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RELEASE: Speaker Grassley's Opening Remarks for the 2026 Legislative Session

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Speaker Grassley's Opening Remarks for the 2026 Legislative Session

(DES MOINES, Iowa) -- Today, Speaker of the House Pat Grassley (R-New Hartford) delivered opening remarks to the Iowa House of Representatives. The following are his remarks, as prepared for delivery:

"Good morning, everyone. Welcome back to the People's House. It's good to see you all back in these seats. Everyone cleaned up nicely and looks great today. But give it a few weeks of long debates and subcommittee meetings. You'll all be back to looking like yourselves.

It's an honor to stand before you once again as we convene the second session of the 91st General Assembly.

Before we dive into the work ahead, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the people who make our service possible. First and foremost – to our families. Every member in this chamber knows that we can't do this without our loved ones that are carrying the load back home for us.

I can't thank my family enough for the sacrifices they make and the extra work they pickup so that I can serve here in Des Moines.

I also want to thank the people who actually keep this building running. The Chief Clerk's Office, our caucus staffs, LSA, the doorkeepers, Iowa State Patrol, Capitol Maintenance and all the other building staff. You guys do the heavy lifting behind the scenes so that we

can look good for the cameras.

And finally, we can't start the session without thanking the lowans who sent us here. They put their trust in us, and we don't take that lightly. We are here to deliver on the promises we've made to them.

Today, marks the starting line for the 2026 Legislative Session. It kicks off about a four-month sprint to accomplish the goals the people of Iowa have laid out for us this year.

Chief among those goals is the issue of property taxes. lowans have made it known. The current property tax system is not working for them.

Seniors on fixed income are being priced out of their homes. The high costs are causing young people to delay homeownership. And everyday Iowa families are seeing their bills rise with no predictability and no way to know if those tax dollars are being used efficiently.

Last session we made good progress and got great feedback from lowans and stakeholders. But rather than rush just to get something done, we decided to return to the table this session.

For too long, certainty for the taxing entities has taken priority over certainty for the taxpayers. It's time to put the taxpayers first.

Another issue that returns this session is the discussion of eminent domain. Iowa House Republicans have passed bills on this since 2023, and make no mistake – This issue is not going away.

We continue to hear from lowans about the seriousness of this issue.

We have tried multiple approaches in our efforts to protect landowner's rights. This year, you can expect our approach to be narrowly tailored. If last year's bill had too many components to it, then let's return to the crux of the issue and focus on the topic of eminent domain.

Hours upon hours alone in the combine has given me a lot of time to think.

This year, I found myself reflecting on why it is that a little more than 3 million people choose to call Iowa their home. Because, as we often joke, it's not the weather.

Central to our state's identity is that Iowa is a safe place to live and raise a family. Here in Iowa, we expect that you can trust your neighbors. Leave your car unlocked. Or let your kids play at the park.

We get headlines that pop up on our phones every day about the horrors that take place across this country.

Innocent Ukrainian refugee stabbed to death on a train in Charlotte.

Woman doused in gasoline and set on fire on the L in Chicago.

I've noticed these stories getting closer to home. They're not just taking place in New York or California, but in neighboring states and cities here in the Midwest. And it puts all of us, especially parents, on edge.

Growing up in Iowa like most of you in this room, we remember a childhood where we used to leave the house and our parents didn't worry as long as we were home for dinner.

But that's not our experience as parents and grandparents, is it? Now adays, many of us track our kids on an app. We worry that they won't make it home if we haven't heard from them in too long.

Let's go back to the two tragedies from 2025 I mentioned earlier.

The man who stabbed the woman on a Charlotte train had been arrested 14 times in Mecklenburg County alone. The pyromaniac in Chicago? 72 prior arrests and multiple felony convictions. At the time of the attack, he was on pretrial release with an ankle monitor for a separate assault.

Before you say, well those didn't happen in Iowa. These headlines got my attention, and I went looking to see if something like that has happened in Iowa. The short answer is yes, it has.

One example - In 2023, Henry Dinkins was convicted for the kidnapping and murder of a 10-year-old girl in Davenport. Dinkins' criminal history included more than 10 separate convictions, including multiple felonies.

Repeat violent offenders are released back onto the streets where they become a risk to our children and loved ones.

For those of you who say "well this isn't really a big problem in Iowa"- I say, that even one instance is too many. If Dinkins had been incapacitated once he'd shown a pattern of violent crime, Breasia Terrell would still be alive today. We can not and will not sit back and wait for the tragedies to pile up before we take action.

That's why House Republicans will be pursuing a tough on crime agenda this session. We propose that in this state, if you can't get on the right track after 2 strikes, then on that third strike: you're out.

Dangerous criminals that insist on repeatedly breaking our laws will not be allowed back onto the streets.

This legislative session, career criminals will get the message - they are not welcome here in Iowa.

And lastly, this former Appropriations Chair can't let this speech end without nerding out over the state budget.

The fact is – House Republicans have become so good at responsible budgeting that for years we hardly even talked much about it.

Now, because our income tax cut to 3.8% - 6th lowest in the country - has taken effect, the budget is back in the news. And the minority party is telling you it's time to panic, while Republicans are saying this is exactly what we intended.

Let me frame up this debate accurately for Iowans and draw the important distinctions between the minority and majority parties.

Iowans - the government was collecting too much of your money. Way more than we needed. The state was collecting so much money that not only were our reserve funds full, not only was the budget's ending balance over \$2 billion dollars, but also, our Taxpayer Relief Fund had reached over \$4 billion dollars.

House Republicans don't believe it is responsible for the government to be sitting on so much money. It should be back in Iowa's economy.

Unfortunately, the Democrats think this is their money and it should be used for more government spending.

They believe the government bureaucracy knows better what to do with your hard-earned money than you do. Republicans, on the other hand, know that this is your money. And that you deserve your money back.

So, we cut income taxes and created a responsible plan to navigate a temporary decrease in state revenues by using money from the Taxpayer Relief Fund.

We're not talking about the reserve funds. We're talking about the over \$4 billion dollars sitting in the fund that was created in a bipartisan manner, specifically for the purpose of cutting taxes. Any other use of that money would be a betrayal by Republicans and Democrats on a promise we made to our constituents.

So Iowans – ignore the fear mongering and enjoy the extra cash in your wallet.

We've got 100 days to deliver this legislative session. By late April, I predict there will be a lot less enthusiasm in the room and we'll all be sick of the sight of each other. But we're all here for a reason.

We're here to serve the good people of Iowa as best as we can. We're here to deliver on

the promises we've made to our constituents. We're here because we're proud to be from the state of Iowa and we're willing to work hard to make sure it remains a great place to live and raise your family.

So let's get to work—and let's try to be out of here before the planters are rolling in the field."

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