

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

4 Points Above the Threshold: Theocracy Revisited

I'm committed to a constitutional government of checks and balances, a government constrained by the civil rights of the governed, and an independent judiciary to which citizens can turn when those rights are infringed.

Our Bill of Rights can be summarized with just two words: equality and independence. Equality of treatment in our dealings with the government, and as much independence as possible from government meddling in our lives, in what we do, think, and say.

Those concepts are antithetical to religious fundamentalists. Fundamentalists make self-serving differentiations that cast believers as superior to non-believers, treat articles of faith as facts, and view judgmentally the choices others make and try to influence them to a prescribed conformity. When the religious seek converts by example, persuasion, or procreation, they have complete legitimacy. When they seek through government to compel conformity, that legitimacy is lost. In recent years there's been a disquieting movement by fundamentalists to co-opt government to speed their conversion efforts.

If you read the Bible with the selective fundamentalist's eye, a disquieting picture emerges.

They paint a picture for women in their place, and that's not the work

place. Their picture would treat law-abiding gay citizens as criminals deserving of the death penalty.

When the Iowa Senate refused to confirm my appointment to the State Board of Education because I'm gay,



what did they say about religious tests for public office? What did they say about fundamental principles of equality and independence from government meddling in our lives? What did they say about our religious freedom and our freedom from the religion of others? What did they say to our fellow Iowans who are gay, or to those who believe in equality and individual independence?

In their picture, gay citizens would have no right to protection from discrimination in employment, housing, education, or public accommodation. Gay students, and those perceived to be gay, would not be entitled to protection from bullies in the schoolyard.

In their picture, affirmative action by government to correct historic, government-sanctioned oppression toward people of color, would be no more. Their picture, in the name of a culture of life, would still countenance the death penalty, and rationalize war and admitted killing of innocent civilians as long as it's war and someone else's innocent civilians.

Their picture would deny individual choices that seek to achieve a quality of life for the living through family planning, stem cell research, and death with dignity. Their picture would teach sexual abstinence until marriage, but deny gay people the right to marry unless we're willing to deceive some unsuspecting member of the opposite gender.

In their picture there is also Armageddon. People who believe in imminent Rapture as an article of faith can't be trusted with setting a national budget. Why not deficit spend, you aren't going to have to pay it back? They can't be trusted with protecting the environment. They can't be trusted to establish foreign policy in the Middle East where Armageddon is prophesied to begin. The "Rapture Index" is at 149, four points above the threshold when the whole thing is supposed to blow, Christ is to return, the righteous are to enter Heaven, and sinners are headed to hell. Rapturists

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Foundation in Education: A Campaign Speech

The fundamental problem facing the Democratic Party is one of leadership. The party has become a permanent minority party at every level of government, yet its leaders are determined to pursue the same losing strategy over and over again, failing entirely to learn the lessons of the electoral process. Democratic Party leaders have for decades been convinced that the constituencies of the Democratic Party are unpopular special interest groups. When Jimmy Carter finally addressed reporters about his defeat at the hands of Ronald Reagan, he put it succinctly: the Democratic Party was a "millstone around my neck." The electoral implication was clear. To win, Democrats must abandon their base.

This approach was put to the test on a broad screen by John Kerry. The key to victory, he believed, was to distance himself from the anti-war movement and run as a war hero. The anti-war movement was purposefully demobilized by the Kerry campaign, despite the fact that the war in Iraq is one of the most unpopular wars in American history. Betray your base and win the race was Kerry's theory. He then lost to a failed president whose policies were broadly unpopular.

It has become clear in recent weeks that national and Iowa Democratic leaders have learned nothing from this disastrous loss. Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean, whose only job is to win elections, issued an unqualified endorsement of Bush's unpopular war in Iraq. Here is a Democratic leader who ran for president by embracing a key Democratic Party constituency, the anti-war movement. Now he is convinced that the Democratic Party must betray its base in order to win elections.

Closer to home, Governor Tom Vilsack used David Yepsen's column in the Des Moines Register to launch a snarling, anti-intellectual attack on public higher education, declaring that our universities must cease to reward basic research and turn themselves in corporate research parks if they expect to receive any further funding from the taxpayers of Iowa. Having turned on supporters of public higher education, and pitted K-12 education against higher education and community colleges, Vilsack will go down in

"Political leaders of both parties have been recklessly cutting taxes."

history as one of the most anti-education governors in Iowa history. It is no wonder that he is a hero with the Democratic Leadership Council, the arm of corporate America in the Democratic Party. Having mistaken the voice of big corporations for the voice of the people, he is now running for president. Betray your base and win the race.

What about possible Democratic candidates for governor, assuming we are spared another run by Vilsack? Secretary of State Chet Culver is the nominee presumptive, and Democrats are already lining up behind him for the same reasons they lined up behind candidates like Wesley Clark, John Kerry, and John Edwards, i.e. "I want to win." What is the evidence that Chet Culver would make a strong candidate? His principles are largely unknown, but he recently endorsed the death penalty, leaving Iowa civil

libertarians, humanitarians, and religious leftists with nowhere to go. Betray your base and win the race.

As Democrats, we are doomed to permanent minority status under the leadership of the Deans, Vilsacks, and Culvers of our party. We urgently need to recruit some progressive leaders who can run for office by rallying the Democratic Party base and standing up for Democratic Party principles, as Harold Hughes did within living memory. If we don't make a serious attempt to recruit candidates for office, we can't complain about the dismal candidates who win the party nomination.

Look around and see if you can recruit a progressive Democrat to run for governor. As a contribution to that effort, I have written an announcement speech for such a candidate, based on the assumption that she will come from Johnson County. We have the speech: all we need is the candidate, a communicator who really believes in Democratic principles.

"I am running for governor because of my deep concern for the future of education in Iowa. Iowa is different from other states, and that difference is defined by our commitment to education. Since the founding of the state, Iowans have made sacrifices in order to put public resources into the education of our children, and increasingly of our adults as well, in order to improve the lives of all Iowans, and make Iowa a better place to live.

Iowans continue to support education at all levels, but that commitment is in danger from lack of leadership. Instead of supporting education, political leaders of both parties have been recklessly cutting taxes and handing out money to big

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The Political-Industrial Complex, Part II

In contrast with the era of the Iowa Democratic Party's modern rebirth, today, in too many instances, within the same Party, the proper order of priorities has been reversed. An emphasis on organizational politics, and concerns about the need for money to finance those organizations, now frequently supplants and precedes any overt commitment to liberal and progressive core values.

As a result, a growing fissure threatens to separate those who are instinctively drawn to the substantive, historically-rich heritage of the Iowa Democratic Party from those who are primarily obsessed with, and relentlessly attentive to obtaining, the seemingly unlimited resources of time and money that the ostensible perfections in organization require.

This premise—that the Iowa Democratic Party needs to re-commit itself to a substantive progressive agenda before focusing on matters that mere technological fixes cannot remedy—is increasingly obvious to many party activists, particularly in light of the November 2004 election.

But this viewpoint is not frequently spoken about by Democratic Party officials or by candidates who seek the support of Democratic Party activists. Indeed, apologists for the losing status quo, persons whose voices are given disproportionate access to the public forum, too frequently explain and excuse the sad events of November 2004 with implausible rationales.

Some of these apologists are themselves entrenched in a formidable, growing new industry, an expensive phenomenon that might well be called the "political-industrial complex." Often acting in the capacity as "political consultants" and "experts," their survival appears impervious to political defeat. Indeed,

many such persons are already gearing up for the next election cycle in the aftermath of the 2004 debacle.

Ironically, in this curious era of potentially downwardly-spiraling political fortunes of the Iowa Democratic Party, participation in losing causes appears to provide solid credentials for the next campaign season.

There is much work to do on the substantive side of our political equation. The Iowa Democratic Party's energies too often flow in the wrong direction. If the Party's future is to be different than its recent past, its members must re-establish the correct order of priorities. A dedication to fundamental liberal values must precede any grand schemes for new campaign machineries and strategies to finance the same.

Indeed, if the Party's leaders are not careful, they risk damaging the Party's relationships with its larger potential membership base—persons whose interests in politics derive largely from concerns about the poor, the disenfranchised, and the struggles of the middle class—by miscasting them into one-dimensional, expendable figures.

Too frequently in recent campaign cycles, and poignantly, in the closing months of the November 2004 campaign, the Party faithful, after making their expected political contributions, were viewed as little more than bit actors, stage props, in a grainy foreign film.

It will not do, however, to assign Iowa activists to roles that are reminiscent of railroad station masters: directed to line up at depot platforms, time pieces in their hands; instructed to memorize the Timetable and to note when the trains arrive and depart; and told to count the passing freight cars,

but not to attempt to determine what is in those cars or to determine the destination of the trains themselves.

Although a railroad station master may have little reason to know about or to feel responsible for the contents of passing freight cars – or even to care about a particular train's ultimate destination – Iowa activists care foremost about the substance of their politics.

A successful Iowa Democratic Party of the future will be infused with progressive and liberal ideas, led by persons who are at least as concerned about the contents and substance of our State's future policies as they are about getting voters to the polls on time.

It is time for a renewed Iowa Democratic Party to refocus on its core values. The majority of Iowa voters know that all citizens need society's cushion from the effects of life's most tragic twists and turns. Citizens—all of us—need government's active protections against the misguided efforts of those who control unbridled economic and political power. Only with sound, progressive public policies can citizens hope to enter and to remain in our increasingly fragile middle class.

Unfettered calls for programs that coincide with this knowledge will breathe new life into our political process. The key to the Iowa Democratic Party's future can be found in its past. As in earlier eras, success will follow our commitments to fundamental progressive values, all of which must precede any renewed fixation upon revamping electioneering processes and reinventing expensive new campaign technologies. ✕

—Jim Larew is an attorney in private practice in Iowa City

Labour pains: The price for failing

A couple of years ago, some kind Iowans gave me the opportunity to leave my home in Britain and come and experience elections U.S style. In the spirit of friendship and co-operation, I'd like to give Prairie Progressive readers an insight into the recent British election.

As I write, Britain is recovering from election fever. For the last couple of weeks people have been feeling nauseous, irritated, and delirious. The cause was a media dominated by politicians speeding around the country from ridiculous photo-opportunity to ridiculous photo-opportunity, exchanging vapid, inane slogan for vapid, inane slogan. Like any fever, there was a lot of difficulty involved in swallowing. Overall, the British public didn't. For the first time in modern history, the number of non-voters comprised the largest share of the electorate. The victory of Tony Blair's Labour party also was a first. For the first time, Labour won its third consecutive election. However, instead of being a recognized as an unprecedented achievement, the calls for his resignation have only increased. Why?

In electoral terms, Blair is unquestionably the most successful leader in Labour party history. As always, this is due to a combination of luck and political skill. The pre-Blair Labour party had a miserable record, securing only two convincing victories (1945 & 1966). Its problems in winning elections stemmed from its perceived inability to govern. Labour governments were characterized by economic crises, industrial unrest, and ideological infighting that ensured the government fell at the subsequent election. By the early 1990s, these characteristics had manifested themselves in the Conservative government that had ruled since 1979. The Conservatives sacrificed Mrs. Thatcher to win

the 1992 election, but the question of European integration, the issue that had triggered her demise, continued to fester and poison her successor's government.

This constant internal strife, allied to a sluggish economic performance and the humiliation of being forced to devalue the pound in 1992 destroyed the Conservatives' credibility. Consequently, when Blair became leader of the Labour party in 1994, he not only inherited a healthy lead in opinion polls, but also a party frustrated by a generation out of power that he was able to fashion in his own image. Building on the reforming work of his immediate predecessors, Blair adopted a Clintonesque approach. Labour was no longer the party of the workers, but of the aspiring upwardly mobile and professional classes. The party would be fiscally responsible, pro-business, tough on crime, and would reform public services and the welfare state. It would be "New Labour." In policy terms, the question of whether it succeeded is a subjective one, but in electoral terms "New Labour" was a phenomenon. In June 2001, the Labour government was returned to power with a share of the vote almost identical to its 1997 victory. But if 2001 was an affirmation of the 1997 result, then 2005 was to be different. The Labour party lost 45 legislative seats and its share of the vote fell to just 35%.

When Blair came to power, he replaced 18 years of Conservative party rule. That's a whole lotta legacy to blame for when things go wrong. The problem is that Blair came to power when the Spice Girls had hits and nobody knew who Harry Potter was. After eight years it is harder to blame others.

The luck is still there. Indeed, the only issue of clear vulnerability for the government was the war in Iraq, but

the Conservatives couldn't take advantage of this because they originally backed Blair more than Blair's own party did. The luck, however, is running out. In critical areas the Labour party found its support eroded from the anti-war left – always suspicious of the "new Labour" project and now openly furious at Blair's alliance with Bush in Iraq – and from those voters who came to Labour in 1997 but are increasingly discontented with the indirect but still perceptible increases in taxes under Labour not resulting in perceptible increases in the performance of public services. I suspect that people's perceptions of Labour as a more competent option in delivering economic prosperity ultimately secured the party another term, but if those perceptions change, as they could easily do, Labour will face real difficulties.

This then is the parallel problem between Labour and Democrats in the United States. There is a tension between being "electable" – which means appealing to the centrist voter (who by definition is to the left/right) of activists, or "righteous" – reflecting the core beliefs of its activists. Proper political leadership involves motivating and carrying people to a place they were initially reluctant to go. Blair's "New Labour" project has failed to do this, just as his Democrat counterparts have failed in the United States. The price for failing, as Blair discovered in 2005, is that there comes the day when neither side believes you. ✕

—Laurence Horton is the Prairie Progressive's London correspondent



August 25, 1925

A.Philip Randolph organized Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters

*A Campaign Speech,
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June 6, 1965

Capital punishment abolished in South Africa

June 13-14

First Annual Diversity Conference, Town Clock Center, Dubuque 563-588-6508

July 1, 1970

Abortion legalized in New York

July 24

15th Anniversary Celebration of the ADA, Kernels' Ballpark, Cedar Rapids empoweria@mchsi.com

August 5-6

Hardacre Film Festival, Hardacre Theatre, Tipton www.hardacrefilmfestival.com

August 6 & 9, 1945

Atom bombs killed 240,000 civilians in Hiroshima & Nagasaki

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corporations and local developers in the name of economic development. Those strategies have failed to rejuvenate the Iowa economy, and failed to provide the tax revenues needed to maintain our K-12, Community College, and Regents institutions.

It is time for a change. We must reclaim our hard-earned national reputation as a people committed first of all to education. It is not acceptable for our political leaders to allow Iowa to sink to 38th in the nation in teacher pay, or to watch while community college tuition grows to levels among the highest in the nation, or to cut hundreds of millions of dollars from the operating budgets of the University of Northern Iowa, Iowa State, and the University of Iowa. Republicans and Democrats alike pay lip service to education, but put resources elsewhere. We need to get back to basics, following the principle that we put on the Iowa quarter: Foundation in Education.

In my campaign for governor, I admit that I do not have all the answers for all of the problems facing Iowa. I have no magic bullet that will provide the resources for all the needs of all Iowans. I do have priorities, however, the same priorities as our great former governor Harold Hughes, and you can trust me as governor to follow those priorities. I come from a county that has its foundation in education, and I will lead Iowans to restore education as a priority state-wide. All other problems facing the state are intertwined with our ability to provide a decent educational system. That's what 'Foundation in Education' means, and that's what my campaign for governor is about." ✂

—Jeff Cox

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are actually content to speed that process along. I'd rather see policies to make the world a better place for generations to come.

Of particular concern should be the escalating fundamentalist attacks on the independent judiciary. The Senate filibuster is targeted because it allows Democrats to block the most radical, theocratic judicial appointments. Senator Frist has characterized the Democrats' defense of the filibuster as "against people of faith." House Majority Leader Tom Delay has called for judicial impeachments on the rationale that objectionable decisions fall short of a judge's required "good behavior." And consider the recent conference in Washington DC called Confronting the Judicial War on Faith Conference. To applause, lawyer Edwin Vieira attacked Justice Kennedy for his opinion in *Lawrence v. Texas* that struck down remaining anti-sodomy laws. Quoting Stalin, he said,

"No man, no problem. This is not a structural problem we have. This is a problem of personnel." The full Stalin quote is: "Death solves all problems: no man, no problem." Alan Keyes got enthusiastic applause saying, "I believe . . . the judiciary is the focus of evil." Senator Tom Coburn's Chief of Staff said recently that "until America throws out the principle of judicial review it's a sick and sad joke to claim we have a Constitution." The judicial review he's talking about is *Marbury v. Madison*.

The Bible has a parable of a shepherd with 100 sheep. One sheep gets lost and the shepherd leaves the 99 in search of the lost one. The lost sheep didn't just run off and get lost; it nibbled its way. Eventually it lifted its head and found itself lost. In every generation, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. During our watch, our civil rights to equality and independence are being nibbled away by fundamentalist tyranny infiltrating our government.

In the words of Martin Niemoeller, a pastor in Germany, "[T]he Nazis first came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, but I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me." According to Nobel Peace Prize winner Eli Wiesel, "In the cause of human freedom from oppression, there is no neutral ground; you're either on the side of the oppressed, or you're to the side of the oppressor."

Whose side are you on and what are you going to do about it? ✕

—Jonathan Wilson is a former member
of the Des Moines School Board

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**"You know, the only
trouble with capitalism
is capitalists. They're
too damn greedy."
—Herbert Hoover**