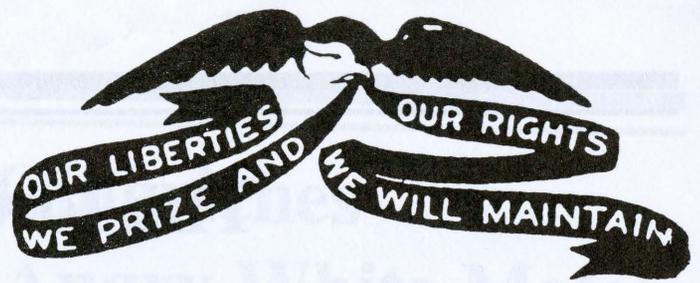


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Fall 1995

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

## Conservative Push May Come to Shove

Former FBI-man and former mayor Bill Ambrisco surveyed the new look of the Iowa City City Council after the 1993 election. "Three peas in a pod," he said of incumbent Karen Kubby and newcomers Bruno Pigott and Jim Throgmorton.

Ambrisco, whose home once boasted a surveillance system he obtained from the Iowa City Police Department, must have had thick background files on the three peas. At the time of his pronouncement, the new council had yet to meet, and one of the three had never cast a vote as an elected official.

Ambrisco wasn't totally wrong. Kubby, Pigott, and Throgmorton have stuck together on a few things: encouraging and respecting citizen involvement, refusing to rubber-stamp tax breaks for developers, slowing the stampede toward a costly and poorly-planned water treatment plant.

But they've gone their own ways on many votes, most recently on the ill-fated attempt to wrap a presidential straw poll around the neck of



the next city council election. Only Kubby instantly recognized the effort as a distraction from local issues, a gimmicky distortion of the electoral process, and an invitation to lawsuits against the city.

Although most observers would characterize Kubby-Pigott-Throgmorton as a progressive minority on the council, local papers have been reporting a "push for conservative leadership." Former city councilor John

Balmer, in a recent Cedar Rapids Gazette, modestly touted his effort to recruit conservative candidates as "reasonably successful."

The three recruits credited to Balmer are Anna Buss, Dean Thornberry, and Dee Vanderhoef. Time will tell if Balmer -- whose voting record was nearly identical to Ambrisco's when they served together -- has come up with a pea-pod of his own.

Several worthwhile new candidates have surfaced in the at-large race. **Julianna Johnston** stands out among them for her environmental knowledge, community organization skills, labor background, and legislative experience. The **Prairie Progressive** recommends that one of your 2 at-large votes go to Johnston in the primary on October 10. Your other at-large vote? We humbly suggest **Karen Kubby**. ☺

—Prairie Dog

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# The Iowa I Know

In the most recent Prairie Progressive, Jae Retz wrote that the love story of The Bridges of Madison County is "a rebellion against what Iowa stands for. It is an escape from the deadening sameness of life in Iowa."

Perhaps Jae takes pride in hyperbole, and might find in another mood that Iowa doesn't mean carbon-copy clones of Terry Branstad. I have heard of the deadening sameness of southern Oregon, Oakland, New York City, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Jakarta from various burned-out friends over the years. And a roll in the hay is hardly a remedy for Deadening Sameness Syndrome.

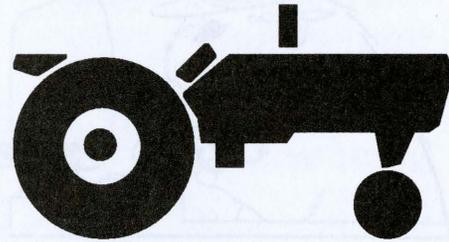
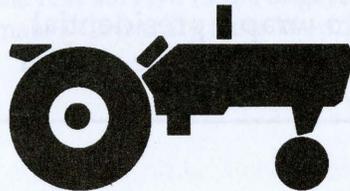
In any hyperbole is an element of truth, and there may be a deadening sameness for the dedicated looker. My Iowa never suffered from deadening sameness.

My dad was Nebraskan, but spent most of his life standing in front of a tracer lathe as a machinist in the factory of Chamberlain Corporation in Waterloo. He liked fishing off the railroad bridges of Blackhawk County and listening to country & western. My mom worked as a waitress or a receptionist to help make ends meet. They both voted Democratic and supported Jesse Jackson a few years ago as the only candidate "who spoke to us older folks."

My dad was good-natured and believed in the fundamental goodness of everyone. When I asked him if he thought God had created Hell, he said, "Now what would He want to do a thing like that for?" No one was that bad nor that mean.

A friend works at the post office in Ames. He puts in his hours and has been offered a management position but refused,

saying, "I've still got some principles." He surfs the Internet, chainsmoking his way through the middle of next Tuesday, and he reads poetry and astrophysics texts, looking for loopholes in the Law of Causality.



A glassblower friend reminded me this trip of our draft-card turn-in demonstration in 1967, prompted by his refusal to be inducted in Des Moines. He was eventually arrested and convicted; the conviction was overturned on appeal.

There's the old farmer in Boone County who would tromp hog manure into our house where ten people lived. He wanted to learn how we cooked soybeans and how we ate them. He helped us plow our garden and we'd help him ring the noses of his pigs. Right down the road from us was a pioneer in large-scale organic farming who

made trips to China and never lost a chance to proselytize to his neighbors about the damage of herbicides.

I just saw a woman who worked in the old Grace and Rubies restaurant. She's now a real estate agent who works with people "no one else in my office wants to touch"--single mothers, first-time buyers who've saved for thirty years, people with disabilities. She's Buddhist and works with the Linn County Democrats.

An elderly activist still researching and writing about women, a Native American social worker whom I went to high school with, my babbling English professor from Iowa State, alcoholic mechanics and lawyers, cheerful workers at the Emma Goldman Clinic, and others of my Iowa pass before me and I wonder: what does Iowa stand for?

My Iowa was always a place of down-home diversity that Bridges and Jae missed. I haven't got the money to make a movie or the patience to write a book, but maybe someone out there does. If you do, don't hire Streep and Eastwood. Now that's deadening sameness. ☘

— Barbara Summerhawk, a former Iowan who lives in Japan, migrates annually to Iowa quarries.

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# Prairie Mole at Republican Straw Poll

*"You've got to be kidding me."*

*"Why in the world would you want to go there?"*

*"That sounds like my idea of hell."*

**T**hese are only some of the responses I got from fellow progressives when I told them of my intentions to attend the Iowa Republican Straw Poll last August. No one could fathom why I would actually volunteer for such an activity. And not only was I planning to attend, but I was to be a Pat Buchanan delegate.

This may not be a typical behavior for an active Democrat, but it should be. First, I think it would be particularly good for Democrats if an ideologue like Pat Buchanan were the Republican nominee in November of 1996. Second, as an activist, I think it's important to know what the other side is saying. And third, it sounded like a perfectly fine party to crash.

Advance press reports indicated that the Republican Party was expecting upwards of 8,000 to be in attendance, making it the largest political fund raiser in Iowa history. Further, each candidate had scheduled numerous fun events (barbecues, speeches, and even an NRA celebrity turkey shoot) before the Straw Poll itself.

The weather on Straw Poll Day was perfect -- 70s, sunny, and not a trace of the August humidity that had been so prevalent only days before. Busses upon busses of people rode into the lot around us, following signs reading "Gramm busses this way" and "Buchanan straight ahead." The lot was beginning to fill when my fellow liberal friends and I arrived at around 1:00 in the afternoon.

Scattered around Hilton Coliseum in Ames were various tents roped off and identified on huge weather balloons for the candidate they represented. The atmosphere was that of a carnival, with music playing, barbecue smoke drifting, and buttons and bumper stickers everywhere. There was a real sense of excitement in the air as we approached our first destination: the Buchanan tent for sign-in.

After picking up our \$25 tickets to the Straw Poll (courtesy of Buchanan for President), we strolled to the food line and were actually served food by Bay Buchanan, Big-time Republican relative of Pat's and a principal organizer of his campaign. Bay was charming, and, most impressively, was working up a sweat slopping beans and burgers with the volunteers.

We raided the Buchanan tent of freebie hats and other campaign goodies, and were on our way. Next stop, Gramm and Dole. Dole's party actually seemed paltry compared to the display at some of the other tents. Sure, he had the Governor and all the other Iowa Congressmen on stage with him and his wife, but addressing a smallish crowd they just looked like six guys in bad suits.

Gramm had the best food, which was out by the time we got there. The good Senator had rented several smokehouse trucks and served up an authentic barbecue. We posed for photos with Phil and were on our way.

One thing stood out as being different from Democratic Party events: there wasn't any beer. We even got a few ugly stares from supporters who noticed our smuggled-in cans of Miller. But

those concerns quickly dissipated as a caravan of bikers (presumably they liked his civil-libertarian tendencies) followed by seven busses of supporters began to parade around the coliseum with their candidate of choice: Illinois businessman (and long-shot) Morry Taylor.

Following the Taylor caravan led us to Taylor's party, by far the most festive scene of the day. After picking up the arm-band and standing in a short line for a nice cold beer, I was just in time for Taylor's pre-Poll speech to his crowd. And his crowd they were. Many of them in leather, they cheered when some of the first words out of his mouth were: "I can't believe we're the only ones with beer!" He then proceeded to tell his supporters how to vote later if they were too drunk to read his name in the voting booths.

After Taylor, the partying went down hill. Specter's tent wasn't really happening, and neither was Wilson's. Alexander's seemed a little too Tennessee for me. It was about time for the vote, so we decided to enter the coliseum.

Inside the seating area, with Dan Quayle as emcee, it was an exciting scene indeed. Much like a professional basketball game, rock music blared and spotlights scoured the arena as the candidates walked on stage, the announcer bellowing their names and credentials. It now appeared that many more than the 8,000 predicted attendees actually made it; the arena was packed.

As for the speeches themselves, they were typical political fare (although I'd never heard the word

*Mole, continued on Page 4*

*Prairie Mole,*  
*Continued from Page 3*

"Christian" mentioned so many times at a political event). But the crowd certainly responded to the firebrand rhetoric that the candidates were spewing. To add to the convention atmosphere, balloons and streamers -- and even pyrotechnics at one point were unleashed. To be sure, it was well choreographed for the cameras.

But the television coverage, despite how important it can be in day-to-day campaign scenarios, was not the most significant occurrence that day. And neither was the outcome, no matter how much controversy surrounded who bought which votes. The most important thing for those concerned about Republican and Religious Right successes was the degree to which rank-and-file Republican activists were energized that beautiful day in Ames.

There were over 10,000 people voting at the Straw Poll. Some of those were not Iowans, as the media reported. But even if only half that number were Iowa Republicans, that's still a lot of Republicans brought together to have a great time while celebrating their party's positions and candi-

dates. Hell, even I had a blast. Just imagine the time the Young Republicans of Poweshiek County had getting to party and meeting their idols Pat Buchanan and Phil Gramm.

Contrast that with the Democratic Party. What do we do for our people? Well, sure, we have events like the annual Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Des Moines which usually feature prominent speakers. But the JJ Dinner costs a minimum of \$50. That's not a price tag that'll get your average Democrat into Des Moines for a party event. The Democratic Party would perhaps be better served in the long run if they focused more attention on the people who do the work in campaigns. Sure, it would likely mean a loss of some revenue. But I submit that most of the campaigns in Iowa last time were well-financed. It wasn't that we didn't have the money; the voters (and many one-time activists) simply weren't excited about what the party or its candidates were doing.

Unless the Democratic Party can start doing more to energize and mobilize our own people, the Ames Straw Poll will be remembered not as the day Phil Gramm tied Bob Dole for first, but as the day Republicans won the 1996

elections in Iowa. Until the Democratic Party starts doing such things, remember that you can always crash Republican events -- you just might have to bring your own beer. ☹

— *Andy Peebler is a political scientist in training at the University of Iowa.*

## Don't Give Back, Fight Back!

**O**n June 27, 1993, A.E Staley Manufacturing Company in Decatur, Illinois, locked 760 workers out of their jobs to enforce its massive concessionary demands.

At a peaceful demonstration in front of the plant on June 25, 1994, police repeatedly sprayed pepper gas on Staley workers and supporters, many of whom were sitting down with their backs turned.

UPIU Local 7837 is asking the Illinois Department of Commerce to remove Staley's exemption from a variety of state taxes. These exemptions had been granted on the condition that Staley maintain 1,600 full-time jobs at the Decatur facility.

Staley is also becoming increasingly entangled in the Archer-Daniel-Midland antitrust investigation, including being sued by Pepsi for damages from price-fixing.

But most of the visible activity centers around the campaign pressuring Staley to stop purchasing corn sweetener. You can help by writing to Pepsi-owned companies like Kentucky Fried, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut. Or call Pepsi at 800-433-2652. ☹

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# Gumps and Gingriches

## Stupid White Men & Angry White Males

*Brains, you know, are suspect in the Republican Party.*

Walter Lippmann

**I**t is not Gumpian chance that the ascendancy of culture-trashing anti-intellectuals in the halls of Congress coincides with the proliferation of movies celebrating human stupidity.

A key target of conservatives eager to show their commitment to the right wing agenda is the Department of Education. Republican presidential candidates are arguing over which of them voted for it and who would abolish it quickest, while the newly elected Republican Representatives declined the traditional trip for incoming legislators to the Harvard School of Government.

The Newly Vague era of American cinema began with the movie *Wayne's World*, during the realm of George Bush, who wanted to be remembered as "The Education President." Then along came Gump, the simpleton from Alabama, just as the South rose again in the United States Congress. Forrest Gump cheered a lot of people out there on the Right with what Michael Lerner calls his message "that the only thing wrong about their world is the people who are telling them there's something wrong."

What a comfort it must be to Christian Coalitionists to know that they, like Forrest, can make it big in life without an abundance of brain cells. The fact that Forrest was named after a Civil War general who later started up the Ku Klux Klan doesn't hurt his standing with the Christian Right either.

Only *E.T.* and *Jurassic Park* have grossed more than Forrest Gump. Hollywood isn't stupid. Dim is definitely in. Have movie titles ever been so intellectually honest: *Dumb and Dumber*, *Airheads*, *Jerky Boys*? And on the horizon are *Idiots*, *Dummies*, and *The Stupids*. These titles are as up front as the

**"Oklahoma City was a watershed moment in American history, a chance to put the violent, pseudo-patriot right wing on the run and disarm the NRA. But Republicans came to their rescue."**

Republicans' wish to abolish the Department of Education.

Yes, I have watched these movies. At the theater, I lied and purchased a ticket for another film than the one I was there for. But in the crowded video store, I had to suffer the humiliation of a young clerk announcing: "*Jerky Boys* is due tomorrow and *Airheads* on Sunday."

*Jerky Boys*, starring a couple of jerks playing stupid telephone pranks, is "Candid Camera" with an attitude. Adam Sandler, who beyond putting his tongue against his lower lip to sound stupid possesses no discernible comic talent, plays a real jerk in *Billy Madison*. He has to repeat grades 1 through 12 if he wants to inherit his father's factory and fortune. It's a real struggle for him, but in the end he wins both wealth and a beautiful teacher.

The *Airheads* are rock musicians living up to their name to make it. They do, and the lead one gets his woman back.

Jim Carrey, the man of a single face, is the star of *Dumb and Dumber*. He and his dumb (or dumber—it's never clear which is which) sidekick are really down on their luck, but as dumb luck would have it, they discover both fortune and romance. (The makers of *Dumb and Dumber*, seeing an even more profitable Dumbest in their future, break the pattern and at the very end their protagonists are back where they started.)

Basically most of these movies are the American dream movies: persevere and regardless of your IQ you'll find your love and fortune. Stripped down to the barest bones they are procreation dramas. And what is dumber than instinct?

All these movies glory in the scatological. I can't discuss them without getting scatological myself. And I don't want to talk about the Gumps when the Gingriches have captured the podium and taken over all debate in the country.

*Gump, Page 6*

*Gump,  
Continued from Page 5*

Oklahoma City was a watershed moment in American history, a chance to put the violent, pseudo-patriot right wing on the run and disarm the NRA. But Republicans came to their rescue. They turned the heat on the government instead with their hearings on Waco and Ruby Ridge, where we have the spectacle of Arlen Specter, the only Republican standing up to the Christian Coalition, making a tragic hero out of a backwoods Nazi. They re-channeled the debate on violence to our TV and movie screens, and shifted the spotlight from the armed and ready anti-government militias to hypothetical flag burners.

Republicans are also having it their way on the intelligence front,

which is to say: both ways. While carrying out an anti-intellectual assault on American culture on one flank, on another they are embracing the Bell Curve, which claims that white is smart. But this latest Aryan myth of a "cognitive elite" rising to the top can be blown to smithereens with the mention of a single name: Ronald Reagan.

In the midst of all these movies glorifying white stupidity, African-American director John Singleton made his no-nonsense Higher Learning. Its message is "information is power," and its urgent question is "Do you have a plan?" Because without a plan how will the rest survive in the angry white male's Cowardly New World? ☹

— Jae Retz

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