reminiscent of 2013 when the Senate passed an ambitious immigration overhaul only to see it ignored by the GOP-led House as "amnesty."

The Tribune Washington Bureau and Washington Post contributed.

UI/Still more to be done, mayor says

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university's efforts.

Over the next few months, in addition to the park adaptation plan, the city will encourage residents and businesses to participate in environmental sustainability efforts while the UI holds programs and events on the topic.

"What we'd love is to have community members come and really be a part of that opportunity to both hear national leaders but, in addition to that, join in the conversation about sustainability," said Linda Sneteslar, UI associate provost of outreach and engagement.

Events throughout the semester include a "teach in," where professors can include sustainability as a lecture topic, as well as

lectures and a workshop conducted by Marcy Rockman, the National Park Service's climate change adaptation coordinator for cultural resources.

Iowa City Mayor Jim Throgmorton said he has had multiple conversations with UI President Bruce Harrelld about improving the Iowa River, which runs through the campus and city.

Throgmorton said that while the city already has some good features along the river, such as Riverfront Crossings and parks, there's still more that could be done.

"I think of them as jewels on a necklace," Throgmorton said. "The crown jewel, if you will, is Hancher (Auditorium). So there are all these really wonderful assets along the river, but nothing tying them together except the

river itself."

Scott Spak, a professor for the graduate class, said the class' plan will be about adapting the Terry Truethood Recreational Area, 579 McCollister Blvd., with evolving human and natural uses.

He said studying the park is a "hands on" way for his urban and regional planning master's degree students to get experience as well as develop an adaptation template for other areas along the river.

Overall, the Iowa River corridor efforts "will acknowledge and celebrate the various historical factors that have shaped current human use along the river, respond creatively to challenges and opportunities in specific locations along the river, adapt to changes in the region's

climate by making the areas adjacent to the river more resilient to future flooding, and use the river as a catalyst for future community and economic development that exemplify and fulfill the sustainability values and principles we jointly hold in high regard," the city and the university said in a joint statement.

"When we think of rivers, we are often thinking about many different areas throughout the state," Sneteslar said. "That particular idea in Dr. Spak's course will kind of become a template that can be used throughout the state, but I also see it maybe as something that might be a focus nationally as well."

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Water quality/Lawmaker says no chance of bill

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Asked on Iowa Public Radio's "River to River" on Monday about the prospects for water quality legislation this year, Baltimore predicted there only was a "snowball's chance in hell."

The first test of that will be today when the House votes on SF 512. It could agree to the Senate bill without changes and send it to the governor, who has said she wants the first bill she signs as governor to be water quality legislation.

Or the House could insist to a conference committee to work out a compromise. Among other difference in the bills, the Senate measure would make more money available quicker for water projects but the House version envisions selling bonds.

Since late last year, several lawmakers have been arguing for passage of SF 512 as a

starting point. Umpeyer, R-Clear Lake, for example, has said that passage of a water quality bill this year will not be the end of it.

Baltimore, however, said there's no chance the Legislature would pass a second bill because of pressure from interest groups.

"If the Senate bill is passed, it's the end of the discussion because the Farm Bureau has no interest in continuing the discussion," he said.

Addressing water quality Monday during her weekly news conference, Reynolds highlighted the "collaborative, watershed-based approach being used successfully across the state."

That has allowed the state to bring in funding from the public and private sectors,

including a \$10 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Regional Conservation Partnership Program in 2016.

"We've built a wide range of partnerships comprised of diverse stakeholders who share a common goal of improving water quality and creating new economic opportunities," said Reynolds, who has supported SF 512 in the past. "These partnerships are a great way to grow vital funding resources and support our coordinated efforts between the public and private sectors to scale proven practices."

At that news conference, Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey called for a watershed-by-watershed approach to improving water quality, which was at the

core of HF 612. However, Northey called SF 512 "more doable."

Kerri Johannsen of the Iowa Environmental Council said the watershed approach in the House bill would "bring together urban and rural in a really Iowan way of approaching this." However, neither the House nor Senate proposals include funding adequate to address a \$4 billion to \$6 billion problem.

She recommended the Legislature approve a sales tax increase to fund the conservation trust fund that voters approved in 2010.

But that would have to be part of tax reform the Legislature also plans to tackle this year, Rozenboom said, because neither party has been willing to propose legislation raising taxes.

"I don't expect them to this year," he said.

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State Rep. Chip Baltimore, R-Boone



Bill Northey, Department of Agriculture