

Organization of the Assembly

With Republican majorities of 93 to 15 in the House and 41 to 9 in the Senate, no doubt existed as to which party would organize the 54th General Assembly. The real story, then, was not to be found in legislative halls but in the respective caucuses of House and Senate Republicans prior to the official opening of the legislature on January 8, 1951. Thus it was on January 6 that Republicans of both houses met separately to name their leaders.

As expected, the caucus of House Republicans turned into a battle royal over the nomination for the speakership, while the caucus of Senate Republicans was comparatively mild. House Republicans met at the Savery Hotel in Des Moines, and no less than 7 of the 93 members received votes for the speakership nomination in a spirited race that went to the fifth ballot before they settled on William S. Lynes of Waverly.

The contest found supporters of Gus T. Kuester of Griswold, Speaker in 1947 and 1949, backing Clifford M. Strawman of Anamosa for the post. Among these were legislators whose views were in line with those of Governor William S. Beardsley. Those not considered firm followers

of the Governor lined up behind other candidates. Their strategy was to block the nomination of Strawman by scattering their votes until they could decide on a candidate all could support. In addition to Lynes and Strawman the candidates who received votes included Fred Schwengel of Davenport, Dewey E. Goode of Bloomfield, Theo Klemesrud of Thompson, Arthur C. Hanson of Inwood, and Ernest Kosek, who hailed from Cedar Rapids.

Missing when the first ballot was cast were C. M. Langland, a farmer living in Winneshiek County but whose post office is in Spring Grove, Minnesota, and Max M. Soeth of Estherville. Soeth arrived in time to participate in the remaining four ballots, but Langland was absent for the entire caucus. Thus 92 members were present. On the third ballot, however, only 91 votes were cast when someone didn't vote.

Kosek withdrew after the first ballot, reducing the field to six. Goode and Hanson withdrew after the second ballot — although Goode received one third-ballot vote anyway — and Klemesrud withdrew after the third ballot but still got two votes on the fourth.

The withdrawals narrowed the field to Lynes, Strawman, and Schwengel for the fourth and fifth ballots. Here is the result of the five ballots that were taken for Speaker of the House, before Lynes received more than the 47 votes necessary to win:

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Ballot No.</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Schwengel	23	24	22	12	5
Strawman	20	24	28	33	30
Lynes	17	29	38	45	57
Goode	14	7	1	0	0
Klemesrud	9	5	2	2	0
Hanson	5	3	0	0	0
Kosek	3	0	0	0	0

This was the most closely contested Republican caucus race for Speaker since 1941, when Robert D. Blue of Eagle Grove, later Governor of Iowa for two terms, received seventeen votes in a field of six on the first ballot and went on to win the nomination on the fifth ballot.

Once the Speaker had been chosen, the House Republicans nominated Lawrence Putney of Gladbrook for speaker pro tempore. He received 46 of 91 votes on the first ballot to 28 for Hanson, 12 for Henry H. Stevens of Scranton, and 5 for Schwengel, who announced before the balloting started that he was not a candidate. Goode was then elected majority floor leader by a vote of 58 to 31 over Harold F. Nelson of Sioux City.

Senate Republicans, unlike House Republicans, closed their caucus to the press. They reported no spirited contests for president pro tempore of the Senate or for majority floor leader. Senator Stanley L. Hart of Keokuk was nominated for president pro tempore and the floor leadership went for the third time to Leo Elthon of Fertile.

Republicans already had the presiding officer of the Senate — a non-member who votes only in the case of a tie — on their side by virtue of the victory of William H. Nicholas of Mason City for Lieutenant Governor at the general election in November of 1950.

Unable to put up a scrap because of their weak numerical strength, Democrats didn't bother to contest for the speakership, for speaker pro tempore, or for president pro tempore. They did caucus on Sunday, January 7, however, to name J. E. Hansen of Dedham as House minority leader and Senator A. E. Augustine of Oskaloosa as Senate minority leader.

At the Republican caucus, after his nomination for Speaker, Lynes, older brother of Senator J. Kendall Lynes of Plainfield, "humbly accepted" the honor with these words: "I appreciate all you folks have done for me and I hope you treat me a little lenient as I probably will make mistakes. My intentions will be the best and I will do the best I can." He previously had said he was going into the race alone, "with no promises to anybody." "I'll be speaker in the best interests of Iowa," he had declared.

After the caucus he called his wife at home, saying simply "the lightning hit." She asked:

"Does that mean you're the next speaker?"

"Well," he replied, "I guess so, for there's only nine Democrats so they can't stop it."

Actually there were 15 Democrats in the House, a fact which Lynes overlooked in his excitement, but even that number couldn't stop it. So he was formally elected Speaker on January 8 shortly after the session was opened, as is the custom, by the senior gentleman from Polk County — Ted Sloane of Des Moines, in this instance.

Fred Schwengel was unanimously elected temporary speaker on the motion of A. C. Hanson of Lyon County. Shortly after Schwengel took the chair, John E. Young of Afton nominated Lynes for Speaker. The nomination was seconded by John A. Walker of Williams and by the Democratic leader, J. E. Hansen, who also moved that a unanimous vote be cast for Lynes, saying the candidate "enjoys the confidence and admiration and respect of the minority party." The motion prevailed.

Upon taking the gavel, Speaker Lynes expressed his thanks, said his door would be open always to business, and added he was "glad to hear the minority party was going to work with the majority party."

A. C. Gustafson of Des Moines, veteran of many sessions, was named chief clerk of the House, and Carroll Lane of Carroll, a former House member, was named secretary of the Senate.

Speaker Lynes and Lieutenant Governor Nicholas announced appointment of committees within

a few days, and the session got under way in earnest, although the Lieutenant Governor revised his list later to give some Senators assignments they considered themselves better qualified for than those they originally drew.

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