

# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Fall 2017

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A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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## Teach the Truth

A full house of college students warmly greeted an 85-year old former elementary school teacher from northeast Iowa last month at the Englert Theatre in Iowa City. The white-haired white woman on stage, wearing a white sweatshirt with the words "Prejudice is an emotional commitment to ignorance," did not return their warmth.

Jane Elliott came to talk about the construct of whiteness. She wasted no time: "We ought to change the name of the White House to the President's Residence." Students exchanged looks and clapped tentatively. Clearly this was not a typical senior citizen standing before them.

Elliott has never been typical. The night Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered, she worried what to tell her class of Iowa third-graders who had just finished studying the life of King in a unit called "American Heroes." She decided to employ an exercise that resulted in death threats, ostracization of her family in the tiny town of Riceville, and national notoriety. The exercise became known as the blue-eyes brown-eyes experiment. "I never called it an experiment," said Elliott. "I knew exactly what would happen."

Elliott's voice choked as she described the fallen faces of the children

who had suddenly become second-class citizens, and the meanness of the children who had become suddenly become entitled. In one school day, the privileged blue-eyed children (sitting in the front row, getting the best treats, enjoying the longest recess) became arrogant, cruel, and dismissive of the lowly brown-eyed kids (seated in back, allowed fewer snacks, mocked for the color of their eyes). Those with brown eyes became sullen and defeatist, their self-esteem deteriorating so drastically that their reading comprehension skills plummeted. In one day. Not in centuries, not through generations, not over months or weeks. In one day.

What Elliott hadn't expected was the hate mail, the families that would no longer speak to her, the boycott of her parents' restaurant. "If I knew that would happen, I wouldn't have done it."

She admonished the crowd to stop thinking of races: "There are no races, only the human race. There is no such thing as biracial."

Elliott repeatedly waved off applause. "Don't offer me love. Offer me justice. And teach the truth."

The truth is that no one is born a bigot, there are many color groups but only one race, and all people are

30th to 50th cousins. All of humanity is descended from a black woman in Africa who survived years of blazing sun, thanks to the melanin in her skin.

Once the White House is re-named, Elliott would like to see the words Under God removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. Her taste in faith runs more to quoting the Talmud: "You're not responsible for finishing the task, but you don't have the right not to try."

Elliott continues to try, even though America appears to her to be more racist than ten years ago. Schools are as segregated as they were before *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Conditions described in President Johnson's Kerner Commission report fifty years ago are nearly identical to today. The documentary *Whose Streets?*, about Ferguson, MO, could almost be about Watts, Newark, or Detroit in the sixties, or the so-called Rodney King riots in 1992.

Thronged of students, many of whom were pre-teens when Obama became President, swarmed Elliott for selfies and hugs after her speech.

May they always remember the words on her sweatshirt. ✂

– Prairie Dog

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# The Future of Iowa

Are you mad about Governor Reynold's decision to waste money giving Apple a 20-million-dollar tax break? You should be.

She just gave Apple a 20-million-dollar tax break to build a data center in Iowa, something one of the world's richest corporations was going to do anyway.

Iowa does not need to bribe large corporations to build big data centers here.

Electricity is a data center's biggest ongoing cost. Iowa has lots of low cost, reliable, renewable electricity.

Iowa is also relatively free from earthquakes, has lots of water and our winters reduce the cost of cooling hot computer servers.

In addition, there's already an Iowa sales tax exemption on the electricity consumed by data centers, a tax break worth tens of millions of dollars.

With those built-in advantages, why did Apple—and Facebook, Microsoft, and Google before Apple—get tens of millions of additional Iowa tax dollars to do what they were going to do anyway?

The answer: the millions came from a broken state economic development program that is an open checkbook on autopilot.

The deceptively named "High Quality Jobs" program showers large corporations with state tax dollars based on construction and building costs. The giveaways have more to do with fattening the bottom line than they do with the number of new jobs created.

Since 2011, the "High Quality Jobs" program has cost Iowa taxpayers

more than \$352 million in tax exemptions. For that enormous sum, we've gotten just 1,300 new jobs in return—at a cost of nearly 3 million dollars per job!

And, unlike families seeking help with nursing home costs or college tuition bills, these large corporations do not have to prove they need the money.

In short, Apple, the richest corporation on the planet with a value of \$750 billion, did not need a handout from Iowa taxpayers to build this data center.

Governor Reynold's budget crisis can't be solved without dealing with the fastest growing part of state spending: tax giveaways.

And we can't jumpstart our state's economy until we stand up to powerful Des Moines special interests, and direct more resources towards small towns and rural areas.

This won't be easy, because corporate-backed Republicans control Iowa's state government from top to bottom.

Everyone trying to change that fact faces a daunting deadline.

The 2018 election will be here before we know it. There will be an election for Governor, and half the Iowa Senate seats and all the Iowa House seats will be up for election.

I believe this election will determine the future of Iowa.

Look what's happened since radical Republicans took complete control of Iowa's state government in the Trump Election.

In short order they:

- Guttled Iowa's collective bargaining laws
- Closed women's health clinics
- Slashed state help for victims of domestic abuse
- Cut the wages of more than 60,000 minimum wage workers, many in Johnson County
- Deeply cut Iowa's grossly inadequate efforts to protect at risk children
- Cut tens of millions of dollars from our state universities (and plan to cut much more)
- Threw Iowans dying from asbestos poisoning under the bus
- Made it harder for you, me, and every other Iowan to vote
- Weakened environmental protections and cut funding for the Leopold Center
- And much more, taken straight from the Koch Brothers/Fox News/Breitbart playbook.

A big reason Iowa Republicans are destroying Iowa education and selling off our health care safety net is to fund corporate handouts like the Apple deal.

To stay in power, they are attacking working people and making it hard for Iowans to vote. Remember, there is nothing in Iowa's constitution to prevent them from gerrymandering our election districts, like they've done in almost every other Republican-controlled state.

Are you mad about any of this? Are you working to flip Iowa from red to blue? You should be. ✂

– State Senator Joe Bolkcom

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# Oh Say. Can You See?

**W**e love baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and Chevrolet was a successful advertising jingle from the 1970s, demonstrating the advantage of linking a commercial product to American patriotism. The National Football League took it a step further when it not only bumped out baseball as America's game, but also embraced the military and all the glorious patriotism and respect given to the armed forces.

The national anthem's popularity peaks during times of war or military conflict. The words move people. Historically, it was played at baseball games going back to the late 1800s, although it wasn't officially adopted as the national anthem until 1931. Playing the anthem became a fixture at sporting events dating back to World War II, but players stayed in the locker room when it was being played, except during special occasions. It wasn't until 2009 that players were mandated to stand on the sidelines during the anthem. The NFL's operational manual states: "The National Anthem must be played prior to every NFL game and all players must be on the sideline... stand at attention, face the flag, hold helmets in their left hand and refrain from talking..."

On the surface, it appeared to be a sound business decision to create this mandate. After all, the armed forces and football have a great deal in common. Both are based in violence. Both require strength and perseverance. Both have used the draft as a recruiting mechanism. And it is easy to see how plotting a military strategy is very similar to preparing for an upcoming game by studying the opposing team's weaknesses and strengths. But what is key to both is the need

for strict discipline. Orders, whether they come from an officer or a coach, need to be blindly followed or carried out. There can be no questioning or deviating from this belief. Authority has to be respected, otherwise players get injured or soldiers will die.

When Colin Kaepernick, former NFL quarterback, took a knee in 2016 during the national anthem, he simply wasn't being a good soldier. It isn't that bringing attention to the racial injustice that continues to plague our society wasn't an important cause, it is simply that this act threatened the authoritarianism demanded and desperately needed by the military and our Commander in Chief, President Donald Trump. Kaepernick single-handedly disrupted the military campaign by the Department of Defense for the paid patriotism by the government to the NFL.

It wasn't just the government that was unhappy at this disruption. Strong emotions were triggered by some NFL fans at the perceived disrespect to the flag. Other blatant flag violations in the past hadn't drawn this ire; for example, football players who didn't hold their helmets in their left hand during the anthem or didn't even place their hand over their hearts. Instead some just grabbed the collar of their jersey, chomping away on gum or chew, like cows chewing cud. No, this behavior was accepted by fans and the NFL. Even the little flags on player's uniforms is a violation. According the United States Code: "The flag should never be used as wearing apparel..." Another violation are the giant flags being held flat over the field to show the NFL's patriotism. The code clearly states: "The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally, but always

aloft and free." These violations weren't upsetting, but quietly taking a knee drew anger and outrage.

Other fans were simply unhappy at the political bickering. Football is a hobby, designed for people to kick back and relax as they cheer for adopted teams. It is a brief escape from the conflicts and tragedies surrounding us on a daily basis. Politics are not welcome, and when ticket sales and viewership are already lagging, calls for boycotting games and products only contribute to the ongoing problem. What had seemed like such a sound business decision now has the NFL scrambling to somehow address this public relations nightmare. Some teams believe that joining arms and kneeling before the anthem followed by standing during the anthem is a compromise, demonstrating unity. But the unity message has been confusing. Green Bay Packers' quarterback Aaron Rodgers tried to explain the NFL's response. "This is about unity and love and growing together as a society..." Seriously? No wonder people are confused. This is football. Violent entertainment.

The NFL has clearly lost sight of its identity and purpose. It's trying to be something it isn't. Before more fans are lost, it should lose the national anthem, cut ties with the military (including the disturbing flyovers by bombers after the anthem), and just play the game. Leave the "unity and love and growing as a society" to political activists and willing ordinary citizens. ✂

– Des Moines area resident Stephanie Fawkes-Lee is a struggling Vikings fan

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# I Was a 1960s Feminist

**A** while ago I visited Cornell College with my foster granddaughter, a couple of her friends, and their mothers. Her 11 year old sister Tay came along. While the girls were visiting a class, the mothers caught up on their cell phones and Tay noticed an exhibit that looked interesting. Dozens of t-shirts hung on a clothesline. I thought it would be a chance to talk to Taylor about the old-fashioned custom of hanging laundry out on a line with clothespins, and perhaps think about some social issue that still seems far away from us. Was I wrong! Each t-shirt had a message from someone who had experienced sexual abuse to their abuser.

I was thinking it was a nationwide exhibit that was traveling to different venues around the country, when Taylor and I rounded a corner and were confronted with a table of clean white t-shirts and some magic markers. We were invited to make a t-shirt ourselves and add it to the collection. I looked more carefully at the shirts on the line. Not only did many of them call out their abuser by name, they mentioned towns like Davenport and Clinton. That's when I realized this display was made by women who were Cornell students in peaceful Mount Vernon.

Cornell is a small college with only around 1400 hundred students. There couldn't be more than 700 or so girls on campus, and here were dozens of t-shirts describing abuse. Some incidents happened in childhood, mostly within the family or with step-parents or partners of their mothers. Most of the victims were girls. Most of the abusers were boyfriends or older men. It happened in high school, even middle school, at

school events. Alcohol was involved. One of the t-shirts said, "Yes, I was drunk, but that didn't make it okay for you to do what you did." A lot of the shirts mentioned violence and hospital emergency rooms. A few described things that happened on the Cornell campus. All of them were vivid examples of traumatic stress with the after-effects of vivid nightmares, revenge fantasies, insecurity, and constant fear. More than one said, "I will never forget this." Some used very graphic language and I was beginning to regret that I had allowed Taylor to look at this display. I hugged her and said, "Now, do you see why your mom keeps such a close eye on you and your sister?"

I was a 1960s feminist. We believed that if we won the rights to equal status and control over our bodies, it would mean freedom from sexual exploitation. It never happened. The display brought back a memory from my freshman year at another small college, standing outside the restroom in the freshman dorm to watch out for the RA or housemother while inside another young woman sobbed and her roommate and a couple of friends tried to soothe her. She had been raped.

One of my memories of 8<sup>th</sup> grade is that one of my girlfriends rushed up to me after lunch, her hair messed up and her blouse torn. There was blood on her leg. She was sobbing and said she had been raped. In the 50s, we still played with our Toni dolls after school. I wasn't even sure what the word rape meant and I had to ask my mother that night. I still feel sad that I couldn't be more helpful to my friend. There are other memories that I still don't talk about much. As we left the exhibit, we paused by the

blank T-shirts, but neither of us made one for ourselves. Tay was very quiet, and I hoped she didn't already have memories of her own.

Nothing changes. We have come a long way as women, but not so far in our personhood. We are still vulnerable. Hugh Hefner is finally dead, but we have a misogynist president who brags about his power over women. His Secretary of Education dismantles a rule that would have colleges be more forthright in dealing with sexual crimes, because it discriminates against abusers! Colleges still try to obfuscate their problems with sexual abuse on campus, but they have increased their counseling services. Counseling and sixty-seven cents-on-the-dollar pay equity doesn't seem like much compensation.

One of the kids I mentor is a 15-year-old African-American boy. I have already had The Talk with him, and watched his childhood innocence fall away from his face. Sometimes he wonders why an old white woman thinks she knows so much about being Black. I have never been Black, I tell him, but I have been a woman all my life. Neither of us are white men. He nods. He gets it.

Now I see there is another Talk I need to be having with the girls, about boundaries and keeping yourself safe. This one is hard, after years of telling them they are growing up to be strong young women who have the world ahead of them and can be anything they have the courage to seek for themselves. ✨

– Carol Thompson is a former member of the Johnson County Board of Supervisors

# The Socialist Revival: It All Began in Iowa

When Bernie Sanders spoke to a sold out crowd at Hancher Auditorium in August, sponsored by Prairie Lights Books, he prefaced his comments by thanking the people of Iowa for their early support for his presidential campaign. "It all began here," he said. If that is true, historians will look to the 2016 Iowa caucuses as the beginning, not merely of a presidential campaign, but of a wholly unexpected revival of democratic socialism in America.

The four socialist pillars of the Sanders campaign were (1) a trillion dollar green government jobs program, with good jobs at good wages, to cut global warming, (2) a \$15 an hour national living wage, (3) free tuition at public colleges and universities, and (4) Medicare for All. Underlying these proposals is a fundamental principle, which Sanders explained in a skit on Saturday Night Live. Larry David, as Captain of the sinking Titanic, was giving preferential access to lifeboats to the wealthy. Sanders, as a poor Jewish immigrant, came up on deck to explain to the Captain that *we need to unite and work together if we are going to get through this*. When Larry David complained that this sounded like Socialism, Bernie Sanders replied: "Democratic Socialism."

Politics is full of surprises, and one of the big surprises of the 2016 presiden-

tial campaign was the discovery that socialism is no longer a bad word, at least for anyone under 50 who has trouble identifying the meaning of the word McCarthyism. More young Americans now approve of socialism than approve of capitalism. In his campaign, Sanders received overwhelming support from young Democratic voters and caucus attenders, not only in college towns but in small towns and rural areas around the nation.

Now the most popular political leader in America, he is resurrecting the ideals of a Democratic President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, also called a socialist. Roosevelt transformed the Democratic Party with his belief in good jobs at good wages through public works programs, a social security pension as an entitlement (not welfare), and secure employment with protections under the fair labor standards act and union contracts. These New Deal programs were not merely good economics or good politics for Roosevelt, but human rights because *we are all in this together*.

Sanders has brought the New Deal back from the dead. It is unlikely that mainstream Democrats will embrace the label socialist, but there is every evidence that they will increasingly embrace the socialist policies brought into public debate by the Sanders campaign.

In Iowa Cathy Glasson is running for governor on "a bold progressive platform." She supported Secretary Clinton in the Iowa caucuses, but she is now touring the state advocating a \$15 an hour minimum wage, free tuition at our public community colleges and a tuition freeze at our three state universities, and Medicare for all as the only way to deal with the health care crisis inflicted on Iowans by the disastrous Republican privatization of Medicaid. Glasson has clearly seized the political high ground with her ideas.

Shortly after Senator Sanders's Hancher speech, Iowa City native Cathy Myers returned to her hometown to speak at a fundraiser organized to support her campaign for Congress in Wisconsin, where she is running against Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. Myers supported Secretary Clinton for the Democratic nomination, but her speech in Iowa was taken straight out of the Sanders campaign. She supports Medicare for All, a \$15 an hour national minimum wage, and a large federally funded green public works program to combat global warming and provide good jobs at good wages for the American people.

Nationally, mainstream Democrats are getting on board with Senator Sanders's ideas. When he introduced

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***The Socialist Revival: It All Began in Iowa***

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Medicare for All in 2013, he could get no Senate co-sponsors. Now he has more than fifteen. At the beginning of this session of Congress, Congressman John Conyers had only 51 co-sponsors for his version of Medicare for All. Democrats, including Iowa's Dave Loebsack, began signing up, and Medicare for All now has the support of roughly two-thirds of the House Democratic Caucus.

Anyone who watched the CNN debate on health care between Senators Sanders and Amy Klobuchar on one side, and Senators Lindsey Graham and Bill Cassidy on the other, can only come away with one conclusion: Senator Sanders is winning the battle of ideas in support of Medicare for All. Unable to explain why it is

a bad idea, Senator Cassidy was reduced to the classic rhetorical tactic of someone with nothing to say: name-calling. Senator Sanders, he said, was a socialist.

Senator Cassidy was not wrong to call Sanders a socialist; he was wrong only in thinking that he could end the argument that way. When Sanders explained patiently to Senators Graham and Cassidy that health care is a human right, he was explaining that *we are all in this together*. National Health Insurance remains part of the unfinished business of the New Deal. It will be a long and bitter fight to enact Medicare for All. If it happens, though, remember that it all began in Iowa. ✂

– Jeff Cox

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