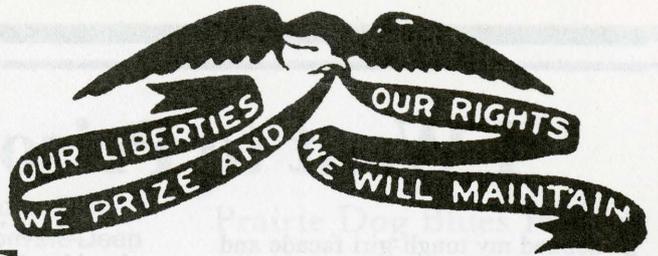


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Winter 2001

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog's Honor Roll for 2000

Storm Lake City Council

On the recommendation of the Storm Lake Police Dept., the council enacted the following resolution:

Resolved, that the Storm Lake Police Department will continually conduct an examination of traffic enforcement strategies, and if appropriate, refine mission and value statements, training programs, field supervision, and the evaluation and documentation of citizen complaints and related response to citizens, to ensure that racial profile traffic and pedestrian stops are not being employed by individuals within the Police Department and that citizens are treated equally and fairly pursuant to the Iowa and United States Constitutions.

Effie Burt

Stopped by a Waterloo police officer for not wearing a seat belt, the John Deere worker pointed out that she was indeed wearing a belt, then was arrested after asking to speak to the officer's supervisor. Burt is now appealing her resisting-arrest conviction by an all-white jury.

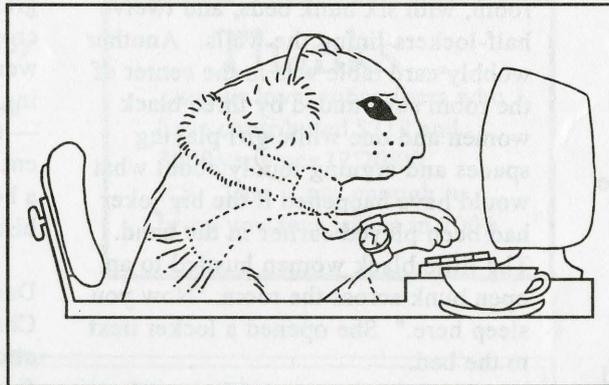
Gene Redmon 1936-2000

A former Rath Packing Co. worker, Redmon devoted the last twenty years to helping laid-off packing

plant workers in Blackhawk County. He was widely respected for his work as labor liaison with Cedar Valley United Way, and as an interviewer for the Iowa Labor History Oral Project.

Sarah Swisher

The longtime behind-the-scenes activist came into her own, becoming



one of SEIU's most indefatigable organizers. Writing, fundraising, coordinating events, and lobbying for needle-stick legislation – Swisher did it all, and still found time to door-knock her precinct on election day.

Julie Goodlaxson

Another little-known, soft-spoken Iowa Citian who emerged as a leader against the jail bond and against attempts to reduce mental health and disabilities services in Johnson County.

Jonathan Narcisse

The Bystander in Des Moines is the oldest Black-owned publication west of the Mississippi. Editor Narcisse has now compiled and published "For My People," a mountain of invaluable statistics and commentary on the status of Iowa's African American community. Order a copy at 515-284-5006.

Lee Clancy

The Mayor of Cedar Rapids strongly supported gay rights in an election year (she was re-elected), and was equally outspoken on the Governor's 2010 Planning Council, helping to pass a recommendation to add sexual orientation to Iowa's civil rights statute. Clancy also had the sense to resist the rain forest that Coralville fell for.

Carol deProsse

Jail bond vote in Johnson County: 65.5% no, 34.5% yes.

Dan Kelley 1941-2000

An old-fashioned social worker who worked for systemic as well as individual change, Kelley founded UE Local 893, Iowa United Professionals, and built it into a strong

*Honor Roll 2000,
Continued on page 6*

I Went to Prison in December 1995

I donned my tough-girl facade and prepared to meet the violence that society and the media had led me to expect.

After several hours in receiving and discharge, filling out endless forms, repeating again and again that I did not feel inclined to hurt myself or others, being lectured by distant and pontifical administrators — don't do drugs, don't kill anyone, don't take food out of the kitchen, don't have sexual relations with staff members or other inmates, don't go into any other housing unit but your own, don't leave your bed unmade and your room a mess, and always stand up for the 4 p.m. count — I was issued sheets, two uniforms, five T-shirts, five pairs of socks, five underpants, five bras, a pair of steel-toed boots, and released into the compound.

I am not a scrapper. I'm shy. I'm the type who cowers under harsh words, who always cried on the first day of school. But that day, I walked onto the noisy compound with my shoulders back, steely-eyed, ready to fight, to go to any lengths necessary to establish myself as someone to be left alone. So I was surprised at what I saw when I reached my unit. Everywhere I looked I saw hundreds of women — large, small, black, white, Native American, Spanish, young and old sitting in chairs, at tables, on the floor in the foyer — knitting, crocheting, doing plastic canvas, and beading, all intent on making the best scarf, the best rug, the best necklace, for their people back home.

I blundered around the unit, stepping over blue knitted craft bags and red balls of yarn, nearly upending a rickety card table covered with thousands of colored seed beads and plastic canvas containers. Finally, an old, tiny, bespectacled black woman put down her crochet hook, took notice of me, and called out, "Honey, where are you going?" I shrugged.

"Darla," she yelled over her shoulder, "we got a new one. Where she suppose to be at?"

Darla, a biker chick well over 6' tall, weighing about 240, with a nail-eating face, was delicately threading orange beads onto her loom where a Harley Davidson logo was being formed on a barrette. She looked up at me, smiled sweetly, and rasped, "Didn't they tell you where to go? Jesus. Them people." She shook her head, and sighed over the injustice of it all.

"Take her to the 600 bus stop. They got an empty bottom bunk. And get her shampoo and shower shoes. Commissary isn't for another two days."

"Them people," she muttered as she lowered her head back to her loom.

The bus stop was a small dorm room, with six bunk beds, and twelve half-lockers lining the walls. Another wobbly card table was in the center of the room surrounded by three black women and one white girl playing spades and arguing loudly about what would have happened if the big joker had been played earlier in the hand. The little black woman hustled to an open bunk across the room. "Now you sleep here." She opened a locker next to the bed.

"And this is yours. My name's Yula. I'll bring you some personal hygiene. You can pay me back later. I'm on the 400 alley. Juss yell if'n you need anything." As she left the room she admonished the card players. "Now y'all be nice to this here girl. And don't stay up playing all night. She'll have enough trouble sleeping with all us out here getting ready for Christmas."

I quickly learned there is no privacy in prison. We were housed in "cubes," 7' by 10' spaces partitioned by 5' high cinder block walls, with an open entrance and no doors. There

were two women to a cube, 16 cubes to an "alley" or hallway, and four alleys to a unit. Each unit had two "bus stops" or dorm rooms of twelve, where new women stayed until a bunk opened up in an alley. The bathrooms were communal, the noise constant. A dull roar of voices bouncing off concrete walls, women talking, calling out to each other, laughing, singing, voices raised in indignation or hilarity, with an occasional wails of sorrow or soaring above the din.

One might think that the living arrangement alone would create an atmosphere rife with tension and pent-up aggression. Add to the equation that we were all criminals, all deemed by society to be wicked and dangerous enough to be taken out of civilian life and locked away in this artificial environment. I quickly learned, though, that we were all just mothers, sisters, grandmothers, nieces, daughters. If a cross-section of any group of women were cut from society — a PTA meeting, a Mary Kay party, a church social — the atmosphere would be no different. We were all simply trying to make a home and some sense out of this bizarre environment.

I was released from prison in December 2000, just in time for Christmas. I am again confused. I am attempting to weave my present and future with my past, to create a whole fabric. I am trying to come to terms with my prison time, the separation and reunion with my ten-year old son, what presents to buy for my family, how to use the internet, how cell phones work, and why flannel shirts are out and animal prints are in.

And I can't shake the feeling that, like my first days in prison, I've come back to the streets with the wrong information. ❧

— Jennifer Krehbiel was imprisoned for federal drug charges. Originally from Iowa City, she now lives in Wisconsin with her son Toby.

Vilsack's War on Higher Education

There are some important differences between the new Republican and the new Democratic parties. Republicans for the most part stand behind the people who vote for them. Democrats on the other hand turn on their constituents and pit them against each other.

Nowhere has this been made clearer than in the case of Governor Tom Vilsack's political approach to higher education. Vilsack received his strongest electoral support in the university communities of Iowa City, Ames, and Cedar Falls, where staff, faculty, and students played a crucial role in putting him in office.

For several decades our publicly funded state universities have had the good fortune to receive political support from Republican governors Robert Ray and Terry Branstad. As soon as Vilsack was elected, however, he began cutting back on the Regents' budget proposals, and Republicans in the legislature finished the job. Among his many victims was the University of Iowa Library. For the first time in years, the Library received 0% increase for its acquisition budget at a time when inflationary costs for purchasing library materials were running around 15%.

Vilsack's arguments for cutting back on higher education have been politically lethal. He has been traveling the state for several months claiming that educating a university student costs \$11,000 a year, while educating a public school student costs only \$3000 a year. These are bogus figures, lumping together very expensive graduate and professional education in a selective setting with universal, compulsory public education.

It is impossible to deny the fact that higher education is expensive,

however you count the numbers, and supporters of our universities must always be ready to justify the expenditure of tax money, and explain its benefits to the state. But the way in which Vilsack has launched his neo-populist attack could hardly be more damaging. Higher education obviously has a smaller and more vulnerable political constituency than public education. If a Democratic governor launches an anti-elitist attack on higher education, and pits the public schools against the universities, who will win the argument? The damage done to higher education in Iowa by his irresponsible assault will reverberate down through the decades, setting Iowa back permanently in its struggle to maintain the quality of our public institutions.

Vilsack has not only cut funding; he has cut back on access to working class students. He was elected with solid working class support and a strong commitment from the Iowa labor movement, and he even appointed a representative of the labor movement to the Regents. But working class families with college-age children have not benefited at all. With an approving nod from both governor and legislature, the Regents have increased tuition and fees at the highest rate in the entire history of Iowa higher education. Increases in real costs for higher education exclude students based on social class and income, and that is what Vilsack has achieved in his short tenure as governor.

Imagine a contrasting scenario. Governor George W. Bush, shortly after his election as President, travels to a national meeting of the Assemblies of God, having promised them "access" if they help elect him. In small meetings with key leaders of this denomination, he explains that he

intends to publicly attack the Assemblies of God for their unpopular views on abortion rights and school vouchers, which interfere with his ability to cut taxes on the wealthy. The Christian right leaders then applaud politely and, as they leave, tell each other: "Well, at least we have access."

That is exactly what Vilsack has been doing with university groups in Iowa City. Faculty, staff, and student leaders appear to be pleased that the governor has taken the trouble to explain to his supporters in person why other things are more important than higher education. The University of Iowa student government (which must be the worst student government in the free world) actually endorsed the highest tuition increase in Iowa history.

The central political problem for progressives is that we have nowhere to go when abandoned, betrayed, and attacked by Democratic officials after we put them in office. The Iowa Democratic Party has been transformed in the last twenty years by an influx of candidates committed to free-market economics, and funded by big corporations who now out-spend the labor movement inside the party. Democratic legislators take union money and use it to campaign in support of Iowa's repressive labor laws. Democratic Party constituencies appear to be mesmerized by fear of the Christian Right, and in a permanent state of denial about the sweeping damage done to our state and our nation by Democratic elected officials. As a result, Iowa and the nation drift inexorably to the right. ☪

— Jeff Cox

Never Mess with Texas

"I still go into that booth with the same feeling—what if I voted Republican?"

Ruth Dyk, early suffragist, who voted for the last time on November 7.

Well, are you ready for the Lone Star State to be the center of our political solar system? Was it not enough having the ultra right-winger Dick Armeey as majority leader and the *non plus ultra* right-winger Tom DeLay as majority whip? Now both the president and the vice-president are from Texas. (At the last minute, Dick Cheney switched his official residency to Wyoming to conform to the 12th Amendment.) How many Texas Republicans does it take to change Enlightenment into Dark Ages?

The process that gave us this constellation was a series of ironies embedded inside each other like a set of Russian nesting dolls, beginning with the High Executioner of Austin running as a "compassionate conservative." But the ironies really started piling up in Florida, beginning with Jewish voters.

Thanks to the well-documented problems in Palm Beach County, many Jews mistakenly voted for Pat Buchanan, the one candidate who could be called a Nazi sympathizer without fear of legal reprisal. (This confusion led to the preposterous irony of Republicans calling Jews stupid.) James Baker, yet another good ol' goy from Texas, showed up to lead the Florida campaign for the Republicans with solid anti-Semitic credentials of his own. (He reportedly remarked in 1992: "Jews remember the Holocaust, but they forget insults as soon as they smell cash.") Not to forget the irony

of the son of Lebanese immigrants playing a role in keeping a Lieberman out of the White House.

William Daley, recruited by Gore to save the Florida election, came burdened with the ironic attachment to his father the late Mayor Daley, who history thinks stole the 1960 election for JFK. One irony led to another—some people, forgetting that he needed more than Illinois to win, were now calling Nixon "noble" for conceding and not forcing a recount. At one point in this hotbed of ironies the man who might be a heartbeat away from the presidency had a heart attack.

Then we had the irony of the candidate who was leading in both the popular and electoral vote being asked to concede. The two parties spent \$24.6 million wooing Florida in the fall (Gore lost that contest by \$4.4 million), and it all came down to antiquated voting machines in poor precincts. The candidate who had made "trust the people" his mantra, and signed a manual recount bill as governor of Texas, sided with machines. It was all but over when the party of the suites trumped the party of the streets by flying in staffers—attired in their finest brown shirts—from D.C. (courtesy of Tom DeLay) to close down the Dade County recount.

All that remained was the Supreme irony of Republican appointed justices, states rights advocates all, performing what Justice Stevens called "a federal assault on the Florida election procedures," and handing the presidency to George W. Bush. Can Bush ever attack judicial activism with a straight face again?

Some coalitions did not escape the ironic fallout of this election. While an old one may be re-born, a new one could be stillborn. The huge number of Black and Jewish voters who went uncounted in Florida just might resurrect that powerful partnership

from the Civil Rights days. But the one that formed between Labor and environmentalists in Seattle to fight the WTO might not survive. On election night, when Florida was first called for Gore, CNN's Jeff Greenfield did not try to hide his enthusiasm for Labor's role in the election and the prominent "place at the table" Labor would enjoy in the next administration. That place now belongs to the NRA, and Labor faces a vicious and sustained legal and political attack. It will fight back, but by any reckoning, the factory floor is a more promising battleground than the forest in the raging undeclared class war.

Too bad America impatiently viewed the Florida aftermath as a crisis instead of an audition for the White House. Gore was at the center of the action, hanging on every word in every courtroom, while Bush was out and about practicing his presidential wave and feeding animals at the ranch. The man the Bush team chose to plead his case to the Supreme Court was Ken Starr friend Ted Olson, who had lent a hand to Paula Jone's legal team, represented the Virginia Military Academy in its fight to keep women out, and defended an officer in the Rodney King assault. This is the kind of person a Bush presidency recruits and attracts, like flies to dung.

Those voters who are angry at Gore for not winning in a landslide ignore how hard it is to slam dunk with an unzipped Arkansas albatross hanging around your neck. Some wag called it a race between a smart ass and a dumb ass. Next time around, the motto hanging in the Democratic war room better be: "It's Stupid, stupid." In the meantime, I could sure use a pair of those Green colored glasses to see the world through, so it wouldn't matter—and I wouldn't care—who sits in the Oval Office. ☪

— Jae Retz



Feb. 3

Labor Forum sponsored by Johnson County Democrats & local labor unions. 10-11:30 AM, Public Library, Iowa City.

Info: 319-337-3535 or rodsulliva@aol.com

Feb. 3, 1821

Birth of Elizabeth Blackwell, first woman physician in US

Feb. 12, 1821

Birth of Frederick Douglass, escaped slave and abolitionist leader

Feb. 21

Forum on Development in Johnson County sponsored by League of Women Voters. 7 PM, Council Chambers, Iowa City. Info: 319-356-5224 or www.lwvjc.org

Feb. 21, 1936

Birth of Barbara Jordan, first Congresswoman from the Deep South

March 8

International Women's Day

March 25, 1911

Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City

April 12, 1961

CIA-trained soldiers invade Cuba at Bay of Pigs

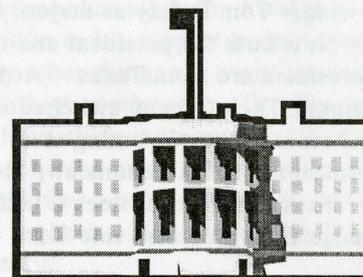
April 19

2nd Annual Conference on White Privilege featuring Cornel West. 8-5:30, Cornell College, Mt. Vernon. Info: 319-895-4484 or emoore@cornell-iowa.edu

Prairie Dog Blues Haiku

*Gadfly bites bleed truth
A caucus in the cornfields
Bring your sharpest pen*

—Michael "Hawkeye" Herman
www.seldomfed.com/recording/hawkeye



I don't care what the law is – just tell me who the judge is.

—Roy Cohn

Pay attention to what they tell you to forget.

—Muriel Rukeyser

The only true aging is the erosion of one's ideals.

—Ralph Nader

We should be ashamed we haven't made more progress in this economy. It is totally unacceptable that with this much prosperity we have millions of uninsured children.

—Marian Wright Edelman

In the face of almost certain abandonment of our struggle by conservative Democrats, we will either organize ourselves in the Congress and at the grassroots or we will fail.

—Jesse Jackson, Jr.

Thanks...

...to our loyal subscribers who have contributed \$712 and 3000 yen since 12/20/00.

P.S. This is not enough to bring you four issues in 2001.

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Honor Roll 2000,
Continued from Page 1

voice for Iowa's state employees. He was irreverent, ebullient, and funny – but seriously committed to the rights of working people.

Hector Velez

The IBP community liaison in Storm Lake became the first Latino Iowan to be elected to a city council.

Iowa City Community School District

Superintendent Lane Plugge pulled the plug on the DARE program, finally ridding the 5th and 6th grades of the police public relations scheme invented by former Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates.

Sacrifice of the Year Award

Former legislator Richard Varn defended the increase in high-end salaries for state workers. "I could make a substantial amount more in

the private sector," Varn said of his \$107,518 salary as state director of information technology, "but public service has to be about more than money."

Wish List for Next Year's Honor Roll

University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics and Blooming Prairie Warehouse, for finally learning to welcome unions into their workplaces. It's never too late to realize that bargaining in good faith is smarter (and cheaper) than fighting your employees every step of the way. ☪

**Labor creates all
value. Organize!**

**American Federation of
Teachers, Local 716**

**Fifteen years
of cooperation
in promoting
the interests
of working
people**

**The Prairie
Progressive
&
the Iowa City
Federation of Labor,
AFL-CIO**

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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Inside!

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