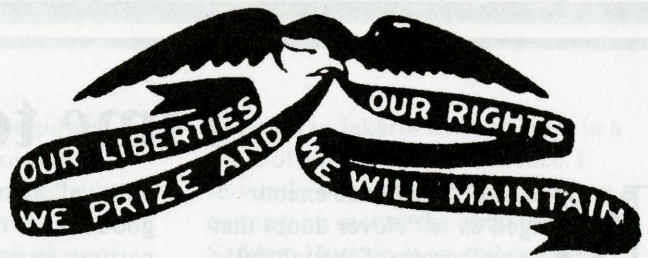


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Fall 2002

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

The Opposition Needs to Find Its Voice

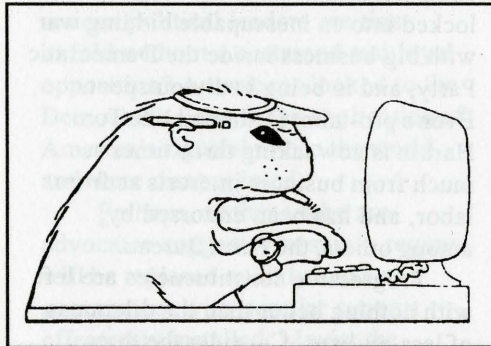
We are preparing for a terrible war, a war that could cost thousands of American casualties and tens of billions of dollars. It might last for only a few weeks or maybe a generation, but it will leave a legacy of lasting enmity toward us among one-fifth of the world's population. By all knowledgeable accounts, the war will commence early next year, following a rapid deployment of forces. We will have few allies. Yet here we are, on the eve of this war, which will change the destinies of millions of people, with Congress having granted the Administration almost carte blanche authority to pursue a policy that turns aside a century of international law. In a democracy, this is a poisonous recipe.

All this could have been said in 1965, just before the buildup of American forces in Viet Nam. It certainly would have been true then, and it is no less true today, as the US prepares for a war in Iraq. Then, the Viet Nam war spread into Laos and Cambodia, but with détente and the opening to China, the conflict was largely contained. Now, however, the risk is greater. Much of the Islamic world will become destabilized with fateful consequences for more moderate and secular regimes, to say nothing of our supplies of petroleum.

Then, the pressure of financing the war led to years of "stagflation." A foolish notion that we could afford "guns and butter" produced a decade of deficits, unemployment and no real

growth. Now, the price may be even higher. The globalization of the economy has greatly increased the consequences of economic fallout, wherever it occurs. Much of the Middle East will be in chaos if the US is at war in Iraq. No part of the world will escape the economic harm that will ensue.

Then, the lack of national consensus on the war tore our country apart.



The election of President Johnson in 1964 was achieved with a promise not to involve American boys in an Asian war. Within a year, over 300,000 troops were on the ground, and the war lasted another nine years. Then, the escalation was predicated on very broad language in the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Equally broad language in the resolution won by the Administration to support its war in Iraq leaves us with an imperial presidency.

And, in the worst case, this will not soon be over. No one can envision the course of war; it takes on a life of its own. We can't predict how the fighting will go, but it is a mistake to underestimate the willingness of any population

to resist a foreign invader. We may very well destroy Iraq's military capacity quickly, only to face a deadly and protracted resistance. Civil wars could erupt in half a dozen Arab states where the US has a vital interest, and even our closest allies may pause before committing to a conflict so open-ended. Finally, it cannot be ruled out that the US itself would be the target of more terrorist actions in retaliation from pan-Islamic extremists, for many years to come.

It is hard to imagine a victory without strong allies among neighboring countries in the region. In their absence, we would be required to remain with a large military presence for years in Iraq to support whatever regime we install. It does not appear that the UN will endorse a unilateral US military invasion. Without international sanction, we will further cement an image of America as an arrogant superpower, disdainful of the will of the international community. Even leaders who sympathize with us would be constrained in their actions for fear of seeming to bow to American interests.

My concern does not reflect any illusions about the present rulers of Iraq. They are murderous thugs. There will always be a risk to the security of the region if they are able to develop weapons of mass destruction. That is the argument for intervention, and it is not without merit. But at what cost, at what risk do we launch a war? There is

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Time to Be FAIR!

Margaret Mead once encouraged us to "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

A few thoughtful and committed citizens in Johnson County have been attempting to prove her right by organizing a local, non-partisan progressive political action group known as FAIR! My own contribution to this group has so far been limited to putting up a hand-colored yard sign with the letters FAIR! on it. I was told that it would make people ask what it means, and it worked. At least one person was almost forced to pull into the driveway in to persuade her nine-year old that there was no carnival in our back yard. Another person thought it meant "Fair to Bennie Sapp."

FAIR! is an attempt to bring together progressives in Johnson County into some semblance of a political organization to educate, organize, and (most important of all) recruit candidates for local political office. Despite our reputation as "The People's Republic of Johnson County," we have had for the last quarter of a century virtually permanent conservative majorities on the Iowa City Council, the Coralville City Council (one of the worst in the nation), and the Johnson County Board of Supervisors. Furthermore, the Democratic Party both nationally and locally has swung sharply to the right during that same period, leaving progressives with nowhere to go and no one to represent them.

FAIR! has its political strategy right in two ways. The first is to start small. The power of big money has become so dominant in both state and national politics that it has become necessary to start over again, and attempt to build local communities that can, eventually, provide the basis for a national network of progressive

political organizations. The second good idea is to concentrate on non-partisan races. As the Kubby for Council campaigns demonstrated, it is possible not only to elect progressives, but even open socialists, in a non-partisan political setting.

Because the flood of corporate money flowing into the Democratic Party is used not only to fund campaigns but also to recruit centrist and pro-corporate candidates for office, the door is firmly shut in the face of progressive constituencies in partisan politics. There are admirable progressive voices in the Democratic Party, including our own state senator Joe Bolckcom and Minnesota's progressive hero Paul Wellstone, but there are no progressive constituencies organized in the Democratic Party to recruit progressive candidates and fund their primary campaigns. The labor movement is locked into an inescapable bidding war with big business inside the Democratic Party, and is being badly outspent. Even a pro-labor Democrat like Tom Harkin is now taking three times as much from business interests as from labor, and has been endorsed by, among others, the Farm Bureau.

Progressive constituencies are left with nothing better than the dilemmas of less-evilism. Consider the three crucial issues of peace, education, and incarceration. Most of the hopeful people in Johnson County who have put up Julie Thomas and Tom Harkin yard signs are against the war in Iraq. Yet when Iowans for Peace met with Thomas, she flatly refused to come out against the war in Iraq. She has since followed the lead of our Republican Congressman Jim Leach and publicly expressed reservations about an unprovoked first strike. Tom Harkin, on the other hand, voted for war, turning the Harkin yard signs of anti-war Democrats into mute evidence of their unwilling assent to a war of aggression.

Education provides another example. The University of Iowa is far and away the largest industry in Johnson County. Driven by the unanswerable logic of lesser-evilism, however, Johnson County Democrats are forced to support a gubernatorial candidate who either voted for or signed into law hundreds of millions of dollars in tax cuts, making it necessary for him to pit K-12 against higher education, cut \$56 million from the university budget, lay off union members who loyally helped to elect him, and drive up tuition by more than 50%. Then there is the issue of incarceration. 70% of Iowa City voters voted against building a new jail, yet 100% of the Democrats on our County Board of Supervisors remain committed incarcerators. Our Democratic Supervisors do a fine job of representing the 30% of the electorate who voted to triple the number incarcerated in The People's Republic.

These dilemmas will not be news to readers of the *Prairie Progressive*, or to those people who have made determined efforts to provide solutions to the problem. So far, however, the ailing Labor Party, the defunct New Party, and the self-absorbed Green Party have yet to make a dent on the partisan electoral map. The corporate and centrist stranglehold on the Democrats grows ever stronger with every election. Under those circumstances, it is time to think locally, with small groups of committed citizens who are willing to ignore partisan differences and concentrate on what unites us. Maybe after a few years of political education, fundraising, and candidate recruitment by FAIR!, Johnson County will live up to its red reputation. ❧

—Jeff Cox

Do You Remember Me?

Two friends, who signed their emails “your past,” came up with the idea of a reunion of students involved in the counter-culture of Iowa State University during the 60s and 70s. Over the next 3 years, they set up a web site and began hunting down lost compatriots. Their efforts came to fruition on August 16, 2002 when over 300 middle-aged folks showed up and reclaimed the campus of their youth.

I had not been back to Iowa for over 12 years. I really did not intend to go to the reunion, but the persistence of one friend and the bittersweet memories stirred up by reading the web site made me want to reconnect.

For many years my opinion of Iowa had been negative. I had bad feelings about everything from the people to the weather. I am an African-American woman who had not found Iowa a particularly tolerant place to live. Now that I was thinking of returning, I thought about what I missed – song-birds, crickets, tomatoes, and corn picked yesterday. I also had missed my old friends.

Alaska, where I now live, is a place of great cultural diversity. There is also a level of acceptance I did not feel in Iowa. Alaska is a wild place with rain forests, mountains, and rushing rivers. Moose wander through the streets of Anchorage and bears are part of our consciousness. Alaskans know they are not at the top of the food chain.

As the plane crossed over the Midwest, I could see Grant Wood’s Iowa in the quilted patterns of the farm fields. I thought about what it means to live in a highly cultivated state where the land is so controlled by the people who live on it. I also knew, whether I liked it or not, that I was connected to this place.

I began my journey to my past in Iowa City. Many students had declared Iowa State a racist institution in 1968 and had left. Some of us had come to

the University of Iowa. I still had many ties to Iowa City and enjoyed being there again.

On the day of the reunion, my friend who had persuaded me to make this pilgrimage and I began a meandering back road trip through the heart of the state. Eventually we would find our way to Ames.

We managed to get lost, questioned by the police, mixed up in a funeral procession, wade through a sea of cattle, and spend time in Tama, gambling with some of the oldest people I have ever seen. In general, we became immersed in the ecological, social, and cultural structure of the state.

The stop by the policeman happened because he said he had a report of a person slumped over in a car. I thought it was because I am an African-American or because someone had reported an interracial pair in a car. I didn’t say anything to my friend, but later I found out that we both had thought more of the incident than we had said at the time. In 30 years of driving, she had never been questioned by the police. This is the expectation if you are White. I was not surprised to see that police car pull over when he saw us on the side of the road. I wish that I could say this has never happened in Alaska, but that is not true. Driving around in a car while Black is still a suspicious activity in most states.

We did finally get to Ames. At first, I was fearful of jumping into the pre-event cocktail party taking place in our hotel. Who were these people? I hadn’t seen most of them in a lifetime.

We retreated to the next reunion gathering place, found a strategic location to watch the crowd and fortified ourselves with alcohol. We sat watching for familiar faces. It was difficult to recognize the skinny young boy “with all that hair” that I remembered from long ago, in the face of the

balding middle-aged man smiling at me. At other times it seemed as if the person I greeted hadn’t really changed.

Almost everyone could figure out who I was. This gave at least one of my friends a complex. One friend even asked why everyone recognized me. There were only two African-American women at Iowa State when I enrolled in 1965. How hard could it have been?

Unfortunately, only one other African-American was able to attend the reunion. I didn’t know him! He said he had majored in engineering and didn’t socialize with this group until the 70s after I had left.

People drifted into the old Larson’s Grocery Store, now the Boheme Bistro. Some were tentative, some were bold. The expressions on their faces changed to smiles and relief as they saw old friends. There was a lot of screaming, laughing, hugging, and kissing.

I don’t think I ever owned a camera when I was in college. You don’t take pictures when you’re young. We think that we won’t forget the significant events of our lives, or that people won’t change. Maybe we don’t imagine how important memories will be to us. Now everyone was snapping pictures like they were at the Cannes Film Festival.

The reunion was an affirmation of who I am. These were the people who witnessed that period in my life when I was becoming me. Unfortunately, they also remembered things I would have just as soon forgotten. A friend once said he could divide up many incidents in his life into “moments of indiscretion” and “lapses in judgement.” Those moments and lapses seem to make up the greater part of our memories.

Conversations with old friends were sometimes difficult. “So you got your Ph.D., married twice and had three kids,” I said. There had been a thirty-

Remember Me?
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Iowa's Budget: Who's to Blame?

A significant number of tax-cut or revenue-reducing bills were passed in Governor Branstad's final term. The biggest and least justifiable was the 10 percent cut in the state income tax. That legislation took effect in 1998; its impact has increased until the revenue loss from that cut alone now results in an annual revenue loss of over \$232 million. The state was running a surplus before the income tax was reduced, but a series of previous tax cuts had already reduced state revenues by about \$250 million. Unfortunately, no one seemed to be paying attention to the cumulative effect of the cuts. Their cumulative impact now totals over \$3.75 billion.

The argument made at the time the income tax bill was debated was that its passage would cause revenues to increase, not decrease. That argument was advanced in a study prepared privately for the Speaker of the House by the Beacon Hill Institute, a Boston-based group associated with Suffolk University. The Beacon Hill study was cited frequently by legislators who argued that the income tax cut would stimulate job growth and cause state revenues to increase 20 to 30 percent. During the debate I got a copy of the study. It looked suspect. I faxed it to my son Art, then a graduate student and now teaching economics at Columbia University. He e-mailed back that the study was grossly flawed and the math was misleading. I spoke to a few Senators about those flaws but to little avail. My Senator, Mary Neuhauser, was one of the few who did vote no. Other economists have since agreed with Art's assessment and the outcome shows revenues did not increase, but decreased substantially. Legislators went along with the "free lunch" argument or were too timid to vote against the legislation. It passed both the House and Senate with few dissenting votes.

It could have been worse. The bill as it originally passed the House called

for a 15 percent cut. Some Senators started to come to their senses and cut it back to a 10 percent cut. Interestingly, when it went back to the House the Democrats, to a person, voted to insist on the original House language that called for the larger cut. I thought at the time, and still do, that they had lost their senses.

But, aside from the income tax cut, many other bills were passed during that time that reduced state revenues: Deductions or credits on income taxes were increased. Property taxes were reduced and replaced with state general fund monies as the tax on machinery and equipment was phased out and the state picked up a larger share of school aid. A few new sales tax exemptions were created. Some inheritance taxes were repealed.

Considered individually, most of these changes in the tax code had a modest impact and many would perhaps be considered quite reasonable. But their collective impact was significant; by the time Vilsack took office in 1999 the annual loss in revenue totaled about \$700 million.

While the General Assembly was reducing state revenues with such legislation, it did not take corresponding action to reduce budgets. In fact, expenditures significantly increased. For example, the Department of Corrections' budget increased from \$38 million in 1981 to \$251 million in 2001. This increase was in large part caused by legislative changes that increased time spent in prison for certain crimes.

Legislators appeared to assume that the economic growth of the Clinton years would continue on into the future and could only get better once Republicans took over the White House. Republicans thought there were no natural cycles in capitalism. People would just get richer and richer...unless government functionaries and elected officials err. Revenue projections made at the time by the state assumed a

wonderful but unsustainable six percent annual growth rate on into the future.

Even if the economy had not slowed down, the state would have found itself with significant budget problems — although at a later date. When the economy did cool, as it always does now and then because business cycles are inevitable, the budget problems became severe. First the surplus eroded and then the budget cutting began.

The tax changes that Governor Vilsack signed after he took office did reduce available state funds by perhaps an additional fifty million as the state continued the effort to pick up a larger share of county mental health and disability costs. Certain costs of educational programs that serve special education and talented and gifted programs were also picked up by the state general fund. Those costs previously had been borne by local property taxes. In addition, a minor change was made to the inheritance tax as the exemption for distribution of an estate by affidavit, rather than probate, was increased from \$10,000 to \$25,000. All of these tax changes passed either without dissent or with minor opposition.

I do not think the Iowa public yet understands the cumulative impact of all these tax changes even though we have been bombarded with news stories that describe their effect in specific cases. Local papers have discussed cuts that have been made to the University of Iowa's budget. Students complain loudly about increases in tuition. An article in the Daily Iowan describes the impact when a local domestic-violence program had its funding eliminated. Other stories have described the effect of funding decreases for a variety of state and local programs. The list is unending. The stories are true.

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Opposition Needs Voice,
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no shortage of dictators whom we would like to see replaced. Many of them have, or are attempting to acquire, dangerous arsenals in the name of deterrence. But until now, that was not sufficient to warrant an invasion by US troops. Even the CIA rates the probability that Hussein would use these weapons offensively as low, unless he is attacked. Moreover, the early allegations of a link to Iraq connecting to the attack on September 11 are so far unproven.

But of course we dare not trust to his intentions. There are other steps, going beyond the current embargo, which we could undertake to deter the belligerence of Iraq, short of war. We have the capability to bomb at will and destroy any development of delivery capability he would need for a missile launch—and we should. The no-fly zones could be expanded over the northern and the southern regions of the country. It is within our power to destroy any means of production that Hussein might seek for fissionable materials. Clearly, there is a need to improve our intelligence assets on the ground but surely that is not beyond our ability.

Those in the Administration who have gained ascendancy on this issue are hardliners who believe that with the

US as the world's only superpower, they can assert a first strike policy and change regimes wherever they desire. They are very close to achieving their goal. Like all ideologies, there is an element of fantasy in their worldview and they will cling to their convictions against all evidence to the contrary.

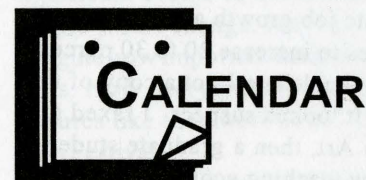
But it is deeply disappointing to see so many Congressional Democrats rolling over on fundamental principles. I understand the politics that drives this issue. It is perilous to oppose a popular president. But these are times that require leadership. The stakes here are much higher than even the Viet Nam War. With some notable exceptions, like Senators Kennedy, Durbin and Byrd, the course of the debate on the war resolution was a disgrace. There was no campaign worthy of the oldest continuing political party in the world's greatest democracy. Can serious political leaders see this unfold without a sustained and loyal opposition? Americans looked to the Democratic Party for an explication of America's rightful role in the world and were disappointed.

Perhaps, as those who are advocates suggest, Hussein's regime will be replaced quickly and a new government with popular support effectively installed. Maybe the masses of Islamic opposition from

Pakistan to Jakarta will not erupt in a wave of anti-American violence. I fervently hope so, and I pray for my country no matter the outcome. Saddam Hussein is an evil man and I would rejoice if we find a means of removing him from power.

However, we should not repeat the mistake of 37 years ago. We need a fully informed, national debate on this issue. The opposition needs to find its voice. The American people need to become informed and ask whether or not the answers they are getting conform to the Powell Doctrine, formulated before the Secretary of State took office: No large scale commitment of American troops without overwhelming support from our citizens, clearly defined goals and an exit strategy. The war on terrorism meets that standard. The war in Iraq must do the same or it will fail, as surely as the last time we ignored the limits of power. ✕

—Thomas Higgins was Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet of President Carter and an Iowa legislator from 1972-1977.



November 2

"The Patriot Act vs. Libraries, Bookstores, and You"
Public forum and panel featuring Chris Finan, President, American Booksellers Foundation for Freedom of Expression, 1:30 PM, Iowa City Public Library
<http://www.abffe.com>

November 5

Last day to vote

November 13

FAIR! meeting, Iowa City.
Info: 319-338-1321

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Remember Me?

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five year gap in our relationship. I sat there trying to grasp who the person next to me was. Sometimes reminiscing was the easier route. We could at least verify each other's past. Remember when Andy Warhol came to my house and held your baby? Remember when you got drunk and went dumpster-diving? Reminiscing was definitely easier.

There was a dance the last night in the Great Hall of the Memorial Union. During the 60s and 70s, many would have been too cool to dance, but tonight they twirled their partners and threw themselves into a wild celebration of life.

We also honored those who had died. We celebrated their lives and we celebrated the fact that through luck — considering how little respect a number of us showed for our bodies — we had somehow survived.

We finished at a picnic in the park the last afternoon. We were like near-

strangers after a night of casual but intense sex — gentle with each other, promising to stay in touch. We were 300 children of the 60s who had come from all over the country looking for that connection with our past. We were each other's witnesses to a time and a place that no longer seems to exist. And for a few days we could hug each other and say yes, I do remember you. ✕

—Toni Pounds and her daughter
Elizabeth maintain their position
in the food chain in Anchorage, Alaska.

Who's to Blame on Budget

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Still, the general perception continues to be that Iowa's deficit is almost solely a result of the sluggish economy. Candidates out on the campaign trail point their fingers all over the place, usually towards their opponents, as they try to pinpoint the source of the problem.

Doug Gross, for example, continues to call for additional tax cuts to stimulate Iowa's economy and tells voters that Governor Vilsack is the culprit because he "mismanaged the budget." Others argue that there are too many unneeded state programs and the tree of government must be trimmed so dollars can be saved. Unfortunately, such complaints tend to be generic and do not point to any specific programs that should be cut.

In summary, I do not think it is fair or accurate to blame Governor Vilsack for the state's budget problems. I do agree that his administration perhaps should have reacted sooner, but I think the die was cast before he took office, and the slowdown in the economy made matters even worse for him. ✕

—Art Small is a former State Senator
from Johnson County. He served in the
Iowa General Assembly from 1971-1986.

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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**"I think we should give
John Ashcroft a big
hand....right in the
mouth! The way things
are going, I'll probably be
thrown in jail tomorrow
for saying that, so I hope
y'all will bail me out."**

—Merle Haggard, August 2002