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2026 Legislative Session: Opening Day Remarks from Leader Brian Meyer

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2026 Opening Day Speech**By House Democratic Leader Rep. Brian Meyer**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Iowa House.
Good morning.

I want to start by thanking my colleagues in the House Democratic Caucus for the trust and support they've placed in me to serve them as the leader of this caucus. It's an honor that I don't take lightly, and one I approach with both humility and determination as we begin this legislative session

I would like to extend my congratulations to Representative Kaufmann on being elected Majority Leader. I look forward to working with you, taking on the people's work in this chamber on the issues that matter most to everyday Iowans.

I have been working in and around the Capitol for over 20 years. Joining me today as my guest is the person who hired me right out of law school, the longest-serving Attorney General in the history of America, and my friend. Please join me in welcoming former Attorney General Tom Miller.

Mr. Speaker, House Democrats are ready to go to work. But these are challenging times for many.

From the Driftless in Northeast Iowa to the Loess Hills, Iowans are struggling to make ends meet.

This session, the Iowa House Democrats are committed to working toward three goals. 1. Make Iowa Number 1 again in Education. 2. Lowering Costs. 3. Making Iowa the best place to live and raise a family.

After nearly a decade of total Republican Control in this State.

- Working families are facing higher costs and fewer opportunities.
- Public schools are being undercut.
- Healthcare has become harder to access
- Families are being forced to tighten their belts

And most concerning...our state budget is in a fiscal death spiral.

We can do better.

Iowa House Democrats will be committed to one clear goal this session: fighting for every Iowan who's been left behind after nearly a decade of one-party control. Our agenda is rooted in what we hear every day from families across this state, and it comes down to three pillars: public education, affordability, and quality of life.

First, we are committed to making Iowa public schools the best in the nation again. That means:

- Lowering class sizes
- Supporting teachers and school staff
- Making sure every student has the resources they need to succeed.

It also means making childcare and preschool affordable and accessible for every Iowa family. And it means saying clearly that taxpayer dollars should be invested in public schools, not siphoned off into reckless private school voucher programs that cost hundreds of millions while leaving too many kids behind.

Second, we are addressing the affordability crisis squeezing working families across Iowa. Too many of our neighbors are working hard, playing by the rules, but still falling behind.

House Democrats are focused on raising wages, protecting benefits, and helping Iowans retire with dignity. We will work to lower the cost of living by expanding access to homeownership, easing pressure on family budgets, and advancing a bold plan to reduce property taxes, paid for by cutting wasteful state spending.

And finally, we are fighting to improve the quality of life across Iowa so that our state becomes the best place for people to live, work, and raise a family. That means standing with family farmers and strengthening rural communities. It means lowering healthcare costs and taking real action on the cancer crisis. And it means finally delivering results on water quality by bringing everyone to the table to protect our land and our water.

When the majority party works toward these goals, you will find a helping hand across the aisle.

If the majority party continues to punch down on Iowa's most vulnerable, we will continue to oppose you at every turn. We will make their voices...our voices here at the Capitol.

There are storm clouds on the horizon. Our state budget is in a fiscal death spiral. While the Republican trifecta on the national level has ballooned the budget deficits with out-of-control borrowing, Iowa must balance the budget every year. Although the use of one-time money is just a temporary band-aid on the budget, a structural deficit is ongoing. What will happen when the money inevitably runs out?

To use one-time money for ongoing expenses is fiscally irresponsible. I will quote former governor Terry Branstad, who said, "funding ongoing expenses with one-time money is unsustainable." – Des Moines Register- July 2, 2015, on why he vetoed certain budget items-

Mr. Speaker, House Democrats are ready to work with anyone in this chamber who is serious about working to deliver:

- better public schools
- more affordability
- A higher quality of life

- A fiscally responsible budget

This session, we must commit to working for the benefit of every Iowan.

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