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SCHOOL CHOICE BILL PASSES

Prior to bill's signing, several people in Jasper County voiced their opposition to lawmakers at legislative gathering



Christopher Braunschweig/Newton News

Sen. Ken Rozenoom and Rep. Jon Dunwell speak with constituents during a legislative gathering hosted by the League of Women Voters of Jasper County on Jan. 21 at the Hy-Vee in Newton. Several people attended the meeting to voice their displeasure with the school choice bill, which passed earlier this week and signed into law on Jan. 24.

By Christopher Braunschweig
Jasper County Tribune

Despite all the pleading from a standing-room-only crowd hopelessly defending their opposition to the governor's school choice bill this past weekend in front of Rep. Jon Dunwell and Sen. Ken Rozenboom, their representatives ultimately voted in favor of the bill, and it was subsequently signed into law a day later.

The Students First Act is the spiritual successor to the school choice legislation first introduced

in 2022, but it had failed to pass due to a lack of support from the House. With Gov. Kim Reynolds endorsing other Republican candidates in the primaries who *did* support her bill, the House quickly found the votes in 2023.

In addition to the controversy of the bill itself — which creates taxpayer-funded education savings accounts, referred to by opponents as vouchers, for families who want their children to attend private school — many have criticized the push by Republicans to get the law passed only two weeks

into session.

Typically, bills that relate to the collection of taxes or appropriate money must be reviewed by other committees, like the ways and means committee and the appropriations committee. But Republican lawmakers introduced a rule change this session excluding any bills assigned to the education reform committee.

The school choice plan was designated to this very committee, and because of the rule change

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Supervisors add ambulance for EMS enhancement program

Partnerships emerge as county's investment into pilot program continues to grow

By Christopher Braunschweig
Jasper County Tribune

Jasper County continues to invest in its pilot EMS enhancement program — also referred to as the advanced life support (ALS) program — and on Jan. 24 the board of supervisors approved the purchase of an ambulance to further assist the part-timers responding to rural emergencies.

Originally, the county had planned to purchase an ambulance upon evaluating the program after a couple of years. Jasper County Sheriff John Halferty said an opportunity has presented itself and he requested the board of supervisors authorize the purchase now rather than later.

"We are currently working with the Iowa Department of Public Health, which certifies EMS services, and that application to them would allow us to then utilize an ambulance to transport patients if and when needed," he said. "We have and always will be a support service for all of our fine volunteer services."

For the times when the volunteer agencies in the county's smaller communities have an ambulance out of service or do not have a readily available vehicle for services,

EMS — See Page 2

County's unused ARPA funding will go towards Newton hospital

By Christopher Braunschweig
Jasper County Tribune

Supervisors do not know how much of their American Rescue Plan Act funds will be left over after the implementation of the EMS enhancement program and the Phase 1 construction of the new secondary roads shed, but they decided on Jan. 17 that whatever is left will be given to MercyOne Newton Medical Center.

Most of the county's \$7.22

million in ARPA funding has been allocated to organizations and projects, including \$1.25 million to county conservation. Jasper County Supervisor Brandon Talsma said there could be between \$100,000 to \$1 million left over, but getting a firm estimate is not yet possible.

Talsma said all of the ARPA money needs to be earmarked or allocated this year.

"With that being said we do know we have a couple large projects that are in the works,"

he said. "...Essentially all the money has been earmarked already. However there are several projects out there that, I guess a good way to put it is the total dollar amount is fluctuating, so it may end up coming in less."

Caps have been placed on these two major projects: about \$2 million for the EMS enhancement and about \$3 million for the secondary roads shed.

Entities outside Jasper County are also requesting un-

used ARPA funds, Talsma said, including an artist. The chairperson of the board of supervisors is "tired of dealing with them" and decided it would be best if officials decided what they wanted the remainder of the funds spent on.

Jasper County Supervisor Denny Stevenson recalled a past meeting where a representative from the Newton hospital requested \$2 million in ARPA funds to go towards facility improvements. Specifically, the

donation would be used for a \$6 million emergency room enhancement project.

"I think the hospital in this county is hugely important," Stevenson said. "I, personally, would love to see the remainder go to that project."

Fellow county supervisors Doug Cupples and Talsma agreed. The board voted 3-0 to allocate the remaining ARPA funds to MercyOne Newton.

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THE WICKS CHICKS

By Jamee A. Pierson
Jasper County Tribune

With the temperature dipping below zero, the search for new and different indoor activities is on. Absolutely Yunique Boutique in Colfax recently added AYB Candle Bar, a unique experience creating candles and wax brittle.

"It has been going so great. It is so much fun. Oh my gosh it is so much fun!" owner Nikki Regnier Stravers said.

Located in the former consignment space in the boutique at 118 N. Walnut St., the idea for the candle bar came from fellow local entrepreneur Brad Magg.

"He was in one day, and we were telling him some of the goals for the year and he said we should check out a candle bar in Valley Junction. He thought it would be really fun for Colfax," Stravers said. "We checked it out

and thought it would be really great for us."

The idea was the easy part, Stravers and her co-owner and sister, Tammi Regnier Schwickerath, soon found out. From figuring out what type of wax to use to learning how to wick it, the duo had quite the learning curve to make the idea a reality.

"It was quite a process to learn how to make candles," Stravers said. "We started in February and didn't open until August."

They first looked into soy wax, a popular material for candles due to the clean burn it gives. Upon using the material, the women found it could be hard to actually get a smell from it.

"I just couldn't image people spending the money and not being able to smell their candle," Stravers aid. "We stumbled across coconut 83 and that is what we use. We haven't had anybody

CANDLE BAR — See Page 2

AYB Candle Bar open at Absolutely Yunique Boutique in Colfax



Photo provided by AYB Candle Bar

Guests gather around the bar to begin their candle and wax brittle making experience at AYB Candle Bar in Colfax.



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