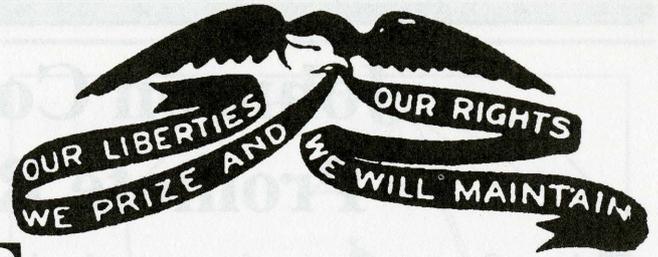


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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February 1999

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Millennial Honor Roll for 1998

Pay attention, friends, 1999 is as good as over. This might be the last Honor Roll of the 20th century, and soon there will be no more talk of building a bridge to the next one.

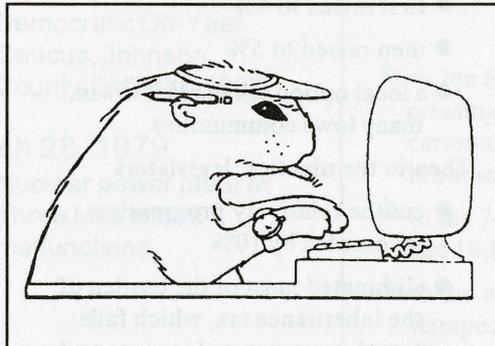
The past year was less than glorious for hog farmers, Friends of Bill, and the people of Iraq, but '98 had its moments of honor. Most notable were some remarkable prairie union triumphs.

650 Titan Tire workers represented United Steelworkers Local 164 have been on strike in Des Moines since May 1. The battle against CEO Morry Taylor is a tough one, but the workers have successfully resisted management efforts to drive generational and racial wedges between the strikers, and continue to maintain a united front.

More than **600 workers** represented by **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1634** went on strike against Rockwell Collins in Coralville. Unions from across the state joined the IBEW picket line, spurring the workers to victory and a contract free from concessions in health care and benefits.

450 nurses joined **United Food and Commercial Workers** in Sioux City. 700 workers joined a coalition of three unions at Prairie Meadows. **Nearly 120 Head Start teachers, counselors, and social workers** voted to join Service Employees International Union in Linn, Johnson, and four other counties.

SEIU was also starred in the year's most dramatic labor victory, not only in Iowa but in the nation, when **1900 nurses and professional staff at University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics** gained representation by voting for SEIU's Local 150. Leading the PP Honor Roll are attorney **Matt**



Glasson and the hundreds of UIHC staff who demanded accountability and respect from one of Iowa's most paternal institutions.

In an election year, only **Kay Chapman, Minnette Doderer, Ed Fallon, Mary Mascher, and Dick Myers** of the Iowa House of Representatives voted against an \$85 million tax cut that disproportionately favored wealthier Iowans. Said Myers, "There's more to being in the Legislature than supporting tax cuts." All five were re-elected easily.

One of the physicians who delivered the McCaughey septuplets, **Paula Mahone** testified at the Iowa legislature against the so-called "partial birth"

abortion ban, raised money for an African-American history museum in Cedar Rapids, and participated in the Economic Justice conference sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. In contrast, the McCaugheys endorsed Jim Lightfoot and did TV ads for an electric drill.

Quiet and cautious Iowa City council member **Dee Vanderhoef** cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of allowing same-sex couples/domestic partners to qualify for federal housing aid.

In her tenth year on the city council, **Karen Kubby** showed why she's the longest-serving member since John MacDonald. Frequently on the short end of a 6-1 vote, "the socialist pot-maker" maintained her commitment to open government and fiscal fairness by opposing a local-option sales tax ballot, opposing a \$12 million parking ramp, opposing a plan that would have made the landfill the most elevated spot in Iowa City, and opposing Dean Thornberry for Mayor pro tem. Kubby also worked to imbue the "peninsula project" with citizen input from start to finish, and to give local developers some opportunities for creativity along with profitability.

When a district judge threw out charges of "public indecent exposure" against the Southern Comfort Free Theater for the Performing Arts, Scott County Sheriff **Michael Bladel** threw in

*Honor Roll,
Continued on Page 6*

Johnson County Legislators Promote Regressive Taxes

Johnson County progressives face a real dilemma in the upcoming election on a regressive local option sales tax. Liberals and progressives support progressive taxes, but also support maintaining the quality of our local civic institutions funded by the sales tax. How did we get into this dilemma, which gives us the choice of supporting the local public library only at the cost of a tax that raises the burden on those least able to pay?

The short answer is that our Democratic legislators from Johnson County created this situation. In 1982 Terry Branstad was elected governor and Democrats took over control of the legislature. Since that time, whether in the majority or in opposition, Democrats from Johnson County have cooperated with Governor Branstad in a major restructuring of our tax code. The burden of taxation has been shifted away from corporations and investors, and placed squarely on the backs of the wage-earning majority of Iowans. The local option sales tax is only part of a much broader re-structuring of our tax code, which has been brought into conformity with the principles of Ronald Reagan.

Contrary to what many Johnson County progressives believe, our legislators have not reluctantly capitulated to the Reaganite agenda on taxes, but have been key players in putting it into place. When I first moved to Iowa City in 1977, I was amazed to hear our legislators routinely defend the sales tax, claiming that it was "not really regressive" because food and prescription drugs are exempt. When challenged, they would concede that the sales tax is in fact regressive, but change the phrase to "not so bad". From their point of view, the fairness of the tax code was less important than raising money for state government.

Local activists on the Johnson County Democratic Central Committee had an entirely different view in 1988, and the county party played a key role in defeating the first local option sales tax referendum by actively campaigning against it. (It will be interesting to see what role the central committee plays this spring.) But local party opinion had little affect on the views of local legislators, who had voted to make the local sales tax an option precisely in order to provide more funding for municipal government.

There have been six key pieces of legislation in the regressive restructuring of Iowa's tax code. In the 1980s Iowa's 3% sales tax was:

- first raised to 4%
- then raised to 5%
- a local option tax made it 6% in many Iowa communities.

Then in the nineties, legislators

- cut the relatively progressive income tax by 10%
- eliminated most of the burden of the inheritance tax, which falls largely on unearned income and capital gains.

Finally, in 1998

- they added a local option tax for schools, pushing the potential sales tax rate to 7%—more than double the 1982 rate.

On the spending side of the budget, these regressive changes in tax rates were accompanied by a shift in funding toward economic developments grants to investors in the eighties, and by an unprecedented expansion of state prison system in the nineties.

With a very few exceptions, our Democratic legislative delegation from Johnson County has provided solid

support for this regressive re-writing of our tax code. The exceptions are worth noting. Although the majority of our local delegation voted for the local option sales tax for schools in 1998, both Dick Myers and Minnette Doderer voted no. State Rep. Doderer supported the sales tax increases of the 1980s, but courageously broke ranks with the Johnson County delegation and stood entirely alone in opposing recent income and inheritance tax cuts. Some members of our delegation are now suggesting that it is time for Rep. Doderer to retire.

Last month, as President Clinton launched 450 cruise missiles on Iraq without so much as a courtesy call to Congress or the U.N. Security Council, progressive Democrats held rallies, not to protest this unconstitutional and cynical exercise of military power, but to defend the President and "the integrity of the constitution." As soon as the impeachment trial is over, Clinton will of course join with the very people who are trying to remove him from office, and partially privatize the social security system.

The assault on the key values of the New Deal/Great Society Democratic party is not merely coming from the White House, but from Democratic elected officials at all levels of government. In local as well as national politics, it appears to be impossible to be an active progressive Democratic without being put in the position of promoting an agenda that undercuts liberal and progressive values. ✕

— Jeff Cox

Wellstone Out, Darling In

When I ran for Governor of California in 1978, my platform was clearly ahead of its time, but today it doesn't sound so far-fetched.

For example, I promised that if I continued my political career and were elected President, I would start the Presidential Network (PTN.) As President I would wear a small video camera to record everything I said, saw and heard. This camera would broadcast to every television set in America, 24 hours a day. Americans should have the option of seeing what the President sees. After all, we pay the bills.

On PTN, the President could inform Americans of events on a daily basis, and he could take the pulse of the people by holding daily elections. When a national consensus is required, the President should not rely on polls as they are conducted today. We need an honest, inclusive polling system that reflects America's diversity. We could vote with Total Democracy Voting Cards, designed for television sets, VCRs, gas pumps, and/or computers. American technology could make this a reality.

With regards to campaign reform, I support a system that would make every political campaign in America subject to the same scrutiny as our current President has recently been subjected. A campaign should be a contract, and a politician should be held accountable for any and all statements made while seeking office. What is true on the campaign trail should be true after an election.

Here is why I am running for President: Someone must convince Congress to alter their attitude toward education. A President need only study our public schools to understand America's major problem. An uneducated population is not ideal for continuing democracy, and if we don't beef up our schools, this nation is lost.

If America elects me as their next President, I will focus all of the power of the Presidency on solving the education crisis in America. I will not sign one budget until education is on top.

We must train and hire far more teachers, and we must build hundreds of new schools. Wherever uncrowded classrooms are needed, we must build them. This revolution can occur in every nook and cranny of this nation, and in

“What politician has made you a better offer?”

so doing we can rebuild America and inspire the world—to say nothing of restoring our children's faith in their future.

“Where will the money come from?” That is what politicians always say when asked about education. Here is my answer: America will retire as a world military power. We will bring our troops home, and their only job will be to protect our nation from the threat of foreign invasion, natural disaster, and to meet America's contribution to the United Nations. We will be one nation among many, an equal partner in world peace.

Following WWII, General Dwight Eisenhower issued a severe warning against our succumbing to the military-industrial complex. Had we taken his advice, America's dominant bureaucracy today might be health and education rather than the Pentagon. It is, however, not yet too late to restore our priorities.

America should once again become the great international experiment. We are the testing ground to see if the people of Earth can actually get along. Everyone is represented here—every race, religion, nationality, philosophy,

cult and ideology. Perhaps that's why we feel compelled to tell the rest of the world what to do, but we can no longer afford this behavior.

If you support my basic concepts—that we must make education bigger and better than ever, and that we must make it available to every child—help send a mandate to Washington, DC. Support my campaign for President of the United States. Support PTN. Support total democracy. Help find a way for every American to be educated, safe, and healthy.

In order to finance my campaign, I am asking for contributions just like every other candidate. And like every other candidate, I hope to receive matching federal funds. Unlike every other candidate, however, I am promising to return my contributor's money along with half of mine. I will hire my contributors to talk about my campaign. Their salary will be one-and-a-half times the amount of their contribution (within the legal limits.) In other words, if a contributor sends me \$100, I will hire that contributor at a salary of \$150.

What politician has made you a better offer? Supporting my campaign is an investment. At last, a politician who pays you to do nothing but talk. I will be in Iowa in 1999, and I will hear what you have to say then. In the meantime, thanks for listening. ✨

— Lowell Darling is the author of *One Hand Shaking*, an account of his California gubernatorial campaign, in which he received 2% of the vote against Jerry Brown.

Darling grew up in the Quad Cities and is the only presidential candidate known to be a direct descendant of Marcel Duchamp.

There's Something about Beloved

To ensure that this movie gets its due from at least one source, I hereby bestow the *Prairie Progressive* Best Movie of the Year Award on *Beloved*.

Three observations: First, Oprah Winfrey—who is both the “mother of the movie” (Demme) and Sethe, the mother in the movie—apparently can do about anything she sets her mind to. Second, Jonathan Demme need take a back seat to no other American director. And third, the timing was bad for a movie about slavery, when movies about dumb white guys are reigning supreme in Hollywood and the Southern White Male has taken over Washington.

After much hope and hype, *Beloved* bombed at the box office. It breaks your heart to read Winfrey's journal about the making of the movie, bursting with the joy of turning her 10-year dream into reality and the belief that this compelling story of her ancestors would open the minds and hearts of millions and help stop the bleeding from our national shame. *Beloved* was to be her *Schindler's List*.

How could it fail? Starring the beloved Queen of Television (there is no king), directed by an Oscar-winning director, from a novel by the Nobel laureate Toni Morrison. Try to top that. Just as the novel never made it easy on the reader, the movie refused to play down to the viewer. It didn't fail. Only at the box office.

Where it pays to be dumb. Not only are dumb movies bringing in big bucks, they are beginning to fool the critics. Gene Siskel, the one with the thin thumb, included *There's Something About Mary* in his list of ten best movies of 1998. The only thing about Mary is her knack for attracting stupid white guys.

There are a lot of things about the character Beloved, and most of them defy explanation. She is the reincarnation of the baby her mother killed to

save it from life as a slave. With this act, Sethe went one step beyond the horror of Sophie's choice. The strong presence of the supernatural gave some critics an opening to dismiss *Beloved* as a ghost story, even a horror movie. But the ghost and the horror in the person of Beloved is the embodiment

“The only thing about Mary is her knack for attracting stupid white guys.”

of the tragedy of slavery, what Morrison calls “the Misery,” that refuses to go away.

One critical mark of a good movie is that you wake up thinking about it the morning after. This one really haunts. I played “most powerful scenes” with two friends. Mine was easy: the climactic killing-of-the-baby scene. I can't imagine any other director doing it better. Another chose Sethe seeing Ohio, a free state, across the river for the first time. The third was most moved seeing the scars on the backs of both Sethe and Paul D. during a love scene, which was as gut wrenching a sight as any whipping scene. Each of these moments argues against the view that the ghost element detracted from the central theme of slavery. Everything in the movie is about the physical survivors of slavery struggling to survive emotionally.

If the Academy is in a mood to start making up for its history of slighting Black filmmaking, *Beloved* has a wealth of potential, deserving nominations, beginning with the movie itself. The remarkable young women of *Beloved*—Thandie Newton (Beloved), Kimberly Elise (Denver), and Lisa Gay

Hamilton (Young Sethe)—may have already played the most important roles of their lives.

No, America doesn't have the time to deal with the slavery which stains its history, nor with a movie about slavery. It's too busy at the moment trying to hold off a pack of Southerners out to get a president whom, according to Toni Morrison, many African-Americans regard as their first black President, “Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime.” And not even this president has dared issue a formal apology for slavery. The only part of slavery America wants to hear about is Thomas Jefferson's DNA.

The top grosser during *Beloved's* rapid exit from theaters was *Waterboy*, a movie that, by any post-pubescent standard, is as horrible as the subject matter of *Beloved* is horrific. There is a great irony in this. The title *Waterboy* recalls the name of an actor, Stepin Fetchit, who has come to symbolize the degrading buffoonish roles that Blacks were limited to in the early days of Hollywood. Now it's the whites playing the demeaning parts in Hollywood's celebration of white male stupidity, while an African-American project like *Beloved* is too complex, too serious, too intelligent for mainstream moviegoers.

Beloved may not find its audience until someday in the future, but film history is sure to reward this noble effort to face our past. ✨

— Jae Retz

CALENDAR

January 10, 1989

Karen Kubby elected to the Iowa City City Council

January 30, 1948

Gandhi assassinated

February 26-27

Envisioning Sustainable Worlds: Campus, Curriculum, & Community, a cultural studies conference at Drake University.

Speakers include Sandra Sanchez, Linda Appelgate, & Ed Fallon. Free and open to the public.

www.env.drake.edu/sustain.html

March 23, 1989

The Exxon Valdez oil tanker runs aground, fouling 500 square miles of Alaskan waters

March 26-27

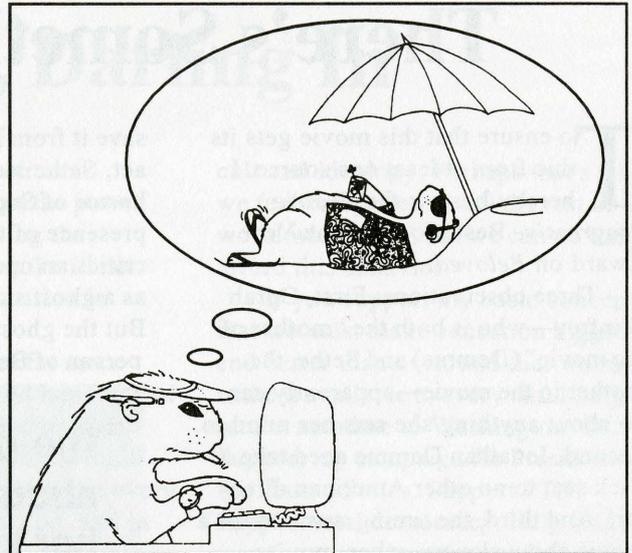
Two-day Media Training Seminar sponsored by Women's Resource & Action Center and facilitated by the Spin Project of San Francisco. Trainer: Robert Bray, former media director for the Human Rights Campaign Fund and the National Gay/Lesbian Task Force. Iowa Memorial Union, Iowa City, \$50, 319-335-1486

March 27

Democratic Off-Year Caucus, Johnson County, 319-338-1997

March 28, 1979

Nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island malfunctions



A Special Prairie Progressive Thank You

- 👉 to Joe Sharpnack and Loretta Popp for creating the classic Beanie Baby fundraising cartoon and the Prairie Dog Beanie Babies for lifetime subscribers
- 👉 to the 74 readers who have contributed \$1206 and 10,000 yen since Thanksgiving 1998
- 👉 to the comrades and relatives who have stamped and labeled thousands of *Prairie Progressives* with passion, gusto, and bemusement

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“We have no permanent friends, only permanent issues. We are beholden to no individual or party. Let us turn up the heat until the politicians see the light.”

— Andy Stern,
President, SEIU

Honor Roll,
Continued from Page 1

the towel, saying that he would “no longer dispatch morality patrols for the state.”

Randy Bezanson, Gil Cranberg, & John Soloski began an in-depth study of how ownership structures of newspapers affect journalism. The UI professors are examining how and why newspapers are operating increasingly for the sake of shareholders rather than readers.

The student-led **Gay/Straight Alliance of Valley High** and others in the Des Moines area and Ames are working against anti-gay bias in high schools. Slurs and threats of violence have failed to keep teenagers such as **Andy Cowan** and **Erin O'Brien** from providing supportive forums for discussing sexual-orientation issues.

The Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission voted 6-1 to recommend adding “sexual orientation” to the city’s anti-discrimination ordinance. Since that vote, the Cedar Rapids City Council assured itself a spot on the 1999 Honor Roll by adopting the recommendation, 3-2. Voting yes were **Lee Clancy, Nancy Evans, and Dale Todd**.

Having already astonished eastern Iowa with its first-ever endorsement of a Democrat for Governor, the **Cedar Rapids Gazette** urged the City Council to protect the rights of gays and lesbians in the areas of employment, education, credit, and housing.

Another Honor Roll hopeful for 1999: rookie **State Senator Joe Bolkcom**, for resisting meth madness, prison expansion, and tax breaks for Iowans who least need them.

The **Iowa City Citizens’ Police Review Board**, formed in the wake of the shooting of Eric Shaw, got off to a slow start but showed courage by taking seriously the growing number of police stops for “driving while black.”

Seven years ago **Miya Rodolfo-Sioson** was a random victim of violence on the University of Iowa campus. Today she works for the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, where she helped pass a city ordinance to permanently fund emergency-assistance services for people with severe disabilities. Rodolfo’s advice for activists, with or without disabilities: “There’s tons of stuff you can still do. Just focus on what you can do, and don’t worry about the stuff you can’t do.” ✂

— Prairie Dog

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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**“Justice does not help
those who slumber
but helps only those
who are vigilant.”**

— Mahatma Gandhi