

Organization of the Assembly

Even though Iowa Democrats surprised everyone, including themselves, with their strong showing in the 1956 legislative races, they fell far short of winning the number of seats necessary to challenge Republicans for leadership roles. Nevertheless, they had come a long way since 1953.

	<i>House</i>		<i>Senate</i>	
	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Dem.</i>
1953.....	105	3	46	4
1955.....	89	19	44	6
1957.....	72	36	40	10

These were tremendous gains, but Republicans still held a numerical superiority in both houses that assured them of winning the leadership posts.

House Republicans met January 7 at the Savery Hotel in Des Moines to nominate candidates for leadership positions, while Senate Republicans met simultaneously at the Kirkwood Hotel a block away for the same purpose. The House caucus hardly had begun before it was apparent that friends and well-wishers of William L. Mooty, Grundy Center lawyer-farmer-businessman, had performed well their preliminary vote-getting chores. Once 1956 election returns were in, they had fanned out over the state in a well-knit team

operation, rounding up support for their candidate, and now the effort was paying off handsomely.

Sensing what was in the wind, two prospective candidates — Ernest Kosek of Cedar Rapids and Henry H. Stevens of Jefferson — withdrew from the race. This left the field to Mooty and Arthur C. Hanson, Inwood farmer and 1955 House Speaker. Thus, for the first time in many years, Republicans needed only one ballot to nominate a candidate for Speaker. Mooty won with votes to spare, 44 to 27. One vote was cast for Stevens, despite his withdrawal. Actually, only 71 Republicans were present, but the absentee ballot of ailing Earl T. Hoover of Mount Ayr was admitted.

Once the result was apparent, Hanson moved for a unanimous ballot and harmony within the ranks. Mooty expressed his appreciation and declared that "we Republicans cannot afford the prospect of having two Republican parties."

At 50 years of age, William L. Mooty had three legislative sessions behind him. He was a State University of Iowa graduate and had served both as Grundy County attorney and in World War II. In addition to legal practice, he owned and operated a farm and was an implement dealer. For the most part, Mooty's nomination was engineered by the so-called "young Turks" of the 1955 session. They included several younger members who had served their first terms that

year, and were rebelling against the conservative House leadership in the 1955 session for its failure to hold party caucuses.

With Mooty's nomination achieved, his supporters were willing that the speaker pro tempore nomination should go to a member identified with the more conservative Republican faction. Hence, Elmer Vermeer, 36-year-old Pella farmer, was named by acclamation.

But there was a contest for Republican floor leader with two ballots required to settle the issue. Robert B. Carson, 36, Independence attorney; A. L. Mensing, 60, Lowden retired businessman; and Clark H. McNeal, 37, Belmond grain elevator operator, contested for the post, with Carson winning in a spirited race. Result of the voting:

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>1st Ballot</i>	<i>2nd Ballot</i>
Carson	32	36
Mensing	21	18
McNeal	18	16

Carson's 36 votes constituted a majority of the 70 cast on the second ballot, Hoover not having sent an absentee vote for this contest, and Roscoe Greenwood of Emerson having been called away after the first ballot by a death.

Meanwhile, at a caucus closed to newsmen, Senate Republicans nominated Alan Vest, Sac City attorney, for president pro tempore over Arch W. McFarlane, Waterloo fuel dealer. The

vote was not announced, nor did the caucus reveal the margin by which D. C. Nolan, Iowa City attorney, defeated X. T. Prentis, Mount Ayr hatcheryman, for majority floor leader.

The outnumbered Democrats did not bother to nominate candidates, but did caucus January 13 at the Fort Des Moines Hotel to elect floor leaders.

House Democrats voted down a motion to exclude newsmen from their caucus and then engaged in a hotly contested two-ballot battle resulting in the election of Merle Hagedorn, Royal farmer, as House floor leader. Hagedorn got 17 votes on the first ballot to eight for Willard M. Freed, Gowrie attorney; six for Scott Swisher, Iowa City attorney; and four for Andrew G. Frommelt, Dubuque labor representative. Two attorneys, John W. Carlsen, Clinton, and John L. Duffy, Dubuque, were absent, but Duffy sent an absentee ballot which was admitted. Carlsen arrived in time to vote on the second ballot, which got under way after Freed and Frommelt withdrew and gave their support to Swisher. Even with their help, however, Swisher could not overtake Hagedorn. When the count reached 19 to 14 for Hagedorn, Swisher's motion to make Hagedorn's election unanimous was adopted.

Democratic Senators tossed the mantle of minority leader around the broad shoulders of George E. O'Malley, Des Moines attorney, who had worn

it in several previous sessions. He was elected without the vote of Arnold Utzig, Dubuque merchant, who boycotted the meeting. Utzig became offended during a Democratic caucus in 1955, when he walked out and declared he would never attend another.

The General Assembly was called to order at 10 a.m. on January 14, with Lieutenant Governor Leo Elthon, a Republican, and Howard C. Reppert, Jr., a Democratic Representative, wielding gavels respectively in the Senate and House. In granting Reppert this honor, House Republicans reverted to a tradition that the senior Representative from Polk County shall convene the session. This tradition was ignored in 1955 because both Polk County Representatives were freshmen and both were Democrats. Moreover, Republicans wanted the honor to go to the lone woman legislator that year, Mrs. Gladys S. Nelson, Newton housewife and a Republican. Reppert, a transfer company executive, was senior member from Polk County in 1957 and, apparently, had won his spurs in the eyes of Republicans.

Once the House had convened, A. C. Gustafson, veteran legislative official, was named acting chief clerk, and, on a motion by Clark McNeal, former Speaker Hanson was elected temporary speaker.

Credentials were presented for duly elected members along with two statements of intent to

contest the election of two representatives (Arley Barringer, Ruthven Democrat, by Edward C. Norland, Cylinder Republican; and S. E. Robinson, Guthrie Center Republican, by Bert L. Woolbridge, Stuart Democrat. The contests eventually were settled in favor of Barringer and Robinson.)

William Mooty was then elected Speaker unanimously upon a motion by Vern Lisle, Clarinda. The motion was seconded by Neil E. Johns, Tama, for the Republicans, and Merle Hagedorn for the Democrats.

Mahlon N. Brown, What Cheer attorney, moved the election of Elmer Vermeer as speaker pro tempore. It was seconded for Republicans by R. D. Breakenridge, Winterset, and for Democrats by Hagedorn, who asked that the motion be made unanimous.

Over in the Senate, Alan Vest was elected unanimously as president pro tempore on the motion of W. C. Stuart, a Chariton Republican.

Official committees were appointed in each chamber to notify the other and the Governor that each group was organized and ready for business. Thus, the session was on in earnest.

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