

**Pieces of Iowa's Past
This Month:
Examining the Firsts:
The Sixty-first General Assembly
March 2026**

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Examining the Firsts: The Sixty-first General Assembly

This year, the Ninety-first Iowa General Assembly began its second session. Some of this year's *Pieces of Iowa's Past* articles will briefly examine the work of the First, Eleventh, Twenty-first, Thirty-first, Forty-first, Fifty-first, Sixty-first, Seventy-first and Eighty-first General Assemblies or observe interesting events that happened during those years.

The first session of the Sixty-first General Assembly convened January 4, 1965, and adjourned June 4, 1965, a 145-day session. The governor of Iowa in 1965 was Harold Hughes. Lieutenant Governor Robert Fulton presided over the Senate, and Vincent Steffen was Speaker of the House.



[Governor
Harold Hughes](#)



[Lieutenant Governor
Robert Fulton](#)



[Speaker
Vincent Steffen](#)

There were 25 Republicans and 34 Democrats in the Senate, and in the House, there were 23 Republicans and 101 Democrats. In total, 183 legislators served during the Sixty-first General Assembly.

Representation in the Legislature

In a 145-day session, at that time the longest session to date, a constitutional amendment was proposed by the Sixty-first General Assembly that rewrote the House and Senate redistricting rules.

Iowa's three Constitutions had called for a two-house legislature, with all seats based on population. The seats had to be reapportioned every two years. The legislature reapportioned its seats faithfully every two years until the Twenty-second General Assembly met January 9, 1888. It adopted the 1886 Reapportionment Act of the Twenty-first General Assembly. So did the next seven General Assemblies. Consequently, population shifts were not reflected in apportionment of legislative seats for 16 years.

The Twenty-ninth General Assembly in 1902 took the first step to fix the failure to carry out the apportionment formula by adopting proposed amendments to the constitution. The amendment gave the Senate 50 seats based on population. There would be 108 House seats, one for each of the 99 counties and an extra one for each of the nine counties largest in population.

CHAPTER 42

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICTS

42.1 Ratio of representation.
42.2 Number.

42.3 Determination of tie.

42.1 Ratio of representation. The ratio of representation for the purpose of determining the counties which shall be entitled to two representatives, each, is fixed at twenty-seven thousand five hundred eighty-three. [C27, 31, 35,§526-b1; C39,§526.3; C46, 50, 54, 58,§42.1; 59GA, ch 70,§1]

Constitutional provision, amendment No. 2 of 1904

42.2 Number. The counties of Polk, Woodbury, Linn, Scott, Pottawattamie, Dubuque, Black Hawk, Clinton and Johnson shall each be entitled to two representatives in the house of representatives of this state. All other counties shall each be entitled to one representative. [C27, 31, 35,§526-b2; C39,§526.4; C46, 50, 54, 58,§42.2; 59GA, ch 70,§2]

[Iowa Code](#) naming the nine largest counties entitled to two representatives in the Iowa House of Representatives.

The proposals also called for reapportionment after every census, instead of every two years as required previously. The amendments took effect November 29, 1904, rewriting Sections 34, 35 and 36 of Article III and Section 16 of Article XII of the [1857 Iowa Constitution](#).

However, never from the time of their adoption did the legislature ever apportion Senate seats as required by the 1904 amendments, so the legislature consisted of 158 seats for the next 60 years. It would not be until 1961 that the Fifty-ninth General Assembly would propose a constitutional amendment entitled The Shaff Plan, commonly known for as its chief sponsor, [Senator David Shaff](#). This new apportionment formula, shown below, was proposed as a substitute for the 1904 formula. Having been passed by the Fifty-ninth General Assembly in 1961 and by the Sixtieth in 1963, this plan was now ready for submission to the people, but voters rejected the Shaff Plan in December 1963.



Senator
David Shaff

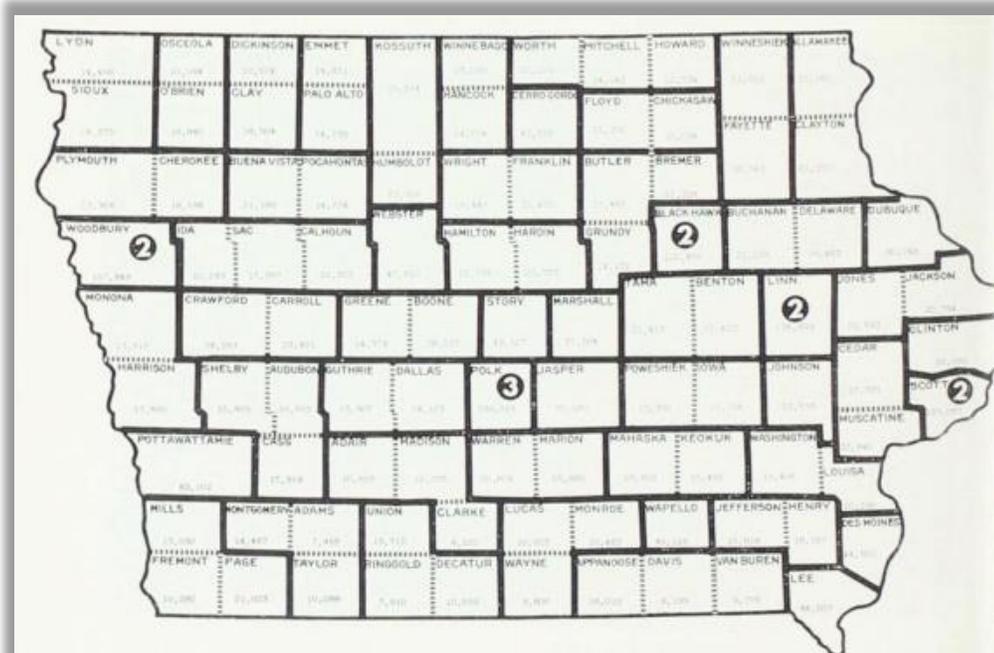
SENATE: The number of seats would be increased from 50 to 58, all based on population. County lines could be crossed where necessary to create 58 districts, each with population deviating no more than 10% from 1/58th of the state's population at the last census.

HOUSE: The number of seats would be reduced from 108 to 99, one for each of the 99 counties, regardless of its population.

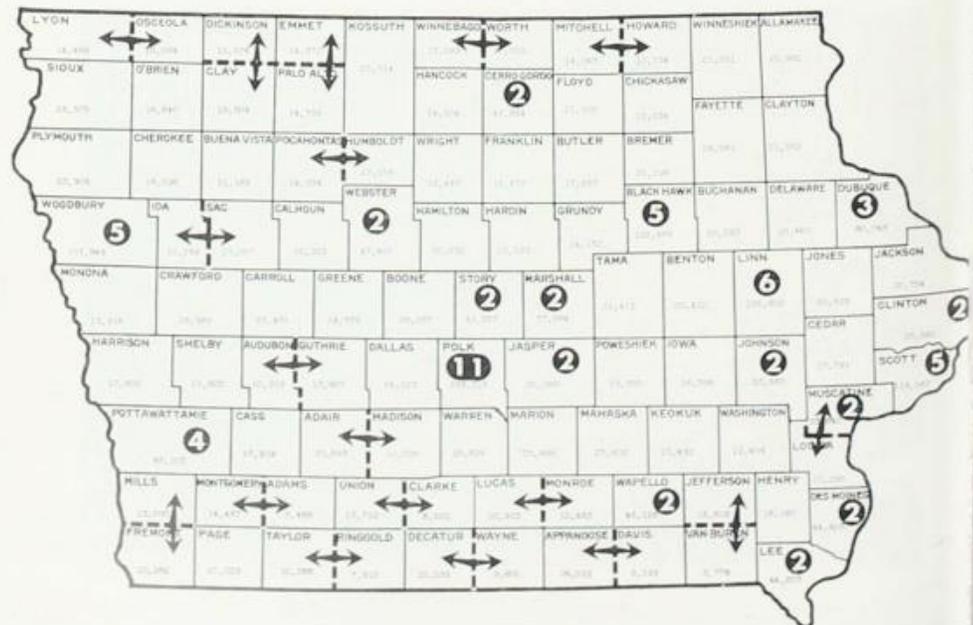
Excerpt of the Shaff Plan printed in the [Palimpsest](#) in June 1964.

This was also at a time that the federal Supreme Court landmark case [Reynolds vs. Sims](#) (1964) applied the "one person, one vote" principle to state legislative districts, requiring them to have substantially equal populations. A federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Iowa's legislative apportionment formula was brought by the Iowa Federation of Labor. In 1964, the federal court decided that the Iowa legislature should reapportion its seats in time for the 1964 elections or face the prospect the court might do it.

A temporary plan was signed by the Governor on March 23, 1964, and on March 27, the Federal District Court approved the temporary reapportionment plan. The approved plan called for a 59-seat Senate based on area, with a population factor, and a 124-seat House based largely on population. Six of the new Senate seats would be based on population, three on area.



SENATE TEMPORARY PLAN. Numbers indicate seats allocated to larger counties with other big counties forming single-county districts each with one seat. Remaining counties form two-county and three-county districts as indicated by heavy lines. Total seats: 59 with majority (30) elected by 38.9% of the people.



HOUSE TEMPORARY PLAN. Numbers indicate seats allocated to larger counties; arrows indicate counties combined into single districts with one seat each, except Muscatine-Louisa with two seats. Remaining counties allocated one seat apiece. Total seats: 124 with majority (63) elected by 44.02% of the people.

Number of seats allocated to each district under the 1964 temporary plan.

With the first reapportionment in 60 years complete, the 183 newly elected legislators of the Sixty-first General Assembly went to work on a constitutional amendment proposing a “permanent” formula of reapportionment to submit to the people.

[Senate File 568](#) repealed the acts of the Sixtieth General Assembly and established a new temporary plan to do the job of reapportionment adequately in the intervening years until a constitutional amendment was to go into effect. The legislature would consist of 185 legislators during this interim.

The Sixty-first General Assembly also passed [Senate Joint Resolution 24](#), a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the State of Iowa relating to the composition of the General Assembly, the basis of representation of the members, and the establishment of congressional districts.

The permanent reapportionment plan passed by the Sixty-first General Assembly set a Senate of not more than 50 and a House of not more than 100. The constitutional amendment eventually was passed by the Sixty-second General Assembly and received voter approval in 1968 resulting in the 26th amendment to our state constitution, shown below.

[26] Section six (6) of Article three (III) section thirty-four (34) of Article three (III) and the 1904 and 1928 amendments thereto, sections thirty-five (35) and thirty-six (36) of Article three (III) and the 1904 amendment to each such section, and section thirty-seven (37) of Article three (III) are hereby repealed and the following adopted in lieu thereof:

Senators — number and classification. Section 6. The number of senators shall total not more than one-half (1/2) the membership of the house of representatives. Senators shall be classified so that as nearly as possible one-half (1/2) of the members of the senate shall be elected every two (2) years.

Senate and House of Representatives — limitation. Section 34. The senate shall be composed of not more than fifty (50) and the house of representatives of not more than one hundred (100) members. Senators and representatives shall be elected from districts established by law. Each district so established shall be of compact and contiguous territory. The state shall be apportioned into senatorial and representative districts on the basis of population. The general assembly may provide by law for factors in addition to population, not in conflict with the constitution of the United States, which may be considered in the apportioning of senatorial districts. No law so adopted shall permit the establishment of senatorial districts whereby a majority of the members of the senate shall represent less than forty (40) percent of the population of the state as shown by the most recent United States decennial census.

Excerpt from Iowa’s 1857 Constitution. Constitutional amendments of 1968.