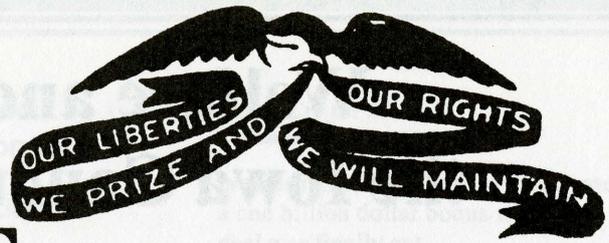


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Fall 1999

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Pioneers, Patriotism, and Pot

"I think baby boomer parents ought to say, 'I've learned from mistakes I may or may not have made.' I think we owe the children that responsibility to share our wisdom."

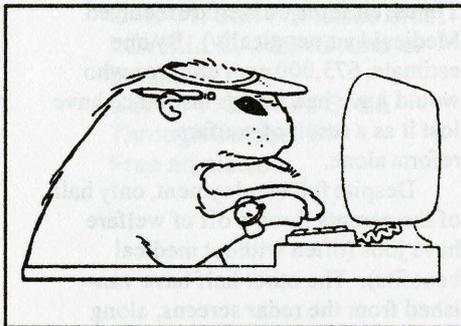
—George W. Bush

Since the Iowa Straw Poll gave its imprimatur to George the Second's royal ascendancy, only three aspects of the Republican race for the presidency remain interesting:

- Is there any limit to the amount of money the Bush campaign can raise and spend?
- Can Bush get away with lying in civil court about the ripening "Funeralgate" scandal?
- How will the formerly "young and irresponsible" candidate crawl through the webs of hypocrisy and confusion that we call American drug policy?

As Bush's record-setting money-raising soars toward \$50 million (the equivalent of 90 home runs in half a season), his chief fundraiser lauds the "willing heart" behind every contribution: "It's not a check, it's a person, someone who cares about this great country." Lest anyone believes that the checks are being written by

everyday patriots, Jim Hightower points out that 40% of Bush's money has come from his "Pioneers" — hundreds of corporate executives and lobbyists who are busily collecting \$1000 checks from their fellow executives and lobbyists. The bundled checks evade the \$1000 maximum



allowable for individuals, and insure maximum access for the Pioneers and their pals.

In his home state, Bush is trying to stonewall an investigation of Service Corporation International, the largest funeral company in the world. The former director of the Texas Funeral Service Commission filed a whistleblower complaint in March, accusing state officials and SCI of colluding to avoid fines of \$445,000 for violations of state regulations. When asked in Iowa if he talked with SCI executives about the investigation, Bush adjusted his previous denial of any "conversations," saying that he "had only a brief exchange" with SCI's CEO. Later, Bush conceded "a twenty-

second conversation," but insisted that a contempt motion claiming that he made false statements to avoid being deposed was "frivolous."

Watching Dubya writhe over the cocaine question isn't pretty, but his agony is well-deserved. Like his backtracking on what constitutes a "conversation," Bush's series of denials became increasingly convoluted, ending — at least for now — with 1973 as the last year he may or may not have used an illegal narcotic (interestingly, from 1968 to 1973 he was a pilot in the Texas Air National Guard). As a governor-who-wants-to-be-President, Bush signed a law making possession of 1.5 grams of cocaine punishable by jail time, and now wants to prosecute youthful offenders as adults.

Is any candidate willing and able to use Bush's bind to honestly examine the racist, classist, and hopelessly ineffective drug laws supported by both major parties? The Clinton administration admitted that clean needle exchange programs save lives without increasing drug use, then refused to approve funding for them. Al Gore is said to privately believe in needle exchange but won't say so publicly. Bill Bradley offers no leadership in questioning policies that are more damaging to America than the problems they are designed to solve.

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Welfare and the Iowa Caucuses

Letters to the Prairie Progressive

A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization.

— Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784

Imagine a major political figure who is responsible for tens of billions of dollars in cuts in child nutrition and health programs. Imagine that such a politician travels around the country bragging about the success of those cuts, and argues that his unprecedented assault on the well-being of poor children is a "success." Which political party would be likely to nominate such a person for president?

A hint: it's the same political party that first introduced a federal entitlement for poor children in the Social Security Act of 1935; the same political party that launched a War on Poverty in the 1960s, and instituted Medicaid to extend medical care to poor children, and staunchly defended food stamps during the dark Reagan years. The Democratic Party's record of support for poor children came to a screeching halt, however, when Bill Clinton signed the 1996 Welfare Reform Bill. According to insider accounts, Vice-President Al Gore was the leading advocate of "welfare reform" in the White House. (Leon Panetta, for the record, led the internal opposition.)

The result has been an assault on the well being of poor children by the Clinton Administration that is unprecedented in the entire history of federal involvement with child welfare. The Clinton Administration eliminated the entitlement to aid that was written into President Roosevelt's Social Security Act of 1935. This was a national commitment to guarantee the well-being of every child in America. No provision of the Social Security Act had ever been repealed until 1996.

Since then, the number of people on welfare has fallen from 14 million to 8 million; the number on food stamps from 29 million to 18 million. As everyone knows, the majority of people on welfare and food stamps are children. In a nation that leads the industrial world in rates of child poverty, the number of children in severe poverty (income under half the poverty level) is growing. At a time of full employment, overall child poverty statistics are getting no better. What will happen during a recession?

The rapid surge in the number of uninsured children has even managed to break through the pro-Clinton consensus displayed in the New York Times (children on welfare received Medicaid automatically). By one estimate, 675,000 poor children who would have had health insurance have lost it as a result of welfare reform alone.

Despite full employment, only half of the parents thrown off of welfare have jobs (often without medical benefits). The other half have vanished from the radar screens, along with their children. Senator Paul Wellstone refers to them as America's "disappeared." Presumably they are living off of relatives and charity, but no one knows. In an act of extraordinary Orwellian doublethink, this purging of children from the welfare rolls is treated by Al Gore as a success story.

Nothing done by the Reagan Administration to the poor of this country even approaches the cruelty of the Clinton/Gore welfare reform. We could, and should, use our grass roots presidential caucuses to send a sharp message of protest to Al Gore next spring. ✕

— Jeff Cox

I am so moved by the inclusion of The Astrology Sourcebook in Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List that I had to sit down and compose myself and this letter of thanks.

I am also impressed by your description of the honorably-mentioned high school essayist that included her Sun-sign in Aquarius. Obviously, The Astrology Sourcebook has permeated the consciousness of your editor, a highly sensitive, kind, and compassionate Cancer (Pisces rising).

I look forward to visiting your offices in August, on my way to the Iowa State Fair, where I will be making a pilgrimage to the Last Supper in butter.

Cordially yours,
Shirley Soffer

The slam-printed-as-substance of State Senator Bob Dvorsky written by the Labor Party vice-chair in the Summer 1999 Prairie Progressive warrants some rebuttal.

Regardless of the campaign contributions which allegedly turned him anti-regular working person, Senator Dvorsky turned in a 100% pro-worker Iowa Federation of Labor ranking for the 1999 legislative session. Senator Dvorsky is one of the strongest consistent supporters of the needs of ordinary working people in the Iowa General Assembly, a fact which the writer seems to have missed.

David Tingwald, Chair
Johnson County Democrats

P.S. One of the alleged anti-working person groups from which Senator Dvorsky was cited for receiving a contribution, DRIVE, is a labor organization.

Don't cry for me, Dan Messina

Election season came early this year. Bored by a slow news summer or because interest in Y2K melted before the snow, pundits focused on upcoming elections as if they were this fall instead of more than a year away. You'd think the media's hunger for ratings would have cooked up more than the 2-3 stories for gnashing. "Was G.W. born with a silver spoon up his nose?" "Creep or Confused: Why Hillary can't stop lovin' that man?" Or, the celebrity minute: "Will Jesse (Jackson or Ventura) or Warren (Beatty or David, Florida's defensive end) run?" Mentions of Al Gore are sparse. Network execs like their viewers awake.

Campaign 2000 will not be run on issues. We have lost our way to there so completely that the destination is no longer printed on the map. In fact, effective campaign strategists now advise hopefuls that, rather than standing tall on issues, winning depends on a candidate's mastery of obfuscating them.

So, what's a citizen with a yen for social justice to do? If your hunger is more about ameliorating human suffering than another election-day victory rush, or you're still quixotic enough to believe the people could win one in your lifetime, then what? That's where Dan Messina comes in.

Daniel S. Messina is the Chief Financial Officer for Aetna U.S. Healthcare, by far the largest managed care company in the nation. A darling of shareholders, Messina's track record for increasing profitability in the industry is already legendary. A key-player in Aetna's several controversial mergers in recent years (most recently Prudential Healthcare in August), Messina's vision is also global. In January Aetna acquired 100 percent of the common shares of Asistencia Medica Social, Argentina's largest healthcare company. This established

Aetna as the most powerful health industry in Latin America. The corporation already was the largest health care company in Chile and Brazil and the second largest in Mexico. In the U.S., Aetna manages the health care for more than 20 million Americans. Ironically while demonizing the idea of national health-care, Aetna is clear that it intends to singularly manage not only this nation's healthcare but also the world's.

"So, what's a citizen with a yen for social justice to do?"

But Messina's most admired brainchild to date has been his part in founding the Coalition for Affordable Quality Healthcare. The CAQH almost sounds like something people like me would want to join, until you find out what it does. It is a particularly baneful brand of genius that can spin a project that sounds like it might be about providing healthcare, when in fact its goals are about controlling the healthcare industry. CAQH's sole assignment is to develop media propaganda to reassure increasingly alarmed consumers that HMOs are not doing what HMOs are doing. The nation's six largest HMO rivals bought into Messina's epiphany that they'd be freer to hack away at each other's stock options if they collectively kept people who actually wanted healthcare out of the legislature.

"Affordable" healthcare isn't about the healthcare the consumer can afford, it seems, but what Aetna can afford—which apparently isn't much with 25 percent of the company's budget

already earmarked for executive salaries. (The average CEO salary [with options] is over \$100 million a year.) Rather than increasing medical benefits, Aetna is improving "quality" by investing tens of millions into CAQH's media campaign with slick t.v. ads and corporate seminars for care providers and non-medical staff titled "Managing Patient Expectations."

With each merger Aetna's drive to reduce patient expectations increases. In some cases refusal of patient benefits have been so Draconian they've crept up to the line of genocide, if not over it. The examples of care denial presented by Physicians for a National Health Program when it protested the megalomaniacal Aetna/U.S. Healthcare merger last year would inspire a Dickens novel. From trading life-saving medications for less expensive but inadequate treatment to kickback schemes that reward physicians who refer patients to services where it has a financial interest, Aetna is clear that the doctors they pay the most are those which give the cheapest care.

The role of CAQH is to persuade consumers—as consultant David Wood puts it—"to stop expecting more healthcare than they can afford." In a stirring essay to his colleagues Wood goes on to describe the "courage to make harsh decisions" and includes disturbing yet vague references to "older patients who live longer than expected." Wood uses these patients as an example of the "purgative" the industry needs to effect to remain strong. While Messina expressed sadness over Aetna's "tough, but necessary choices to protect affordability" during the Aetna/U.S. Healthcare merger, his boss Aetna

*Don't Cry for Me,
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Did Kubrick Blink?

"... I have found it always the best policy to allow the film to speak for itself."

Stanley Kubrick

In searching for greatness in the last film of the great Stanley Kubrick, let's hope I have more success than the Tom Cruise character did in his search for sex. Since Kubrick died shortly before *Eyes Wide Shut* hit theaters, leaving him no chance to answer his critics, we are forced to let the film speak for itself.

While controversy in the wake of a new Stanley Kubrick production is nothing new, the total rejection by so many is. Several movie-loving friends "hated" it, one saying *Eyes Wide Shut* "had all of Kubrick's weaknesses and none of his strengths." Clearly, just knowing that Stanley Kubrick was behind the camera wasn't enough for them.

But can we so easily dismiss the man who peaked with the *Strangelove-2001-Clockwork Orange* trinity, creations that respectively delighted, mystified, and shocked us so? What director has created such a uniquely diverse trio of masterpieces in a lifetime, let alone one after the other? Doesn't the director of three great anti-war movies—the classic *Paths of Glory*, the zany *Dr. Strangelove*, the ferociously profane *Full Metal Jacket*—deserve a closer look? Since Kurosawa's death, Kubrick was the acknowledged greatest living director. There must be more to his last movie than meets the eye.

On the surface, *Eyes Wide Shut* is about a young, beautiful, rich New York couple who hit a rough spot in their marriage when the wife confesses a sexual fantasy that sets the husband off to get even. That seems hardly plausible for such a couple, in New York, in the 90s. But as is usually the case with Kubrick, there is much more going on beneath the surface.

Right from the outset—with his first three shots—Kubrick gives us the images to guide us through his movie: 1-the back view of Nicole Kidman disrobing; 2-New York street traffic; and 3-Tom Cruise looking for his wallet. The wife and husband, cocooned in their apartment, and the outside world. And could the gender roles be any more clearly delineated?—the woman, the key player in the procreation game, the one responsible for attracting the male and bearing and caring for offspring, standing naked, while the man, the hunter, the bread winner, looks for his wallet. They converge in the bathroom, where she sits on the toilet (Kubrick even shows her wiping). Familiarity inhibits breeding.

The family unit is complete when we meet the daughter and the babysitter, who frees them to leave the nest for a party where they know "not a soul." At this party, she is propositioned by a suave Hungarian while two young models come on to him.

After this foray into the outside world, things turn interesting the next evening in their bedroom while smoking marijuana. They start arguing about men's and women's attitudes towards sex. One line leads to another, until she—in response to his declaration of total trust in her—confesses that she once had a sexual fantasy about a naval officer she had seen on their family summer vacation. She tells him she would have given up everything—her husband, even her daughter—for one night with this man. Kubrick coaxes a look from Cruise we've never seen before, as expressively powerful as her words to him.

If Kubrick hadn't already used it for his first movie, *Fear and Desire* would make a fitting title for his last one. The same woman who had just argued that women want "security and commitment" confesses further that it was "just a glance, but I could hardly move." Is the notion of eyes being wide

shut any more inconceivable or preposterous than founding a family on the procreative instinct? In "a glance" the family could collapse. Society says family unit, but the life force says keep on procreatin'. And this all happens at Christmas time, the ultimate family time. Kubrick's holiday lights are everywhere, always adorning, never illuminating.

It's the Cruise character's fantasies of his wife with the naval officer (these, the only erotic scenes in the movie, are in black and white) that drive him from one unconsummated encounter to the next, as if trying to prove his wife's words that "men stick it everywhere." His quest culminates at the masked orgy, where sex, like the wedding ceremony and baptism, is presented as elaborate ritual. The censors, who made it digitally decent, need not have worried. The sex act would pale next to the visuals of the masks, accompanied by that haunting, otherworldly music and a mounting sense of danger. Kubrick presents here the full range and mystery of the human sexuality ritual: is it a game or a matter of life and death?

Cruise's mask later somehow ends up on his pillow, next to his sleeping wife. Seeing this symbol of the orgy lying next to the mother of his child, the mask that masks our true natures, he breaks down.

Kubrick, one criticism goes, who could be so far ahead of his time, was in this melodrama about an infidelity that didn't even happen, out of touch with contemporary mores. But the timeless conflict between human nature and social constructs is never out of date.

Even if this line of defense makes sense—if Kubrick were still alive to make another movie, I would have to say to him: please, Stanley, make war, not love. ✕

—Jae Retz



Question Authority!

A workshop for young people by young activists

Saturday, Sept. 25
10 AM-2 PM
WRAC—130 N. MADISON ST.
IOWA CITY (319) 335-1486

STOP THE HATE

The FBI reported 57 incidents of hate crime and 75 total victims in Iowa in 1997. Join a national day of speaking out against hate violence.

Unity Walk and Interfaith Service Thursday, Oct. 7
Walk at 6:30, Service at 7 PM
511 Des Moines St.
Des Moines More info: Interfaith Alliance of Iowa, 515-279-8715; tiaowa@netins.net

Nadine Strossen

President, ACLU
October 8, 7 PM
Drake University
More info: bstone@radiks.net

Iowa City City Council
Candidates' Forum
October 13, 7 PM
Iowa City Public Library

**Drawing the Line:
Political Cartooning
Under Pressure**

Featuring Paul Conrad, Jules Feiffer, & Joe Sharpnack
October 14-15-16
University of Iowa

**Annual Human Rights
Breakfast**

Sponsored by Iowa City Human Rights Commission
October 28
More info: 319-356-5022

Art and Politics

in Cedar Rapids
CFR-11, San Francisco artist
LOWELL DARLING runs for president
CSPS, 1103 Third St SE
Through October 31
Free admission

*Don't Cry for Me,
Continued from Page 3*

president Michael Cardillo took home a one billion dollar bonus when the deal was finally cut.

What manner of civilization exists that allows the exploitation of the disease and suffering of the many as a means for the few to amass obscene wealth?

Martin Luther King, jr. spoke of the need for freedom fighters to have moral assignments. Rather than working for human champions, the notion was that we would work for a human cause. Could a moral assignment be a movement to establish national health care in our lifetime? Given the multi-tined hooks HMOs have threaded throughout the political quilt, is there a political candidate who can be trusted to stand up against them? What if, instead of giving an inordinate supply of life's precious moments to candidates who sell out before we can rip off their bumper stickers, we put some of that energy into something that might translate into palpable social change?

What is it that remains unwritten on the page of social justice that is more valuable to the common welfare than recognizing healthcare as a human right? Is healthcare less critical to human dignity and survival than free speech or the right to vote? Can we use our collective means to build human roads and bridges but not heal human bodies? Mobilizing around a crusade for this human right during the coming election year more than a candidate could threaten some corporate and campaign purses but it might really enrich our souls. ✕

Mona Shaw is a natural-born Iowan. Editor's Note: For more info, contact Physicians for a National Health Program at PNHP@aol.com or 312-5540382.

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Pioneers, Patriotism, and Pot
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Don't expect any leadership in Iowa. On July 1 a minimum two-day jail sentence (supported by the governor and all but a handful of legislators) became mandatory for misdemeanor possession of marijuana. Johnson County alone had approximately 300 cases of small amounts of marijuana possession in 1998. That translates to an additional one-and-two-thirds prison beds a day – an expensive, wasteful, counterproductive approach to nonviolent "crime."

When will we learn from mistakes we may or may not have made? ✕

— *Prairie Dog*

**A tribute to
Karen Kubby**

**Dec. 9, 1999
Iowa Memorial Union
Iowa City**

**All proceeds to
Women's Resource and
Action Center. For more
information, call 335-1486.**

**Student Rights 30
Years After Tinker
v. Des Moines
School District**

**October 8-9, 1999
Constitutional
Law Center**

**Drake Law School
515-243-3988**

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**"George Bush is a rich
favorite son caught in a
poor man's trap."**

— Jesse Jackson