

Senate Democratic Leader Janet Petersen's 2020 closing day remarks

Thank you, President Schneider.

As we wrap up the 2020 Legislative session, I want to thank my Democratic colleagues for the honor of leading our team.

I also want to give a shout out to the retirees for their service: Senators Behn, Breitbach, Feenstra, Greene, Kapucian, Segebart and Schneider.

I want to take a moment to ask the chamber to join me in showing our appreciation to our smart, talented, caring and hard-working caucus staffs – from both the Democratic and Republican caucuses.

Thank you to the Secretary of the Senate and his staff, the Senate pages, all the hard-working staff at the Legislative Services Agencies, and the news media that cover us every day on behalf of our constituents.

Let's give all of them a round of applause.

On the opening day of this historic session, I talked about the nostalgic resurgence of Fred Rogers of "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood."

I talked about how my 15-year-old daughter asked me last fall why Mr. Rogers has become so popular again.

I told her I believe Mr. Rogers's popularity has resurged because people are longing for kindness and a sense of connection in our world.

As author and podcast creator Carvel Wallace put it: "In a time like this, Fred Rogers has something that we desperately need."

Mr. Rogers famously told this story: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, '*Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.*'"

In that spirit, I asked that everyone in this chamber, in the House and in the Governor's office to strive to be the new helpers focused on working together to

build a healthier, happier, safer and stronger Iowa neighborhood for our parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren and our friends.

Specifically, I asked that we start sending a message that Iowa will once again be a friendly, inclusive state *for everyone*.

That's because we have a responsibility to deliver kindness and care to people who don't look like us, people who have less money than us, people who don't share our interests or our political views, and people who haven't had the opportunities we have received.

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In the wake of the death of George Floyd, a black man killed by police in Minneapolis, thousands and thousands of Iowans took to the streets to protest and to call for the end of racial injustice in our nation.

Iowans came together to say "enough is enough."

I am proud that state leaders listened to concerned Iowans and took historic first steps to advance equality and justice in our state.

We must continue listening during the coming months and years, and we must be prepared to work together to end racial profiling, enact criminal justice reforms, and expand voting rights. We also need to address racial disparities in health care, income and educational inequality, and much more.

The second major issue facing the Legislature and Governor this year was the COVID-19 pandemic that created a "new normal" in our homes, neighborhoods and workplaces.

When the Legislature recessed on March 17, there were 29 positive cases and no COVID-related deaths in Iowa.

Today, we are faced with more than 23,500 confirmed cases and more than 650 COVID-related deaths.

Unfortunately, the Governor and Republican-controlled Legislature failed to provide the leadership necessary for Iowans to look with confidence to our state government

as a “helper” during this pandemic. And thousands of Iowans have been hurt by their lack of leadership.

Instead of relying on ribbon-cutting rhetoric and mystery data, we should have worked together to:

- Protect the health and safety of ALL Iowans.
- Stabilize basic economic security needs of Iowa families.
- Create an Iowa-focused economic recovery plan.

Next session, I hope the Legislature and Governor will work harder to make our neighborhoods safer and stronger rather than focusing on the wish lists from special interests.

We support:

- **Creating good-paying jobs and ensuring economic security.**
- **Making Iowa education #1 again.**
- **Expanding health care and mental health services.**
- **Making Iowa a safer place to have a baby for parents-to-be.**
- **Protecting older Iowans from financial exploitation, neglect and abuse.**
- **Passing meaningful medical cannabis laws.**
- **Protecting human and civil rights.**
- **Improving and expanding democracy.**
- **Cleaning up Iowa’s water and protecting Iowa’s environment.**
- **Expanding access to high-speed internet in all 99 counties.**

In the future, let’s pledge to put the power of kindness to work in this place so our children, our grandchildren and all Iowans see that the Iowa Legislature is comprised of helpers who want to make our state a welcoming, friendly neighborhood again for everyone.

As Fred Rogers once said: “If you look for the helpers, you’ll know that there’s hope.”

Finally, I want to thank all for making your voices heard this legislative session. Democrats love you and we look forward to working with you to ensure bluer skies are ahead for state – and a much bluer Iowa Senate.

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