

The Political Campaign

In 1954 Iowans settled down to their biennial task of electing state and local officials and representatives to Congress. The primaries in June presented few problems for Democrats, particularly regarding the major offices. In both the Gubernatorial and Senatorial races two familiar names stood alone on the ballot. In January, Clyde E. Herring, son of a former Democratic governor, announced that he would seek the Governorship. Herring declared it was "time for a change" after fifteen years of Republican administrations. The Burlington *Hawk-Eye Gazette* called Herring "one of the most formidable men the Democrats have put up for a long time."

Shortly afterwards, incumbent Senator Guy M. Gillette announced that if Iowa Democrats supported his candidacy for re-election in 1954, and Iowans "wish me to continue to serve them in the United States Senate, I shall do my utmost to serve them worthily." A number of papers felt that Gillette's age would work against his candidacy. They noted that he would be nearly 82 at the end of another six years. However, the predominantly Republican press agreed that in Herring and Gillette the Democrats would have an

unusually strong ticket. "The contest will not be one of those spiritless affairs in which 'any old Republican' can win," warned the Marshalltown *Times-Republican*.

On the Republican side, the big question until March concerned the intentions of Governor Beardsley. In February Beardsley announced that he would not seek to become Iowa's first four-term Governor, but he did not say if he would run for the Senate, as many were predicting. Congressman Thomas E. Martin of Iowa City, who had tossed his hat into the ring in March, 1953, was the only avowed Republican candidate for the Senate.

On March 3, Beardsley announced, to the amazement of many of his friends, that he was not a candidate. Willard Archie, writing in the Shenandoah *Sentinel*, expressed regret that the Governor had decided not to run for the Senate because "in my opinion he was a certain winner." The Mason City *Globe-Gazette*, a sharp critic of Beardsley, disagreed completely with this view. Other papers commented that although Beardsley was retiring his political influence would remain great.

After Beardsley's announcement, former Governor Robert D. Blue, former state American Legion commander Dudley Weible, and two prominent Republican women, Mrs. Hiram C. Houghton and Mrs. Raymond B. Sayre, admitted

that they were considering running for the Senate, but in a few days all withdrew their names from the field. Tom Martin was thus the only Republican to file for the nomination. The 61,000 signatures which he submitted was the largest number ever presented on nominating petitions.

Meanwhile, six men sought the GOP nomination for Governor. They were former Lieutenant Governor William H. Nicholas of Mason City, Speaker of the House William S. Lynes of Waverly, State Representative Ernest Palmer of Fort Madison, A. B. Chambers, former mayor of Des Moines, Ben Ellsworth, an Ottumwa lawyer, and Attorney General Leo A. Hoegh of Chariton.

Hoegh did not formally enter the race until February, but he was at once recognized as one of the strong candidates. Many believed that none of the candidates would receive the 35 per cent of the vote necessary to nominate and that the choice of a Republican nominee would therefore be left up to the state convention. The Davenport *Times* commented that there might as well be a dozen names on the ballot "since the voter's confusion would be no greater."

To gain attention the six candidates resorted to various devices. William Nicholas had the unique idea of conducting a contest for youngsters under 18 years, the entrants to complete in 100 words or less the statement: "I think W. H. Nicholas would make a good governor because ——."

More orthodox was the effort to create interest through discussion of issues. Such matters as financing highway improvements and aid to schools loomed large. The liquor-by-the-drink issue was advocated by A. B. Chambers who maintained that "the only group solidly against me is the bartenders organization of Omaha." Hoegh, who, as Attorney General, had carried on a vigorous campaign to enforce the liquor laws, was hailed by some temperance leaders as the drys' candidate, a claim which was hotly contested by Nicholas and his supporters. Lynes and Palmer took middle-of-the-road stands on the liquor issue, both contending that the legislature, not the governor, made the laws. This was true, the Cedar Rapids *Gazette* admitted, but it was also true "that a governor, if he is worthy of the title, has considerable influence with the legislature."

Toward the end of the campaign, as Hoegh's strength became apparent, efforts were made to stop him by identifying him with the existing administration. Ernest Palmer charged that Hoegh was "the hand-picked candidate of Gov. William S. Beardsley's organization." William Lynes, who maintained that balancing the state's budget was the important issue, declared that only a new administration could accomplish this. "When I say it will take a new administration," he added, "I mean just that."

When the votes were counted Hoegh won, car-

rying 76 counties and receiving 39.2 per cent of the votes cast, thus removing the possibility that a state convention would choose the GOP's candidate. Palmer, Hoegh's sharpest critic in the campaign, at once pledged his support, declaring: "I'll be working for a great Republican team — Tom Martin and you." The *Waterloo Courier* called Hoegh's triumph "an astounding accomplishment." It was, the paper felt, "a smashing success" for the dry forces, and for the political organization built by Governor Beardsley.

Dayton Countryman of Nevada won the Republican nomination for Attorney General over two opponents. Other Republican incumbents in the executive department were renominated, with the exception of David B. Long of the Commerce Commission. In the principal Congressional contest, State Representative Fred Schwengel of Davenport defeated Senator Herman B. Lord of Muscatine in a close race for the Republican nomination in the First District to succeed Tom Martin. All other seven incumbent Republican Congressmen were renominated. Only H. R. Gross of Waterloo was opposed, and he won handily.

In the legislative races 13 incumbents in the House and 2 in the Senate unsuccessfully sought renomination. Voters were assured of choices between Republican and Democratic candidates in all but two districts — the 35th Senatorial District, where incumbent Democrat, Arnold Utzig

of Dubuque, was unopposed, and the 50th Senatorial District, where Guy G. Butler of Rolfe was the unopposed Republican candidate. In 1952 the Democrats had not contested 11 of the 30 Senate seats and 31 of the 108 House seats which had been at stake.

The issues of the campaign were outlined at the party conventions in July. Both parties demanded an accelerated primary and secondary road building program. Both called for increased state aid to schools with 25 per cent of public school operating costs as the goal. Neither party suggested how the state was to raise the money to finance these activities.

The statements regarding taxes were of little help since the Democrats had no such plank, while the Republicans only said they opposed higher state income taxes and the levying of a state property tax. Both parties agreed on the need for legislative reapportionment. Sharp disagreements were revealed on farm and labor issues, however. The Republicans ignored the union shop demand, whereas the Democrats called for the legalization of this major labor objective. The Republican platform supported the flexible farm price support program of the Eisenhower administration, while Democrats demanded 90 per cent of parity on basic crops.

Some observers called the fall campaign the hardest fought off-year election contest in Iowa's

history. The struggle between Gillette and Martin assumed national importance since the United States Senate was so evenly divided that a victory in Iowa might well give the winning party control of the upper house.

Both parties brought in outstanding national leaders to plead their case. Vice-President Richard Nixon and Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson were among the Republican speakers, while Senator Estes Kefauver and Adlai Stevenson made appearances on behalf of the Democrats. Republican hopes that President Eisenhower would speak for the party in Iowa were not fulfilled. The question of whether or not Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin would come into Iowa in an effort to defeat Gillette had aroused much discussion, but as it turned out the Wisconsin Republican was too busy in Washington fighting for his own political life to do any campaigning.

In the Senatorial contest the farm question was the most important single issue with both men strongly supporting their own party's stand. But the fight also revolved about other matters. Republicans argued that a man of Gillette's age would not be able to give his constituents all the attention they might demand. Martin's energy was certainly proved by the backbreaking schedule which he set for himself, involving 165,000 miles of traveling, mostly by air, from the time he announced his candidacy in 1953.

Martin argued that Iowans should elect him to the Senate in order to demonstrate that they were really behind the Eisenhower administration. "The challenge of 1954," he told the state convention, "is to keep Republican control of congress. If the Democrats regain control, we will have a repeat performance of 1933 to 1953 of high taxes, wild spending, and starting wars that Democrats can't stop." Martin emphasized his membership on the "Eisenhower Team," and declared that Republican votes were needed in Congress if the President's program was to succeed. Vice-President Nixon told Iowans that "time after time" Senator Hickenlooper's vote in support of administration measures had been canceled by Gillette's vote.

Gillette pleaded "guilty" to the charge that he was not a Republican. But he said that the record showed that he had voted with Hickenlooper as much as against him, and that on certain parts of the Eisenhower program, such as reciprocal trade, he had supported the President while Hickenlooper had opposed him. Republican chairman Don Pierson recalled a speech Gillette had made in 1950 in which he said that it was essential that "the legislative department be of the same political complexion as that of the executive department." Gillette replied that all this was irrelevant; the campaign issue was the record of Congress and not President Eisenhower.

Age was no issue in the Gubernatorial contest since Leo Hoegh was 46 years old and his opponent, Clyde Herring, was only 39. In addition to being young men, both had won reputations as vigorous law enforcing officials, and both wore mustaches, thus assuring the state of its first governor in nearly 40 years who was not entirely clean-shaven. Both men likewise expressed support of labor's demand for the union shop. As a result of his stand on this issue, Hoegh reportedly incurred displeasure among conservative Republicans.

The sharpest split between the two candidates arose over the financing of Iowa's road program. Hoegh stood for a continuation of the existing pay-as-you-go system, but he would speed up construction by raising the gas tax one cent. Herring, on the other hand, advocated a \$175,000,000 state bond issue to be paid off from existing road taxes. Hoegh charged that this would cost the state \$60,000,000 in interest, but Herring replied that interest would be only half that amount.

Early in the campaign polls indicated that Hoegh and Gillette were the likely winners. *Wallaces' Farmer* in August declared that Hoegh and Gillette, at that time, each would receive 51 per cent of the farm vote, Herring and Martin 39 per cent, with the rest still undecided. In September the *Des Moines Register's* poll of all voting groups showed Gillette ahead of Martin by less

than 2 percentage points, while Hoegh led Herring by nearly 8 points. By October both polls showed Herring making rapid gains. Gillette now was far ahead of Martin in both polls.

At last, election day arrived. Leaders of both parties expressed confidence, but privately they conceded that they were uncertain of the outcome. One Marshalltown woman, apparently confused by the campaign oratory, put her head out of the voting booth and cried indignantly, "This isn't right. I won't stand for it. Why, Eisenhower's name isn't on this ballot."

When the votes were counted the Republicans had swept to victory in all the state executive offices while their control of the legislature, although not as overwhelming as in 1952, remained a comfortable one. The Gubernatorial race was the closest since 1936. Hoegh polled only 25,700 votes more than Herring out of a total vote of about 846,000 for the two men.

Iowa once again sent eight Republicans to the House of Representatives, but the big surprise to the red-faced pollsters was Gillette's defeat by Tom Martin. After the election Martin admitted that in early October "I wasn't doing so well. I knew that I had been on the way up ever since but I didn't know whether I had gotten back enough to win." However, Martin defeated Gillette by nearly 40,000 votes. When asked by *U. S. News and World Report* what he thought was the main

cause of his defeat, Gillette replied wryly, "Well, primarily it was that I didn't get enough votes." Gillette was not as strong in some labor areas as was expected, while the predicted swing of the farm vote to the Democratic candidate failed to materialize. However, Martin's victory was in large part of his own making. "Just get two people together," the indefatigable Senator-elect had told party workers, "and I'll be there to talk to them."

There was general agreement with the Des Moines *Register's* comment that the election showed "that the state continues to be Republican, that Iowans still like Ike and his administration, that most voters think it advisable for a Republican administration to have a Republican congress." On the other hand, the showing of the opposition party, the Cedar Rapids *Gazette* felt, "indicated that Democratic overthrow of state and county government in Iowa is not a fantastic possibility even in a non-presidential year." With 18 representatives in the lower house and 6 in the upper house in the next General Assembly, Democratic members, as political writer Robert Hogan put it, would no longer be able to caucus in a telephone booth.

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