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Iowa Division

Advocacy News

DECEMBER 2022

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Status of Women’s Rights as Human Rights in the United States



Debra DeLaet

Executive Director, Iowa United Nations Association

The [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women](#) held its 82nd session from June 13 through July 1, 2022. The Committee, comprised of 23 independent experts on women’s rights from countries across the globe, is the treaty-monitoring body for the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW). The CEDAW Committee works with States parties (countries that have ratified the treaty) to ensure that they are working towards fulfilling their treaty obligations. Countries that have joined the treaty are required to submit regular reports to the Committee on the steps that they are taking to implement provisions of the treaty. The Committee reviews these reports in public sessions and makes recommendations to the State parties for measures to further their implementation of treaty provisions.

Like other international human rights treaties, the treaty-monitoring process relies on constructive dialogue between the CEDAW Committee and participating countries. The Committee’s recommendations are non-binding and based on the consent of the States parties. Whereas [critics have argued](#) that the non-binding nature of international human rights treaties renders them meaningless, CEDAW has contributed to [concrete policy changes](#) expanding the rights of women in countries across the globe, including the expansion of “citizenship rights in Botswana and Japan; inheritance rights in Tanzania; property and political participation in Costa Rica; ... a law in Rwanda prohibiting sex-based discrimination in access to land; ... domestic violence laws in Turkey, Nepal, South Africa, and the Republic of Korea;... anti-trafficking laws in Ukraine and Moldova”; and gender-responsive budgeting for rural development in Sri Lanka, among other policies. In response to observations from the CEDAW Committee, China adopted measures to reduce fetal sex identification procedures and sex-selective abortions.

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Batteries, Oceans, and International Seabed Authority, Oh My!



Jane Shuttleworth

Iowa UNA Board Member

Advocacy Committee Member

Excitement is in the air because climate change is being addressed on a global scale. The passage of the [Inflation Reduction Act of 2022](#) is expected to advance [decarbonization](#) through incentives to increase investment and innovation in both renewable energy and energy efficiency. Major car manufacturers in the United States and Europe are shifting to [electronic vehicle \(EV\) production](#). Greece recently announced its country’s entire energy system ran on renewables for the first time in October. The list goes on. But not all that glitters is “green”, and the devil is in the details. In the center of the devilish details are three things: the growing global demand for batteries, the international ocean bottom, and a heretofore obscure UN-affiliated agency, the [International Seabed Authority](#) (ISA).

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Advocacy News is Still Going Green

In alignment with our commitment to sustainability, Iowa UNA is prioritizing the electronic distribution of our advocacy newsletter. We will distribute Advocacy News via email and also will publish it on our website and social media platforms. If you prefer to receive a hard copy, please email debra@unaiowa.org

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In addition to making recommendations to State parties, the Committee also issues [general recommendations](#) to offer clarification regarding treaty provisions and to highlight issues of concern related to women's rights. For States that have ratified CEDAW's [Optional Protocol](#), the Committee has the authority to receive from individuals or groups of individuals regarding claims that their rights under CEDAW have been violated by the State party and to initiate inquiries into situations involving grave or systematic violations of women's rights under CEDAW. CEDAW has near-universal membership, with 189 States parties. A striking omission from the list of parties to the treaty is the United States, the only industrialized country in the world that has not ratified CEDAW. The other United Nations members that have not joined CEDAW are Iran, Palau, Somalia, Sudan, Tonga, and the Holy See. The United States has failed to ratify CEDAW despite playing a leading role in drafting the treaty. Indeed, the United States was the first country to sign CEDAW when it was brought up for signature in 1980. However, the U.S. Senate has failed to ratify the Convention due to the [lack of bipartisan support](#), with Democrats generally in favor of ratification and Republicans staunchly opposed. Democratic



support for CEDAW has been insufficient to reach the [two-thirds majority required for ratification](#). Some of the U.S. resistance is rooted in fears that participation in international human rights treaties erodes national sovereignty. There is also [partisan disagreement over women's rights](#). Among Republicans, political opposition to ratification has been [particularly strong among social conservatives opposed to abortion](#).

The issue of abortion has remained at the center of ongoing global discussions regarding women's rights and the U.S. failure to join CEDAW. On July 1, the final day of its 82nd session, the CEDAW Committee [issued a statement](#) that publicly criticized the U.S. Supreme Court's June 24 ruling in [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health](#), in which the Court [struck down Roe v. Wade](#). The Committee specifically urged the United States to ratify CEDAW in order to respect, protect, fulfill, and promote human rights for women and girls, including the right to health. The Committee's statement highlighted the fact that unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal morbidity and mortality globally. The Committee called upon all States parties to end the criminalization of abortion and to allow lawful abortion at least in cases of rape, incest, threats to the lives of women and girls, and cases involving severe fetal impairment. According to the Committee, forced pregnancy and forced birth constitute gender-based violence against women "and, in certain circumstances, to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

The Committee echoed the [statement by Michelle Bachelet](#), the [UN High Commissioner For Human Rights](#), who issued the following statement on Dobbs. V. Jackson: "Access to safe, legal and effective abortion is firmly rooted in international human rights law and is at the core of women and girls' autonomy and ability to make their own choices about their bodies and lives, free of discrimination, violence and coercion." Notably, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling is out of alignment with global trends. As High Commissioner Bachelet's statement indicates, over fifty countries have liberalized



restrictive abortion legislation in recent decades. Importantly, the Council on Foreign Relations has documented evidence that [abortion rates decline in countries where it is legal and increase in countries where abortion is restricted](#). The evidence that abortion declines when the procedure is legal is even more pronounced when one excludes the data from China, where the legacy of China's one-child policy and the practice of forced abortion has led to [persistently high rates of abortion](#), and India, a country with a [high rate of sex selective abortion](#) due to a cultural preference for boys.

Two of the more prominent cases of the liberalization of national abortion laws are Ireland and Mexico. Historically, Ireland has had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe, codified in the 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution which banned abortion. The [death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012](#) from an infection she contracted after being denied an emergency abortion during a miscarriage ignited public outrage and a campaign to legalize abortion in Ireland. In 2018, [more than 66% of](#)

[Irish voters](#) voted to repeal the 8th Amendment. Subsequently, the Irish Parliament legalized abortion prior to twelve weeks of pregnancy and when necessary to protect the health of the mother. In Mexico, the country's Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling [to decriminalize abortion](#) in September 2021. This ruling has expanded legal access to abortion for millions of women in Mexico. The Supreme Court ruling in Mexico also set a precedent for the freeing of women who had been imprisoned for seeking abortions. The cases of Ireland and Mexico are particularly noteworthy because the liberalization of abortion laws has taken place in predominantly Catholic countries with strong religious and cultural opposition to abortion. It is also noteworthy that the Court's ruling in Mexico [makes explicit reference international human rights standards](#).

This global comparison demonstrates that the United States is going against global trends when it comes to promoting women's rights as human rights. The U.S. retreat on women's rights has broader foreign policy implications as well. Harold Hongju Koh, Sterling Professor of International Law at Yale Law School and former Legal Advisor of the Department of State, has demonstrated that [joining CEDAW would strengthen U.S. foreign policy](#) by enhancing our legitimacy and ability to act as a global leader in the realm of human rights. U.S. ratification of CEDAW also would enhance the ability to [promote human rights in the domestic realm](#), partly by drawing attention to the intersection of race and gender. Black women and women of color are more likely to face barriers to the fulfillment of their human rights, including in the realm of sexual health and reproductive justice.

You can take action to advocate for gender equality by reaching out to your elected representatives [here](#). We encourage you to tailor your letters to members of Congress, and specifically to your senators, by specifically calling for the United States to ratify CEDAW.

Thank you for your advocacy on behalf of women's rights as human rights.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND GLOBAL WARMING



Jozef Figa
Advocacy Committee Member

The result of the 2021 [Glasgow Climate Summit](#) was the collective obligation of the world's countries to ensure that the average global temperature would not increase more than [1.5 degrees](#) Celsius above the average global temperature from the beginning of the Industrial Era. Considering that the average global temperature has already increased by 1.2 degrees in the last 200 years, this is a formidable task. But, in principle, it is doable. In fact, the Glasgow Summit named and explained specific measures needed to attain this goal. They included providing \$100 billion annually from developed to developing countries. This is very important because developed countries are responsible for the climate problems. Also, all countries agreed to lower the emissions of greenhouse gasses in order to ensure the attainment of the goal of increasing the average temperature by no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. Participating countries explicitly called for phasing down both coal power and also subsidies for fossil fuels. There are solid chances that none of this is going to happen because of the war between Ukraine and Russia.

Two countries that decisively cut themselves off Russian supplies of raw materials are the USA and the UK. The [official plan](#) of the European Union is to lower its dependence on Russian energy sources by two-thirds. The alternative was to increase oil and gas imports from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Germany has been working on phasing out nuclear power stations and had decided to phase out two out of the remaining three nuclear stations. Due to a collapse in energy supplies from Russia, the German government has decided to keep [two nuclear power plants on standby](#) until as late as April 2023.



France is [planning to add to its nuclear power stations](#). Poland has been traditionally dependent on coal and will be [using more of it](#) at least through the winter. It will be mostly imported coal and, in many cases, of the type that has been correlated with an increasing incidence of cancer.

The [UN Secretary-General](#), Antonio Guterres, has recently stated that what has been presented as short-term solutions to an emergent problem could become a long-term solution, namely, replacing non-renewable resources from Russia with non-renewable resources from other countries. This would amount to continuing the policy which is bound to result in a major climate catastrophe. Guterres's argument is that this war offers both a lesson and an opportunity to end the dependency on fossil fuels. The problem is that, at least in Europe, there are increasing fears of losing access to energy sources and of the resulting pressures to use whatever is available to maintain energy security, regardless of its sources and on the impact on global warming.



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Batteries: Vital Storage

Batteries, used in EVs, cell phones, and a myriad of modern gadgets, are at the center of this global energy shift as they provide vital storage for energy generated by wind and solar. Demand is escalating for batteries and the raw materials needed to build them.

Enter the Ocean Floor

Meanwhile, for the past 540 million years, minerals have been accumulating on the deepest parts of the ocean floor, often in concentrations and formations not found on land. [Polymetallic nodules](#) are a case in point. The shape and size of walnuts, these nodules occur across deep ocean bottoms for hundreds of square miles at a water depth of three to four miles. In addition to manganese and iron, they can contain nickel, copper and cobalt in commercially attractive concentrations, as well as traces of other valuable metals. These nodules and other mineral resources are now eyed as a key source of raw material to power the transition to a decarbonized economy. Investment has poured into the battery industry, and companies are pushing for large-scale [deep-sea mining](#). However, most of these oceanic mineral deposits occur in international waters outside the jurisdiction and beyond the territorial boundaries of any country. Fifty-four percent of the world's oceans fit into this category. Who has the right to access and exploit these resources?

The International Seabed Authority

Although most people have never heard of deep-sea mining, knowledge of the mineral potential of the deep ocean extends back to 1870 when the nodules were first discovered by British scientists aboard the [HMS Challenger](#). Until the 1970s, commercial exploitation was never deemed economically or technically feasible. Nonetheless, apprehension over unregulated access to deep ocean resources and over potential conflicts between nations over this access has emerged over the past century, along with concerns of monopolization by more technologically advanced countries to the detriment of developing countries. In this context, the UN produced the [UN Convention on the High Seas](#) in 1958 to establish a common framework for international interactions on and with oceans. This treaty emerged out of the work of first [UN Conference on the Law of the Seas](#) (UNCLOS) and [entered into force](#) in 1962. It wasn't until the third UNCLOS, lasting from 1973 to 1982, that the [UN Convention on the Law of the Sea](#) was finalized as a treaty. The treaty did not become operative until 1994 when it received the required number of ratifications to enter into force.

Under UNCLOS, minerals on the international seabed are classified as the [common heritage of humankind](#). [Part XI, Section 4](#) of the treaty created the International Seabed Authority with the mandate to ensure equity in access to the deep seabed, along with equitable sharing of benefits and scientific knowledge, and long-term sustainability in protection of the marine environment. The ISA is the only organization through which state parties to UNCLOS, including 167 Member States and the European Union, cooperate to administer, organize and control all mineral-resources-related activities on the international seabed for the benefit of humankind as a whole.

Unlike the majority of UN bodies, ISA is classified as "autonomous" and falls under the direction of its own [Secretary-General](#) who convenes delegates from the member states and other observers annually.

Until recently, the ISA had only issued permits for exploration, and no commercial mining has taken place in the international seabed. Instead, ISA efforts have focused on mapping the ocean floor and gathering environmental

data as the basis for developing regulations. However, as knowledge of minerals and their distribution has increased, so has awareness of the extraordinary biodiversity of the seafloor including constant discoveries of new species as well as the significance of the deep ocean in overall ocean ecosystem functioning.

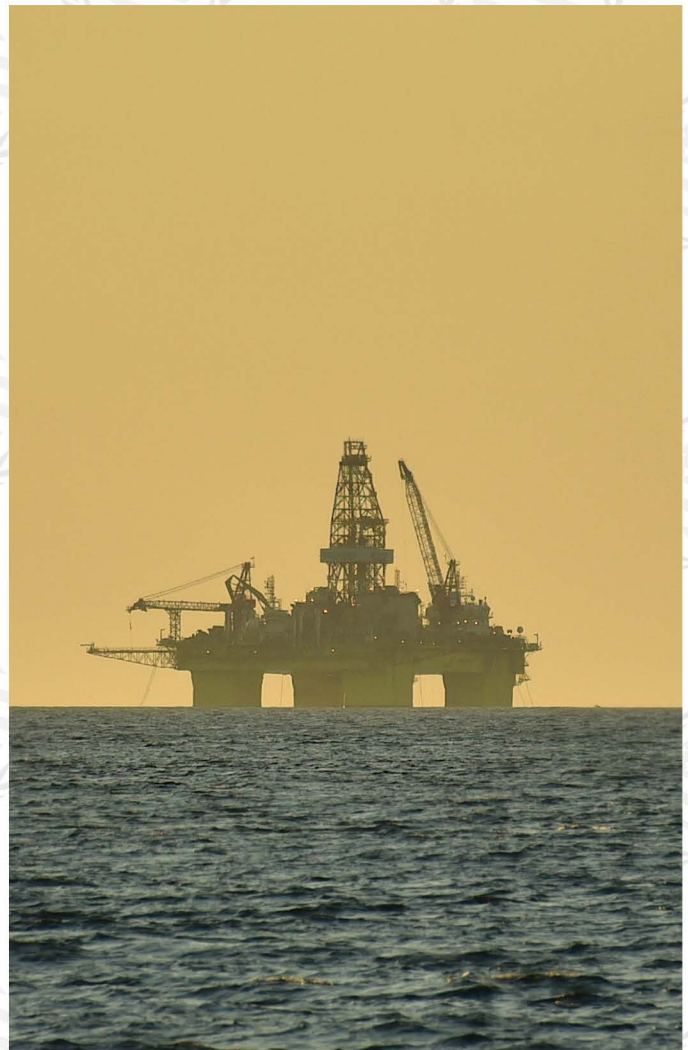
Opposition to deep sea mining has begun to grow, with many asking if deep sea mining is really in the interest of humanity. [Critics of deep-sea mining](#) cite alarm over potential irreversible consequences that mineral exploitation could have on loss of habitats, species, and ecosystems, and concern about possible social and economic impacts to [Pacific Island Nations](#). Critics of the ISA argue that the body is skewed toward mining rather than conservation, and concerns have also been raised about the lack of transparency in the ISA's activities and decision-making processes.

Other scientists and policy makers argue deep-sea mining critics need to step back and look at the big picture. For example, [Don Walsh](#) is an American oceanographer and passionate advocate of ocean exploration. In 1960, he was one of the first two persons to descend to the deepest part of the ocean in the [Mariana Trench](#), and he represented the United States as a scientific advisor to UNCLOS negotiations from 1978 to 1983. In a [2020 interview](#), he expressed his belief that there is time for science and industry to work out their differences and allow deep-sea mining to proceed while minimizing and mitigating impacts. "It's not a matter of if but when," he says of ocean mining. "It will have to take place to ensure and supply the world's growing demand for essential commodities."

The Trigger is Pulled

Until recently, the ISA has issued permits only for exploration, and no commercial mining has taken place. Recently, the number of exploratory permits suddenly began to increase from under a dozen in the early 2000s to over 30 by 2021. Despite this rapid increase, many ISA states and observers were still taken by surprise in June 2021 when the small Pacific island nation of [Nauru notified the ISA](#) it had triggered an obscure clause in UNCLOS that would theoretically allow it to start mining by June 2023 under whatever mining rules were in place by then. Nauru sponsors a subsidiary [The Metals Company](#) (TMC), which is a Canada-based mining startup. Nauru's action put the ISA under pressure to finalize mining regulations, including mechanisms to reduce and mitigate environmental impacts.

In the ensuing months, many ISA member states created the [Alliance of Countries for a Deep-Sea Mining Moratorium](#), calling for a moratorium on deep-seabed



mining in international waters and making a request to not rush the development of mining rules. The [Deep Sea Conservation Coalition](#), founded in 2004, includes over 100 non-governmental organizations that have joined together to protect deep-sea ecosystems. Scientific institutions, NGOs and even businesses, including Google, BMW, Volvo, Samsung, joined the chorus. The ISA has continued to hold meetings. According to observers, progress on the mining code appeared to have stalled in the summer of 2022. Thus, it came as a surprise to the world in September when the [ISA issued the first exploratory mining trial](#) to TMC before the 2023 deadline. The news came first from TMC in a [press release dated September 7](#). The ISA did not post its own statement until September 15. The TMC's [Hidden Gem](#), the world's largest vessel dedicated to mining the seafloor for minerals, headed out to international waters on Wednesday, September 14 from the Mexican port of Manzanillo.

Stay tuned for the next developments.

BECOME A MEMBER!

You can help the United Nations build a better world by becoming a member of the Iowa United Nations Association. Help us to continue to educate, inspire, and mobilize Iowans in support of the lifesaving work of the United Nations. [Join here!](#) You may join our Iowa Division or our chapters in Johnson County, Linn County, or the Cedar Valley. Individuals under the age of 26 years are eligible for free membership.

Education in Crisis Globally



Alice Dahle
Advocacy Committee Member

Education is facing a global crisis driven primarily by three Cs: climate change, conflicts and Covid-19. Since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, the educations of more than 90% of the children around the world have been interrupted – the greatest disruption of education systems in history.

For three days during the opening session of this fall's General Assembly, the United Nations held a [Transforming Education Summit](#) aimed at creating more equitable and inclusive access to education for millions of children who have been left behind. As stated by Joseph Maada Bio, the president of Sierra Leone, who co-chaired the summit, "Education is not a luxury but a right."

The summit emphasized replacement of the [three R's of the past century, reading, writing and arithmetic, with the five C's](#) priorities recommended by [Sustainable Development Goal No. 4](#): critical thinking, comprehension, computer skills, creativity, and civic education.

According to a recent [report from UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank](#), more than 70% of children globally cannot read and understand a simple story, and more than 244 million children will not be able to attend school this year.

For too many of those absent students, especially girls and young women, the break in their educations may become permanent. During the long Covid lockdown, families around the world lost a significant amount of their income. Children were under pressure to engage in agricultural or other forms of child labor, and girls were expected to do housework and look after family members. When education shifted to online learning, those families who had access to the Internet often had only one electronic device, which was allotted to one or two of the sons while the daughters helped with household chores.

Pandemic-related stress also contributed to a rise in domestic violence, rape and an increase in the number of pregnancies in adolescent girls. In some countries, girls who become pregnant are not allowed to return to school, effectively ending their educations. Early marriage of girls became a way for families to cope with the economic challenges they faced. [The United Nations Population Fund](#) (UNFPA), the UN's population agency, estimates that as many as [13 million more child marriages may take place over the next 10 years](#) as a result of school closures and lack of access to family planning

services during the Covid lockdown. In the United States, the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) conducted an academic assessment of 9-year-olds across the country. The results showed the sharpest drop ever in reading skills, as well as the first-ever decline in math achievement between 2019 before the pandemic and early 2022. In addition, US students faced a need for more mental health services as well as increased absenteeism, school violence, disruption and cyberbullying. A nationwide teacher and staff shortage has also emerged during this time period.

UNA members can help by urging our elected officials to make progress toward achieving the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#), especially [SDG 4](#) on Education, a priority, both here in the US and globally.

We can also help girls around the world continue their educations by asking our congressional representatives to pass the bipartisan [Keeping Girls in School Act](#). Ask Senators Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst to cosponsor S.2276, and your representative in the House to cosponsor H.R.4134.



Tell your Senators and Representatives to pass an Afghan Adjustment Act!



Caryl Lyons
IUNA Board Member and
Advocacy Committee Member

Many Afghans risked their lives to help the U.S. military. And many Americans have been very welcoming to Afghan refugees, even in places that often aren't so welcoming to any refugees or immigrants. The United States promised all who worked with us that they would not be abandoned. Many were rescued. Some were not. There are approximately [80,000 Afghan refugees](#) currently living in the United States under a variety of programs.

So—we can feel pretty good about this, right? Well, maybe, maybe not. The big “maybe” has to do with the [Afghan Adjustment Act](#), currently being considered in the U.S. Congress. Many Afghans were brought into the U.S. under the [humanitarian parole](#) program, which allowed for their fast-tracked admittance. Humanitarian parole allows people to remain here for 1 or 2 years while they are under threat, rather than providing a pathway to some permanent status. Thus the Afghans we have welcomed may soon be living “under a cloud of legal uncertainty.”

The Afghan Adjustment Act, [S. 4787](#), was introduced by a bipartisan group of senators, namely Senators Amy Klobuchar, Lindsay Graham, Chris Coons, Roy Blunt, Richard Blumenthal, and Lisa Murkowski. The bill allows these Afghan

refugees admitted under humanitarian parole to apply for lawful permanent resident status, just as they could have if they had been admitted under one of the existing refugee visa programs. Because there are many Afghan refugees still outside the U.S. who would qualify for U.S. protection, the recommended “adjustment legislation” would need to cover all Afghans who are paroled into the U.S. between July 1, 2021 and July 1, 2025.

Some precedents for this? There was a [Cuban Adjustment Act](#) following the Cuban Revolution. There were several related pieces of [adjustment legislation](#) following the Vietnam War.

The legislation would also need to protect Afghans who were forced to have contact with [the Taliban](#). In the past, the State Department determined that merely working for the Taliban (say as a clerk or a school teacher) could bar an applicant from getting a visa. One publicized case concerned a person who was forced under threat to bring food to some Taliban members being barred from U.S. entry.

Without an Afghan Adjustment Act, the tens of thousands of Afghan refugees admitted under humanitarian parole would have to then apply for asylum to have any chance of remaining in their newly constructed lives. Since there is already a [backlog](#) of 400,000 asylum cases (and a larger immigration backlog of 1.4 million cases), adding thousands more would both put even more stress on the overworked legal system and also put these refugees into legal limbo for an indefinite period of time. [Amnesty International](#) asks that the U.S. also take into account the traumatic experiences these refugees have already lived through and refrain from adding further unnecessary burdens to their lives. The right to seek asylum and the right not to be sent back to a country where one might face persecution are supported by Articles 13, 14, and 15 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), as well as by provisions of the [Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), which applies to any form of removal or transfer of persons where there is a substantial ground for risk of irreparable harm upon return.

Please contact your legislators in Washington, D.C., and ask that they lend their support to an Afghan Adjustment Act. Addresses of Iowa Senators and Representatives are included elsewhere in this newsletter.

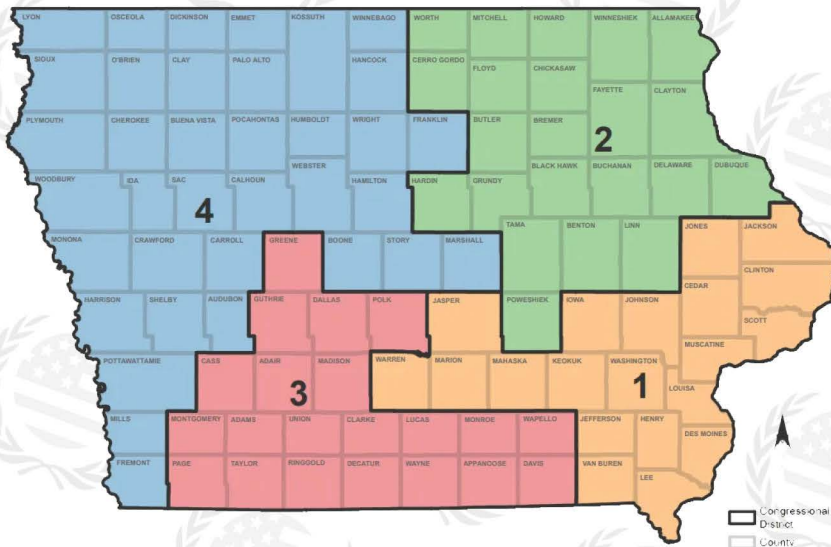


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Also, a huge shoutout to the Drake School of Journalism and Mass Communications student, Nash Linsley, for putting together this newsletter and enhancing the Iowa United Nations Association brand!

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How to Contact Your Elected Officials

* New members of the Iowa congressional delegation will begin their terms in office on January 23, 2023

President Joseph Biden (D)
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
www.whitehouse.gov/contact

Senator Charles Grassley (R)
135 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington D.C. 20510
(202) 224-3744
www.grassley.senate.gov/contact

Senator Joni Ernst (R)
111 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington D.C. 20510
(202) 224-3524
www.ernst.senate.gov/contact

District 4: Representative Randy Feenstra (R)
1440 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington D.C. 20515
(202) 225-4426
feenstra.house.gov/contact

District 2: Representative Ashley Hinson (R)
1429 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington D.C. 20515
(202) 225-2911
www.hinson.house.gov/

District 3: Representative Zach Nunn (R)
1034 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington D.C. 20515
(202) 225-5476
nunn.house.gov/

District 1: Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R)
1716 Longworth House Office Bldg.
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