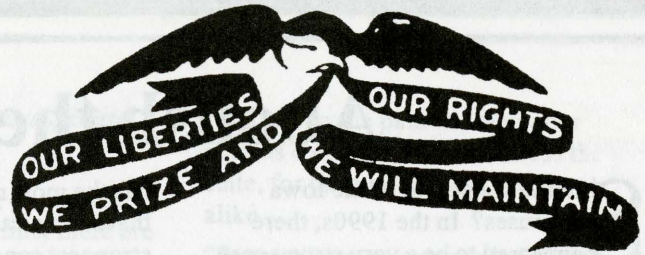


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Spring 2003

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog Embedded

Politics is "Let's Make a Deal" instead of killing each other.

—Bill Clinton, Iowa City, 2003

We are witnessing on our television screens what might become the most spectacular failure of politics in our lifetimes. Not even in Vietnam did the world see such a convergence of messianic certainty and unfettered greed. These two forces have now unleashed havoc on the planet, a havoc made possible by the destruction of the World Trade Center. 9/11 was the final condition needed to generate *The Perfect Storm* to put the US on a footing of permanent war.

Maybe someday Congress will enact a statute forbidding any President from ending a speech with 'God bless America.' Until that day, it's more likely that our Commander in Chief will say, as a presidential candidate in Chris Rock's *Head of State* intoned fervently, 'God bless America...and nowhere else.'

In a coffee shop in Sioux City, Howard Dean talked with six local labor leaders about minimum wage, free trade agreements, and the National Labor Relations Act (Dean advocates a change in the law that would force employers to honor 'card check,' which would make organizing less onerous).

Abruptly, the conversation turned to war, as the youngest member of the group challenged Dean's criticism of US policy. "It's time we stood up to

terrorists, isn't it?" he asked. Before Dean could say a word, the rest of the people at the table — all older than the young man — responded passionately, citing reason after reason why this military action was misguided, uncon-



stitutional, unnecessary, and tragic for the people of Iraq and for our soldiers and their families.

The young man stirred his coffee. The talk returned to health insurance, corporate crime, and the economy. Finally Dean thanked the group for meeting with him, asked for their support, and walked out onto Pierce Street. "That's the first Iowan I've met," he said to no one in particular, "who supports the war."

Television is often credited with turning public opinion against the Vietnam war. Americans were shocked and revolted, so goes the theory, by the sight of war on the

evening news...and the nightly body count. In those days, we were told how many people died — on both sides.

Television coverage of Gulf War I was too bloodless to shock anyone. Smart bombs exploding through a green scrim appeared merely to be a special effects light show. The only truly frightening moment came when a reporter quickly put on a gas mask, nervously describing the correct procedure as sirens blared.

This war is different. Americans are no longer shocked by the donning of a gas mask. Maybe they are no longer shocked by anything. Wall-to-wall coverage will do that to you. It's impossible to watch CNN without becoming lost in the troop movements, the sandstorms, and the close-ups of Apache choppers and Abrams tanks. We see the sandstorms but not the desert.

Instead of nightly body counts, we are given a sprightly morning talk-show version of war. At 8 a.m. on CNN, a tank is shown rumbling toward Baghdad (and the 5 million people who live there). A soldier's helmeted head is visible. We are told the soldier's name and home town. The morning anchor-man has a surprise. With us, live from that home town, is the soldier's wife, participating cheerily in a voice-over interview. The soldier's wife, watching her husband on TV, answers question about she feels while watching him roll north through the desert. She

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Abolish the Iowa Caucuses

Should we get rid of the Iowa caucuses? In the 1990s, there appeared to be a very strong case for doing just that. Iowa Democrats have always justified the caucuses as exercises in grass roots democracy, with opportunities for face-to-face discussion with the candidates and genuine deliberation on the part of Democratic party activists.

As the flood of big money swept over the Democratic Party, that rationale disappeared. Candidates began to approach potential caucus attenders with glitzy television ads and mindless recorded phone messages.

The Iowa Democratic Central Committee joined in the game, turned itself into a soft-money fund raising machine, and defended the caucuses tenaciously in order to keep the money flowing.

The state party manipulated the 1996 caucuses to suppress reporting of any caucus dissent from the re-nomination of the most right wing Democratic President since Grover Cleveland. In 2000 it was almost impossible to find significant differences between two big-money candidates, Gore and Bradley.

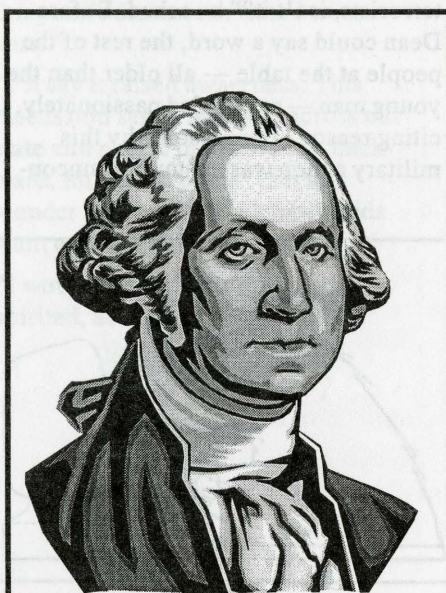
This year is different, leaving open the possibility that there may be hope for the caucuses. Because of the large number of candidates running, we have an opportunity to use the caucuses in a way that could make a difference.

The designated front runners, Gephardt, Lieberman, Edwards, and Kerry (GLEK) represent the mainstream of the new-model Democratic party. Accountable mainly to large corporate and individual donors, they are all pro-war, pro-military, pro-corporate power, and pro-death penalty. They also appear to be in a trance, in the great tradition of those other mainstream Democratic frontrunners, Mondale, Dukakis, and Gore.

It would be a terrible mistake to get in line early in the campaign behind a candidate who is ahead in the polls and

has the most money on the assumption that such a candidate would be the strongest candidate. In order to defeat a passionate, even messianic, Republican president, the Democratic nominee must show some Democratic passion, some conviction, some evidence of principle.

A strong Democratic nominee must share the values of the Democratic Party base. Republicans understand this, and mobilize the party base first before reaching out to the center. Part of the



“Guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism.”

**— George Washington,
Farewell Address, 1796**

reason that the Democratic frontrunners appear so comatose is that not one of them shares the values of committed grass roots Democrats.

On the eve of war with Iraq, 85% of Iowa Democrats were opposed to the war. Even with our troops in combat,

Democrats nationally remain split down the middle. The front runners are all pro-war.

The war is only a symptom of a larger problem facing America. Bush is absolutely right that American freedom is in danger, but wrong about the source of that danger, which is the rapidly expanding national security state.

We need far more than a regime change if American freedom is to be preserved and extended. We need a fundamental re-orientation of America's approach to the world, and we are not likely to get that from any of the Democratic frontrunners. What they offer is a kinder and gentler version of more imperialism abroad and more repression at home.

We are fortunate to have running in the Iowa caucuses at least four candidates who are critical of the American imperial state: Dennis Kucinich, Howard Dean, Al Sharpton, and Carol Mosely-Braun.

One of them, Dennis Kucinich, has outlined a comprehensive program to commit America to global and domestic peace, with a cabinet level Department of Peace to set beside the national security state's sinister Department of Homeland Security. He is the only candidate so far to put forward an alternative path for America that is both idealistic and practical. His leadership, and that of the other peace candidates, deserves a respectful response. Iowa progressives should take this opportunity to make a difference on caucus night. ✂

— Jeff Cox

Johnson County's Jail Problem

Johnson County's jail problem has received a lot of attention in recent years; its 92 bed jail is no longer adequate for the demand.

The county's population grew about 30% between 1980 and 2000. Meanwhile, the jail bookings increased 450% between 1982 and 1998; the criminal caseload increased by 405% (1982-1998); and the average daily jail population increased by 370% (1982-1999). More recently, Iowa City's total arrests for 2002 jumped a whopping 27% from the previous year.

In November 2000, the Board of Supervisors put a \$19 million bond referendum on the ballot, which if approved would have funded a new 256 bed jail. 65% of voters rejected it, in spite of endorsement by the local media, local governments, the Chamber of Commerce, and the League of Women Voters. After the defeat of the jail bond, the Sheriff began housing the overflow of inmates in the Linn County jail.

In the summer of 2002, The Supervisors hired State Public Policy Group to convene a 26 member task force to recommend solutions for jail space and services. It was clear from the beginning of the task force inquiry that county officials favored construction of a new jail as the solution. Considering the lack of public support, it was not clear how they expected to get one, or how they expected to pay for the increase in operational costs, other than a vague hope that they could rent out unused jail beds to other agencies in the short term.

The task force conducted a survey of registered voters, which showed that a small shift toward public support for a new jail may have occurred, but probably not enough for a jail bond to pass. The survey clearly showed strong public support for alternative solutions such as substance abuse and mental health treatment, minimum security facilities,

community service, education, house arrest, and fewer arrests for minor infractions.

The task force chose to look at the jail problem in the context of the criminal justice system as a whole. This is a more ambitious task than simply assuming that the system cannot change, and concluding that facilities must be able to handle the ever-growing slice of the population that lands in jail. It's

"The man of great wealth owes a peculiar obligation to the state, because he derives special advantage from the mere existence of government."

—Theodore Roosevelt

obvious that at some point something has to give, or the system will become an impossible burden for taxpayers.

As could be expected, the task force encountered entrenched institutional resistance to the idea that the system as a whole needed to change. It was said that alternatives to incarceration would cost more than merely warehousing inmates; however, as the inquiry progressed it became clear that alternatives would actually save money. One notable example is an intensive pretrial supervision program rejected by the County in 2001.

This program would have cost an average of about \$37 per day per offender; compare to the \$70 per day cost of housing inmates in Linn County.

The \$37 estimate included funds for substance abuse treatment, drug testing, electronic monitoring, mental health treatment, help with job seeking and other life skills generally lacking in chronic petty offenders, and the level of supervision needed to keep problem pretrial defendants from re-offending. The Supervisors rejected this proposal, which could have saved \$240,000 per year over the cost of warehousing these people pending the resolution of their cases.

The task force agreed that programs aimed at reducing the number of incarcerated individuals need to be implemented prior to any attempt to replace the current jail. Alternatives such as pretrial supervision, treatment, community service, electronic monitoring, work release, and expedition of cases reflect the community's values, needn't sacrifice public safety, and save the taxpayers money. ✂

—Bob Thompson is a member of the Jail Task Force

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says that she is confident that her husband will return home safely. The anchorman asks, "I don't know if you have children, but if you do, how do they feel?" The wife says that her two-year old daughter knows that her father is in Iraq, and she, too, is confident that he'll come home soon.

No need to play "Let's Make a Deal" when the country is run by God's messenger, put here on earth to lead the nation. No need to make a deal when the US Congress surrenders all its authority to the Messenger-in-Chief.

And no need to worry about the body count, as long as we can watch ourselves watching ourselves with faith and good cheer. ✂

Poets Against War

The news photo taken in San Francisco showed a standard scene of intense anti-war demonstrators holding signs with messages condemning the Iraq war and President Bush. "War Sucks," "No More Blood for Oil," and "No War for Empire" were repeated themes. One image stuck out. In the center of the photo a young woman, with an anguished expression on her face, pressed hard against a police barricade while holding a sign with blood red letters that read "Poets Against the War."

I puzzled about her unexpected message. In my mind a poem has about as much chance of stopping a war as a flower has of stopping a tank.

Few I would consider to be poets take a significant participatory role in the politics of war. This is a general rule, not a universal or necessary condition.

William Butler Yeats who served from 1922-28 in the Irish Parliament is an obvious exception. "The Second Coming" is a powerful description of the act of war and suggests the current war:

*...somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about
it*

*Reel shadows of the indignant desert
birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking
cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come
round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

Yet when Yeats was asked to write a poem to express dissatisfaction with the conduct of World War I, he responded with:

*I think it better that in times like these
A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right*

Check out the Poets Against the War.org web site and you will find that over 12,000 poets did not share Yeats'

reticence to poetize about a specific war. Until my mind closed down, I read some of the submissions.

"The Righteous Peace Song" opens with these lines:

*This is the righteous peace song,
as they are my eyes and the love of you,
the struggling color of our skin.
Before the walls of the beast,
we are the holy sunrise, wise
and inviolable.*

"Poets Don't Win Wars" notes a sad truth:

*a friend of mine said
"poets don't win wars
history is written by the victor"
he was right about the latter statement
since there is so little to be found
in american history books
regarding the vietnam war*

"Urgent Message to Bush and Cohorts" tells the President:
*You can mouth your pious
rhetoric about good and evil
invoking the name of god*

The other poems I read are of similar quality. Collectively they underscore the wisdom of Yeats' reticence.

The best war poems are not responses to the politics of the moment but reflect Wordsworth's insight that poetry is experience recollected in tranquility. Randall Jarrell's "The Death of a Ball Turret Gunner" and Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et decorum est" spring to mind. Both men had experienced war. Owen wrote during World War I while recuperating from shell-shock. After treatment he returned to the front and was killed. His powerful description captured well the horrors of war and is a better argument against war than all of the more than 12,000 poems posted today on the Poets Against War web site.

Dulce et decorum est

*Bent double, like of old beggars under
sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we
cursed through sludge,*

*Till on the haunting flares we turned our
backs
And towards our distant rest began to
trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their
boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went
lame; all blind:
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that
dropped behind.*

*Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!- An ecstasy of
fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and
stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime*

...
*Dim, through the misty panes and thick
green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drown-
ing.*

*In all my dreams, before my helpless
sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking,
drowning.
If in sonic smothering dreams you too
could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his
face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of
sin;*

*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted
lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent
tongues,-
My friend, you would not talk with such
high zest
To children ardent for some desperate
glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori. ❀*

---Arthur Small



May 3

ICLU Annual Dinner
River Room, IMU
Reception 6:00, Dinner 7:00

Guest speaker Dan Johnston,
Tinker 'black armband' attorney
Info: bstone@iowaclu.org

August 1-2

Hardacre Film Festival, Tipton
hardacres@aol.com for info.

Debating Bigotry in the Iowa Senate
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"I think that your phrasing of bigoted ideas is completely out of line, there are 50 senators in the place, and we have people across the state of Iowa, everyone is entitled to their opinion. We may not agree with that opinion, and that's all right, but to call people names and to call ideas, in tones such as that, I think sets back the entire debate on any issue.

"Can we disagree and do it civilly? Absolutely. But I think the name-calling is completely out of line. If you think this idea is bad, so be it, that's great, you are allowed to express your opinion, just as other people are allowed to express their opinions. But using the adjectives, and we all know how to do it, get the emotions stirred up, I think that is completely wrong and I think that is out of line. I think we keep the debate on the issue and move on from there."

Senator Bolkcom, March 11

"Yesterday's discussion of the rights of gay and lesbian parents is far from finished.

"Senator Iverson, saying that "everyone is entitled to their opinions" is simply not good enough for me. It is a trite

response to the pain and fear your actions created in Iowans across the state, for gay and straight people alike...

"Senator Iverson, you made Senator Veenstra chair of the Human Resources Committee.

"Republican Senators, you made Senator Iverson your leader. You all bear some responsibility for the fear and concern felt by Eleanor Dilkes, an Iowa parent; for the fear and concern felt by Mary Weidemean, an Iowa parent, and for the fear and concern felt by Iowa parents and children across our state.

"Frankly, I am surprised and disappointed that no Republican member of this body has risen to say they oppose SSB 1057, and the intolerance behind it.

"What would I do if a Democratic member of this body introduced, let alone brought before a committee, a bill to ban black Iowans from fostering white children or adopting white kids?

"Such a racist outrage would not have been that far out of the question a number of years ago. If I had been a senator then, I hope I would have had the courage to stand up and oppose it. I hope I would have put partisan political concerns aside and denounced even the idea of such a law.

"That is the situation the Republican members of this body are in today. And that is the situation you will continue to be in as long as you tolerate hatred and, I hate to use this word again, bigotry, among your ranks.

You can hear the entire exchange at www.joebolkcom.org

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Debating Bigotry in the Iowa Senate

Is the Iowa Senate bigoted? Give and take during Senate debate between Senator Joe Bolckcom and Senate Republican Leader Stewart Iverson on March 10 and 11:

Senator Joe Bolckcom:

"Imagine learning that powerful Republican State legislators want to break up your family because your partner of 14 years happens to be gay? How might you feel if you are one of the children in this family?"

"Allowing this bill to even be debated was a shameful, irresponsible, act of political terrorism against hundreds of Iowa families. Tormenting families and children in this state is unacceptable.

"Moreover, what happened was a disappointing lack of leadership on the part of the Republican majority as a whole to allow this to happen. I'd be

even more surprised, but that is not new, we dealt with this issue in the same mean spirited way on the campaign trails this fall.

"Senator Veenstra, the bill's sponsor, stated in Friday in the Cedar Rapids Gazette, that his attack on this group of Iowa families will "probably will remain in abeyance for the time being." Senator Veenstra further indicated that "controversial legislation often must be accomplished in stages and he believed this year's discussion raised awareness."

"I'll say it raised awareness. This discussion sent a message across our state and nation that Iowa is a backward, intolerant place. Is it any wonder that our well-educated kids want out of here?"

"I would suggest that this mean spirited, anti-gay agenda is anti

economic development and one of the reasons the state is in such pathetic economic condition.

"Colleagues it is time for some real Iowa leadership on this issue. If we want our kids to stay in Iowa, if we want to bring our kids back home, we have to create a more tolerant, and diverse state. It's time to stand up to Senator Veenstra on this idea, on this narrow minded bigoted attitude about gays and lesbians.

"This is the civil rights issue of our time, what are we going to do?"

Republican Leader Stewart Iverson:

"Senator Bolckcom I am going to take issue with what you said.

Debating Bigotry in the Iowa Senate

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"The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist — McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell-Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps."

— Thomas Friedman