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Water quality should be the top 2026 Iowa governor election issue | Opinion

The Big Ag and other business interests don't care that the canary is on one leg and got a bad cough. "Iowa Nice" should not be "Iowa Gullible" or "Iowa Irresponsible."

Mark Gannon Guest columnist

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The recent [water restrictions in Des Moines](#) should finally wake up all Iowa citizens that we cannot push water quality down the road anymore. The water situation is getting worse, cleaning the water is costly (besides it is not really clean anyway) and [cancer rates are high in Iowa](#). We have a pivotal election coming up in 2026 to make water a main issue and if the candidates do not agree to a firm plan to be enacted soon then they don't deserve any votes. Water is the canary in the coal mine and the bird is on its last leg right now.

The poor water quality is a reflection on who runs this state and it is not the citizens. The politicians have the only clout here and most vote the way their money donors want and buy into the propaganda that we are getting better. We are not. [The Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#) is a failure because was ill conceived and it has no teeth. It was allowed to put off real progress now for 15 years. The voluntary approach is not working and don't listen to any claims otherwise. This joke of a plan is costing us having reasonably good water, sticking us high costs for removal and poor health. The science is good but the implementation is non-existent. You can read all kinds of info that proves this point but the politicians are not listening because they don't think this gets them votes. Both parties are equally at fault. This is not a partisan issue.

More: [Opinion: As Nutrient Reduction Strategy turns 10, why aren't Iowa's waters safer and cleaner?](#)

If we are successful in having strict standards and enforcing them then the bad actors will be exposed and required to change their ways. This may include agriculture, cities, towns, golf courses, business and anyone else that is not following the law. We start out monitoring Iowa 56 main watersheds with a lot more sensors than we have now to get the data to turn this around. Responsible farmers do not have an issue with this approach and are tired of being blamed for the problem. They want to prove they are being responsible.

More: [Nitrates are pummeling Des Moines. We can't farm Iowa this way any more. | Opinion](#)

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The governor has to be the leader here, and we haven't had one that was dedicated to Iowa's water and health in many years, if not ever. Iowa has changed considerably in the last 50 years and will keep evolving but we are behind in our responsibility to our citizens and our friends downstream. 2026 may be the last chance we have to get this turned around. The Big Ag and other business interests don't care that the canary is on one leg and got a bad cough. "Iowa Nice" should not be "Iowa Gullible" or "Iowa Irresponsible".

Check out podcasts on gannonre.com plus Chris Jones's <https://riverraccoon.substack.com/> and also his book "The Swine Republic" plus search for more Iowa water quality articles, podcasts and links.

Mark Gannon is a farm manager, realtor and appraiser from Ames but grew up in Des Moines. He has been involved in Iowa Agriculture since graduating from ISU in Ag Business in 1979.

