

Significance of Work

Even though the legislature failed its biggest test — reapportionment — it faced issues better than any of its immediate predecessors. It faced squarely the controversial issue of legalized liquor-by-the-drink and repeal of the right-to-work law, which were defeated in the House, as well as those establishing speed limits, legalizing the traffic point system, rewriting corporation laws, changing the distribution formula for the road use tax fund, increasing workmen's and unemployment compensation benefits, shortening the ballot, and repealing the notice-to-depart law. Undoubtedly there were many who were not happy with the outcome on some of these issues. But none could complain, as in the past, that the legislature had pigeonholed them.

Even the reapportionment issue was not a failure, judged from that viewpoint, for this was the first legislature to tackle the over-all problem since the turn of the century. Thus, the issue was brought into sharper focus for a greater number of Iowans than ever before.

Then, too, this legislature met the issue of committee secrecy head on. The Senate adopted rules opening committee meetings to newsmen, while

the House worked out a system of making public committee votes on all bills.

One reason why the legislature squared off with the reapportionment issue was the determination of leaders of both parties, as well as Governor Loveless and the presiding officers, that it should be solved. Prior to the session, all had declared it the most, or one of the most, important issues confronting the legislature.

But, in the end, no single plan of the several tested received the necessary votes. So stalemate was the result. For this, much heat was directed toward the "big city newspapers" and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation. Yet the real deadlock was between representatives from big and small counties, populationwise, with Republicans and Democrats on both sides.

It can be safely said, however, that the collective effort on the part of those genuinely favoring reapportionment was one of the most dedicated, bipartisan, and sincere attempts to work out a controversial problem that has ever been witnessed in Iowa legislative halls. It was a stirring demonstration of representative government — even though unfairly apportioned representative government — at work.

If there was one chief reason why this legislature faced the issues, it was due, most observers agreed, to the presence of a strong minority, opening the way to coalitions, or the possibility of coa-

litions. The strong minority, essential in a two-party system, also forced better party discipline. Surprisingly, it also paved the way to new and more cooperative leadership. Finally, the officers presided with fairness and dispatch. Perhaps the *Chariton Leader* summed up best what people were thinking when it said:

What brought on the change in attitude as compared with the conservative, maintain the status quo approach . . . in recent years?

The answer should be obvious to all voters. During the periods when the two-party system of government is functioning, legislators are more sensitive to the political issues and needs of the state. For more than 20 years Iowa functioned as a one-party state and basic changes in Iowa government were few despite a world and nation changing at almost breakneck speed.

Increased Democratic representation and election of a Republican leadership with "a new sense of responsibility" were credited by the newspaper with bringing about the change.

Nevertheless, it was the reapportionment failure that lingered in the minds of Iowans as the legislature adjourned. This was widely reflected in newspapers throughout the state. Here is some typical comment:

"The Republican party, after the reapportionment fiasco . . . had better start rebuilding. . . . [it] went on record as favoring reapportionment, but what it meant was a type of redistricting that

would allow 28 per cent of the population to control the legislature." *Marion Sentinel*.

"After huffing and puffing over this matter [reapportionment] for 116 days, the Iowa lawmakers . . . decided to go home. Their accomplishment on this one major task was exactly zero." *Mason City Globe-Gazette*.

"We feel that those who opposed any reapportionment 'missed the boat' because reapportionment in some form is going to come as sure as 'death and taxes'." *Williamsburg Journal-Tribune and Shopper*.

"But when all the pushing and pulling on reapportionment was over, the net result for 1959 was no runs, no hits and errors too numerous to be registered in the box score." *Davenport Democrat*.

"The [General Assembly] had a good record of accomplishment, except on the reapportionment issue." *Des Moines Register*.

"Nobody could come up with a . . . plan to please everybody." *Northwood Anchor*.

"Certainly we're disappointed, as are a majority of Iowans, in the legislature's failure to take the initial step toward reapportionment. But . . . this was the first legislature to come to full grips with that issue since the turn of the century." *Cedar Rapids Gazette*.

"We think it [the legislature] fell short in failure to work out a reapportionment measure, but

on the whole it must be commended for a job well done." *Red Oak Express*.

"And even the reapportionment issue wasn't just lost time. As one legislator put it: The forces opposing reapportionment won a battle, but they lost a war." *Le Mars Sentinel*.

"The redistricting wrangle, which came right down to the wire . . . wound up as hardnosed as it possibly could." *Creston News-Advertiser*.

"Over all, the legislature was reasonably careful with the taxpayer's purse, took some hesitant but helpful steps toward more efficient government and, in its major failure, — reapportionment — may have made the issues and solutions a little clearer." *Sioux City Journal*.

"It's this county-seat price that will keep reapportionment from happening until the cities get control through a constitutional convention." *Algona Kossuth County Advance*.

"The legislature's dismal failure to reapportion Iowa overshadows completely what good work the session accomplished." *Iowa City Press-Citizen*.

"With the Iowa legislative session coming to a halt without passage of a reapportionment law, its many accomplishments are obscured by a wave of disappointment over this deplorable failure." *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*.

But while newspapers generally deplored the reapportionment failure, they also agreed that

aside from that issue the legislature had done a good job. Here is some comment:

"It . . . did a pretty good job." Council Bluffs *Nonpareil*.

"The [legislature] wrote a record of constructive legislation despite its more publicized failures." Chariton *Leader*.

"There can be no doubt but that the 1959 session was far more productive, and responded much more to the desires of the people, than the 1957 body." Indianola *Tribune*.

"The lawmakers could look back with some satisfaction on the progress made by the session." Ames *Tribune*.

In truth, it was a good session, clouded only by the reapportionment failure. Yet that cloud all but blotted out many of the splendid accomplishments of the session. It also almost blotted out the pleasing fact that a Democratic Governor and a Republican-controlled legislature demonstrated for all to see that sharp, bitter differences can be set aside when there is a will on the part of both parties to work together in bipartisan harmony for the state's long-range interests — once each side has accepted the fact that the other is there to stay, by vote of the people, for a definite term of office.

It was unfortunate, then, that the session broke up on a note of bitterness during House reapportionment arguments that were in progress up to

the final hour of adjournment — arguments that became so heated Speaker Lisle cautioned both sides against “striking low blows.”

But what was said left no doubt about one matter — reapportionment is not a dead issue. In fact, it may be destined to become the liveliest issue of the 1961 session — even if the people vote, in 1960, to hold a constitutional convention, which would open the way for them to consider the matter themselves, just as they did in 1846 and again in 1857.

FRANK T. NYE