

## To Pay or Not to Pay

There are always two schools of thought concerning official salaries. One school urges the payment of adequate salaries as a means of securing competent officials; the other argues that high salaries will attract mercenary candidates more interested in salaries than in services. This is not a new subject of debate. In 1846, when Iowans were preparing their Constitution, editors and delegates argued long and bitterly over how much the Governor, the Supreme Court Justices, and other officials should be paid. An editorial, probably by M. T. Emerson, in the *Bloomington Herald* of May 1, 1846, presented one side of the argument under the heading "Economy in State Government".

"This is a subject which will come before the Convention in regulating the salaries of the members of the Legislature and all the officers of State. We conceive it to be one of deep interest to the citizens of Iowa. While we will go as far as any in our opposition to an extravagant expenditure of the public money, we think there is great danger in our zeal after economy of falling upon the opposite extreme, and illustrating in the case of a

State government, the old adage of 'penny wise and pound foolish.' The object of this people is, or should be, to secure a good government well administered. . . .

"Talent is in the market to be paid for, and if private enterprise will yield a better recompense than the public service, the State government must have her affairs directed, her laws administered, by second rate men. We have among us no class who can be expected to hold office for the honor such office confers. . . . Better for the interests of the State and citizen is it, that ample salaries should be given to men competent to 'render the state some service,' than a cheap government administered by any others.— We speak now more particularly of the Executive and Judiciary. The first is not only an office of honor, but also of great responsibility. . . .

"The case of Governor Wright of New York illustrates our meaning; were the Governor's salary in that State what it is proposed to make it in Iowa, a man of the station and in the circumstances of Silas Wright would be excluded from the office. No matter how much he might regard the honor of the position, no matter how well fitted to fill it, his poverty would forever prevent his accepting it. This false economy is contrary to the whole spirit of our institutions; it denies the poor

man any participation in the administration of the government, and in effect creates an aristocracy under the garb of economy.

“In the case of the Judiciary, we think the evils resulting from such miscalled economy still more dangerous than in the case of the Executive — in the latter mischief *may* arise from want of qualification for office — in the former it *must*. Insecurity of private property, and enormous expense to the State and citizen must arise from incapacity in those who hold the offices of Judges. A large part of this expense grows directly out of a want of confidence in the Judge — hence the number of cases carried up by appeal and otherwise to the highest tribunal in the State. We must look for the reason of this in the character of the Judges and the respect had for their decisions. In this country they are not always the best men or the most learned lawyers the bar can produce. The salary is too small, the tenure too limited, to warrant such in leaving the bar for the bench. Less, we conceive, should be heard in Convention of the price to be paid the servants of the State, and more regard be had to the qualifications of those who hold office.”