

The Political Scene

Although 1953 was an off-year for political elections at the state and national level, it was nevertheless a year in which political events and personalities were constantly claiming the attention of Iowans. Thus, thousands of Hawkeyes attended the inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower on January 20. The change of administrations in Washington brought several political plums to loyal Iowa Republicans who had waited twenty years for a GOP presidential victory.

Prominent Iowans appointed to Federal posts in 1953 included Craig R. Sheaffer, Fort Madison industrialist, who became Assistant Secretary of Commerce; Franklin G. Floete of Des Moines, named Assistant Secretary of Defense; and Mrs. Hiram Houghton of Red Oak, who was appointed Deputy Administrator of the Mutual Security Agency. When Justice H. J. Mantz resigned from the Iowa Supreme Court, Governor William S. Beardsley named Attorney General Robert L. Larson to succeed Mantz, and then appointed Leo Hoegh of Chariton as Attorney General.

The 55th General Assembly met during the early months of 1953. Completely dominated by

Republicans, who had a 46 to 4 majority in the Senate, and 105 to 3 majority in the House, the lawmakers heard a warning from United States Senator Karl Mundt, a South Dakota Republican, when he visited their joint session. Mundt told the legislators there were inherent dangers in a lack of opposition which could lead to factionalism within the party itself. Former screen star Mary Pickford also paid the General Assembly a visit on a defense bond sales program.

The work of the General Assembly covered a wide area. A new and sounder public employees' retirement system was created, superseding the one adopted in 1945. The office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction was made an appointive instead of an elective one and a State Board of Public Instruction established to supervise secondary school programs. The controversial subject of legislative reapportionment was thoroughly debated by the House for the first time in forty years and some action, at least, was taken by the Assembly to meet the issue.

The most publicized legislative action, however, and the one which Associated Press news editors rated the top Iowa news story of 1953 was that regarding oleomargarine. After several stormy sessions the House passed a bill authorizing the sale of yellow margarine. Prior to Senate action the Young Republicans' executive committee met and adopted a resolution favoring the bill. An opposi-

tion leader termed this a "gratuitous insult" to Iowa dairy farmers, but in a final vote the measure was approved. A partial compromise was secured with the insertion of a clause providing for the printing of the word "oleo" on each section of the butter substitute. On July 4 Iowans could purchase yellow margarine in their home town.

Other political news had a national flavor. Shortly after Ezra Taft Benson became Secretary of Agriculture he began a reorganization of his department, went on record against price supports for livestock, and hinted that he favored lower parity payments on many products. Hearings on farm price supports were held in the Midwest during the summer, and when Congress met in the fall it was obvious that parity payments would be lower under Benson's long-range program. Jake More, chairman of the Iowa Democratic Central Committee, charged that Benson's new program was developed on Wall Street. The Iowa Young Republican Farm Council rushed to Benson's defense, commending him for his reorganizational efforts and long-range plans.

Jasper County was again a test-tube for the pollsters. The county's 56-year-old perfect record on political trends (having chosen the winner in every presidential election since 1896) was the basis for a 1953 survey. The findings indicated that Jasper County "liked Ike" even better than in 1952, the President's increase from 58 to 65 per

cent in the preference poll being attributed to the truce in Korea.

The 1954 elections were months away when the inevitable off-year speculation began, with accompanying preliminary jostling for position, and actual announcing of intentions. There were guesses as to Governor Beardsley's future plans, but the Governor himself was silent. Senator Guy M. Gillette, the lone Democrat in the Iowa Congressional delegation, parried questions as to his plans for 1954 but said he would delay his decision on trying for another term until the new year.

Representative Thomas Martin of Iowa City was not so reticent. He made what was regarded as an unusually early announcement that he would seek the Republican nomination for Gillette's seat. This brought State Representative Fred Schwengel of Davenport, a Republican, into the field seeking Martin's post as Congressman from the First District. Incumbent Lieutenant Governor Leo Elthon of Fertile announced that he would be a candidate for the same office in 1954, and former Lieutenant Governor William H. Nicholas of Mason City, recovering from an automobile mishap, declared that he would again seek the gubernatorial nomination of the Republicans. Nicholas was unsuccessful in 1952.

Several Iowa cities held municipal elections in 1953, with most of the contests producing little more than local interest. Democrats pointed to

the results in Davenport, however, as a portrayal of things to come. In the race for mayor Walter Beuse, former Scott County sheriff and acting postmaster until a few weeks before the voting, defeated Republican Clemens A. Werner by a sizeable majority. The setback ended the Republican's city hall tenure in Davenport of twenty year's standing. Another interesting contest was the mayoralty race at Norway where Frank Volz defeated Abe Lincoln by five votes.

Crawfordsville remained firm in its contention that the Republican party was born there almost a century ago, and not at Ripon, Wisconsin. As plans for the centennial celebration went forward, however, Ripon took the lead and had the cooperation of the National Republican Committee. Crawfordsville residents thought they had been slighted, but not sufficiently to cause them to apostatize into Democratic ranks.

There were other and more important issues confronting Iowans. In addition to arguing pro and con on the Eisenhower program, Iowans found plenty to debate on such vital state issues as good roads, reduced taxes, 25% state support of our common schools, increased tuition in state schools, educational television, and liquor-by-the-drink. The year 1954 promised to be filled with a score of hot political issues.

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