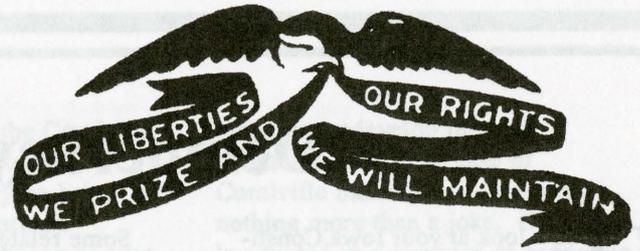


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Fall 2005

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Speaking Truth to Power

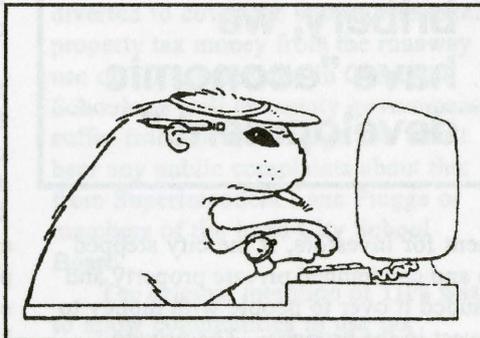
Minnette Doderer was the political mother of the second wave of feminism in Iowa and defined feminist electoral politics in Iowa for decades. She always faced tough elections because the right wing in Iowa hated her guts. Many Democrats hated her as well for her fight for gender equality in insurance and comparable pay, and for pointing out their lack of commitment to women's rights and their sexist behavior.

Doderer fought for Regents funding in a manner which puts to shame every present elected Democrat in Johnson County. She did not take quietly any insult to women or to herself. She was tough and aggressive. Every speech had a zinger, a point, and a plan for action. She believed not only in Democrats but also in democracy.

Minnette's legislative initiatives permeate the Code of Iowa. There is not another legislator in the last 40 years who so shaped Iowa law for women and children. Her programs saved thousands of lives. In the current jargon, she spoke Truth to Power, and she let the chips fall where they may. She was viciously attacked by many, but she gave as good as she got, and she won more political fights than she lost. She could be charming and funny, but it was her sheer courage, immense energy, and moral vision that captured your imagination.

Every woman and man in Iowa who believes in sexual equality owes Minnette Doderer an incredible debt. She educated us and she was there for every important fight for the advancement of women.

—Clara Oleson lives in West Branch.



Most of the obituaries and tributes to Minnette Doderer omit one of her greatest contributions to the people of Iowa. As the 1995 legislative session began, Gov. Terry Branstad's cherished goal of reinstating the death penalty looked unstoppable. "Fervor for death penalty remains high," blared a Des Moines Register headline on January 22. The Iowa House passed a bill to reinstate the death penalty, but only after Doderer used every legislative delaying tactic in the book while reminding the public why Iowa abolished the death penalty in 1965.

As reported in the Prairie Progressive (Winter 1995), "Doderer's moral passion and political skill cut the margin of votes" and gave backbone to the Iowa Senate, which on March 2 soundly defeated the bill "in a stunning renunciation of capital punishment." Later that year, it was Minnette who persuaded Republican House leaders to take up a resolution recognizing the Iowa Civil Liberties Union for 60 years of service to Iowans.

Yes, she was a magnificent crusader for women and children, but she will also be remembered as a brave civil libertarian who fought for justice regardless of the odds. ✕

—Dave Leshtz lives in Iowa City

For more about Minnette Doderer's indomitable career and those of others who served in the Iowa legislature, read **Legislators and Politicians: Iowa's Women Lawmakers** by Suzanne Schenken, Iowa State Press, 1995.

Win a free one-year subscription to the Prairie Progressive by correctly answering the Prairie Pop Quiz: In 1928, which county elected the first woman to serve in the Iowa House?

—Prairie Dog

Democracy in Coralville

Had a look at your Iowa Constitution lately? Perhaps you forgot to take it to the beach, but now that you are back at your desk you can look it up on the web. Google it up under Iowa Constitution, and scroll down to Article VII, Section 1, where it says: "The credit of the state shall not, in any manner, be given or loaned to, or in aid of, any individual, association, or corporation; and the state shall never assume, or become responsible for, the debts or liabilities of any individual, association, or corporation, unless incurred in time of war for the benefit of the state."

Further down, this admirable document, dating from 1857, makes a similar point: "The state shall not become a stockholder in any corporation, nor shall it assume or pay the debt or liability of any corporation."

What is this ponderous language about? It is about nothing less than the fundamental purpose of government in a democratic society. The purpose of government, according to the Iowa constitution, is to serve the public good. Taxes should be used for public purposes, in particular to fund public institutions that serve all the people of the state. The Iowa framers realized that governments, state and local, might be tempted to use public money in order to serve purely private interests. Investors are after all good citizens who benefit the community with economic development. Why not make public money available to them, and define it as a public good?

This language in the constitution was meant to make sure that those in charge of state and local government in Iowa resisted the temptation to become an instrument of those with excessive money and power. Or to put it another way, in Article III, Section 31 governing the appropriate role of the Iowa legislature: "no public money or property shall be appropriated for local, or private purposes."

Some related issues about the relationship between public good and private investment were considered by the U. S. Supreme Court in their June ruling in the case of Kelo vs. the City of New London, Connecticut. The City of New London had taken private property from owners unwilling to sell, handed over the property to a private developer, and justified their actions purely on the grounds of "economic development." There would be larger tax revenue, they reasoned, and more return on invest-

**Instead of graft,
payoffs, and
bribery, we
have "economic
development."**

ment for investors, if the city stepped in and condemned private property and handed it over to people with money to invest in the property. The private owners whose land was taken were given compensation, but the essential point is that they did not want to sell. The law was being used on behalf of purely private purposes, an act of government which the framers of the Iowa constitution in their clumsy way had hoped to prevent. The liberal faction on the Supreme Court, with justices Breyer, Souter, and Ginsburg leading the way, ruled that local governments know best, and may do virtually anything to private property owners in the name of "economic development."

Justice O'Connor's dissent pointed out that "The government now has license to transfer property from those with fewer resources to those with more" and "Who among us can

say she already makes the most productive or attractive use of her property?...The specter of condemnation hangs over all property. Nothing is to prevent the state from replacing any Motel 6 with a Ritz-Carlton, any home with a shopping mall or any farm with a factory." Or back home in Iowa, what is to prevent the City of Coralville from seizing small businesses and homes from unwilling property owners and turning their land into a Marriott Hotel and Convention Center? What is to prevent the City of Coralville from diverting public tax money from the government of Johnson County and using that money instead to fatten the purely private profits of stockholders in General Growth Corporation of Chicago, the owners of the Coral Ridge Mall?

The clumsy prohibitions written into the Iowa constitution, and the fears expressed in Justice O'Connor's dissent, are illustrated on a broad screen in Coralville, whose city council could be a poster boy for the appropriation of public money for private purposes in the name of economic development. Like New London, Coralville uses eminent domain to promote the interests of private investors, but their favorite tool is instead the Tax Increment Financing District, or TIF. To take the example of the Coral Ridge Mall: the property taxes that would have been paid by the owners of Coral Ridge Mall to Johnson County or the Iowa City Community School District are instead simply kept by the owners of the property, for purely private purposes. The Coralville City Council argues that the private expenditure of tax money for local or private purposes in fact has a public purpose because Coralville now has a new mall. This leaves the government of Johnson

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Media reform: think nationally, act locally

Iowans for Better Local Television is helping to organize a town meeting in Iowa City featuring FCC Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps. The October event will examine the effects of media consolidation on real people. Citizens are encouraged to come and speak to the commissioners and share personal stories of how local stations have failed to keep us informed.

This year, Iowa's television broadcast stations are up for licensure renewal. Licenses now last for eight years, effectively cutting off meaningful public input until 2014.

Iowans for Better Local TV is a group of Iowans intent on doing something about the problem of the media. In October of this year members of IBLTV will celebrate the one-year anniversary of their first media reform meet-up. Although membership has increased and focus has broadened since its involvement in the 2004 nation-wide boycott of Sinclair Broadcasting advertisers to protest the company's plans to force its stations to air the anti-Kerry film "Stolen Honor," the group's determination to do something about the problem of the media has been the common thread.

Iowans for Better Local TV selected its name early in 2005 as a way to communicate the idea that fairness and accuracy in the media should be a non-partisan issue, and that local stations should reflect local concerns of Iowans. IBLTV is particularly concerned about the negative effects of media consolidation: huge distant corporations owning local stations, the resulting failure to serve the public interest through lack of local coverage of important topics, and commitment to a corporate or political agenda rather than Iowa values.

A True Prairie Progressive

Labor Day is the perfect time to look at the run for Governor by State Rep. Ed Fallon. He is the only truly progressive candidate in the race for the top leadership position in Iowa. If you want to find Ed these days you would not find him racing off to meet with corporate bigwigs in places of power or promising to give free money to companies that pledge to bring in a few high paying jobs to Iowa. You would likely find him traveling in his beat up station wagon to meet with teachers and parents to share his vision of education. Ed does not believe that bigger is necessarily better and consolidation of our schools is the answer to better education. If elected governor his vision is to restore funding to all areas of education—early childhood, K-12, state universities, community college, the Iowa Tuition Grant, and the Area Education Agencies. This can be done by repealing recent tax breaks given to special interest groups.

Ed is traveling to meet people at small town celebrations, at farmers' markets, and of course, on RAGBRAI. He is listening to people's concerns about health care. He knows what it is like to have a family and not have medical insurance. He believes that

Through community presentations, a meeting with Congressman Leach, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, online activism, and appearances on PATV and WSUI radio, IBLTV has been working to raise public awareness and to increase citizen involvement in determining how our airwaves should be used.

Meetings are held 2nd and 4th Tuesdays at 6:30 in the Iowa City Public Library, and are open to the public. For more info, visit www.ibltv.org ✕

—Trish Nelson lives in Iowa City

the U.S. and Iowa need universal health care. He is proposing a "triple-A" system: health care that is affordable, accessible, and adequate

For years Ed has stood with striking workers on the picket line. He has stopped by their homes to see how their families were doing and how he could help. Working people know that he represents them and fights for their needs.

He has reached out to people who felt that they were not heard by the state agencies that are set up to serve them. He has spent hours with folks who felt that they were neglected and misrepresented by the Department of Human Services. Ed knows that if you really want to stand with the poor and with minorities in the state of Iowa, you must go inside Iowa's prisons. He has probably visited more prisoners and worked with them and their families to address injustices in the prison system more than any other legislator in the history of Iowa. He knows that Iowa's prison system is desperately in need of reform. This will be a priority of his administration. Restorative Justice will be the foundation of the new system.

Ed has been a leader in the fight against the growth of corporate agriculture and livestock factories. He has stood shoulder to shoulder with small farmers and small business people of Iowa.

All other candidates are dependent on corporate interests and money. This is not an Iowa Value. Ed's voice is a voice for all Iowans. He understands that we have so much in common: we all want good schools for our children, safe neighbors, affordable healthcare, jobs that pay decent wages, a clean, safe environment, and sustainable economic development. We will have these things with Ed as our leader! ✕

—Jean Basinger lives in Des Moines

The Wannabes: A Prequel

Our maturing crop of Iowa Democratic gubernatorial candidates brings to mind the Wizard of Oz. Each main character in that classic movie was pleasant and likeable — even endearing — but somewhere along the yellow brick road each was exposed as having a serious weakness.

Chet Culver boasts of big bucks and name ID, but does he have the brains? Ed Fallon prides himself on passion and organizational ability, but can he raise enough money? Patty Judge is well-liked in rural areas, but can she overcome a dreadfully weak environmental record? Mike Blouin looks the part, but how will that pro-life thing play out?

Without identifying who is the lion, scarecrow or tin man — Oh My! — here are scenes from some previously unreleased clips.

Mid-80s: State Senator **Mike Gronstal** immediately introduces himself to a new staffer, unbuttons his suit jacket, winks, and points out that it's made of reversible polyester, in a manner that lets you know he could afford something nicer. Later, he makes sure everyone knows he drives a Chevy Metro back and forth from his home in Council Bluffs.

Late-80s: It's the good ol' days and Demos control both chambers of the legislature. A battle is brewing between a House proposal to spend more money building prisons and a Senate proposal to funnel that money into community corrections. With the end of session looming, House Speaker Don Avenson — known for throwing his 6'5" frame around and bullying other legislators — meets in the Senate Majority Leader's office with Senate negotiator **Mike Gronstal**. Towering over Gronstal, Avenson bellows, pounds tables, and even throws a chair across the room! Gronstal stays cool, throws a few papers of his own, and holds his ground.

Mid-90s: It's his first Sec. Of State campaign, and **Chet Culver** is traveling with his well-known father around the state, trying to drum up interest. In a dark Waterloo hotel room 25 activists shuffle over a sticky carpet and munch on warm turkey sandwiches. Afterward, Chet stands up and delivers a rousing, off-the-cuff, standing ovation speech. He raises his voice, he pounds the lectern, he bashes Republicans using the sharpest, most progressive economic language possible. His cheeks get red and the crowd yells its approval...the Harkin of a new generation has been born.

1998 Vilsack Inauguration: **Ed Fallon** shows up along with hundreds of other Iowans at the morning swearing-in ceremony at Vets Auditorium, wearing his normal legislative clothes: slacks and a shirt. He is widely attacked by Demos and Repubs alike for 'insulting' the governor, the ceremony, and apple pie. Later that night, at a wild after-hours party, **Mike Gronstal** can be seen raucously hugging and kissing everyone in sight. **Chet Culver** stops by but seems very, very nervous and leaves early.

2005 Legislative Session: Facing the glare of media lights day after day amidst intense pressure from the public as well as from inside his own caucus, **Mike Gronstal** declares: "I've said it once, I'll say it again: there will be no debate of the death penalty in Iowa as long as I'm Co-Majority Leader." Facing no pressure whatsoever, **Chet Culver** releases a press release explaining he "agonized" over whether or not to support the death penalty, but in the end, all things considered, gosh-darn it, he does.

Early Spring 2005: **Ed Fallon**, at the end of another aggressive day of grassroots campaigning in northeast Iowa, stops overnight at a supporter's house, breaks out a mandolin, and

spends the evening making music with other makeshift musicians, young and old. His specialty: Irish folk songs.

Spring 2005: In one of his first appearances running for governor, **Chet Culver** steps before an Ames audience of activists and reads blandly from a page of notes. A snoozefest. People wander out of the hall, wondering 'what the....??'

June 2005: In the backyard of progressive state Rep. Don Shoultz, **Ed Fallon** and **Mike Blouin** square off at a Flag Day fundraiser. Armed with brochures, stickers and a staff person, **Fallon** declares "there are differences between Democrats," and "As governor I would represent all citizens except those at the very top...they are doing just fine and don't need my help." He describes the Iowa budget as a zero-sum game, stating "We can't give millions of dollars to Wells Fargo — which made \$8 BILLION in profits last year — and still be able to adequately fund Democratic priorities." **Blouin**, after introducing himself with an engaging story about how "my wife and I invented Hamburger Helper before it came in a box," responds directly to **Fallon's** attack on the Iowa Values Fund and trickle-down economics by saying, "This may come as a surprise, but I HATE business incentives. I don't like 'em." Then he explains in detail why and how he devotes his life to using them. He is a good friend to corporations, as he opposes disclosure of public tax breaks given to specific businesses because it would "create fear for companies." He ends with a fiery appeal to fight for Maytag jobs, asking "Does anyone here think they're not worth fighting for?" **Fallon** ends the evening by quoting Tom Harkin: "You don't help a sparrow by feeding grain to a horse."

—Dennis Harbaugh lives in Waterloo.

Democracy in Coralville,
Continued from Page 2

County without the money it would otherwise have in property taxes from Coral Ridge Mall, but still obliged to provide services to the people of Coralville and surrounding communities.

Through the TIF system, Coralville has found a way around the widespread public suspicion of the misuse of public funds for private purposes. Unlike eminent domain, which has a way of stirring up public outrage, a TIF is largely invisible. The creation of TIFs is a very effective shell game which makes it hard to track the transfer of public money into higher return on investment for General Growth Corporation. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors of course is losing large amounts of money that would otherwise come in as taxes, but the Supervisors have been cowed into silence by being told to get on board in the name of economic development. The TIF regime in Coralville has the full support not only of the local business elite, represented by the Chamber of Commerce, but also of our local Democratic Party legislative delegation (one of whom,

Dave Jacoby, served on the Coralville City Council as they looted the Johnson County Treasury on behalf of General Growth Corporation).

The TIF shell game becomes even more complex when it comes to the Iowa City Community School District. Anticipating the anger of parents if they saw money destined for their children's education being sent instead to the stockholders of General Growth Corporation, the Iowa legislature stepped in with promises to fund the shortfall in money going to school boards because of TIFs. But where does the legislature get the money to pay the Iowa City Community School District for their extensive TIF shortfall? From the same source of money that the legislature gets funding for K-12 education, the state general fund. Money that would be available for school funding is now being diverted to cover the shortfall in local property tax money from the runaway use of TIFs, especially in Coralville. Schools as well as county governments suffer from TIFs, although you won't hear any public complaints about this from Superintendent Lane Plugge or members of the Iowa City School Board.

The original intention of TIFs was to allow communities to use tax

money to redevelop blighted neighborhoods. The case of Coralville makes that aspiration nothing more than a joke. Coralville is situated in a corridor of economic development. The city would be booming without a single penny of government money being spent on "economic development." The capture of the government of Coralville by purely private interests, diverting public money to the interests of stockholders, is a striking example of the corruption of democracy by powerful private economic interests. Corruption now takes a characteristic modern form. Instead of graft, payoffs, and bribery, we have "economic development," with a consensus of legislators and elected officials either looking the other way, or incapable of deciphering the shell game going on in front of their eyes.

So what is to be done? Well, we obviously can't count on the Iowa courts to use the Iowa constitution as a mechanism for restoring integrity to local democracy, and we can't count on the U. S. Supreme Court either. But courts that allow corruption in the name of economic development are not compelling local governments to behave in this outrageous way. What we need are some candidates for office in Coralville, and for the state legislature, who adhere to the democratic ideals of 1857. If you know of any such potential candidates, who understand that public money should be used for public purposes, and private money for private purposes, don't rest until you persuade them to run for office. ✕

—Jeff Cox

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Sept. 24

Johnson Co. Democrats Fall
BBQ, Hills

Sept. 28

Annual Human Rights Awards
Breakfast, 7:30 AM, Iowa
Memorial Union, Iowa City

Oct. 26

Howard Zinn lecture, 7:30 PM,
IMU, Iowa City

October 28-29

Annual Strengthening and
Valuing Latino/a Communities
Conference, Des Moines

Race to the bottom

Visionary Iowa City City Council members voted on March 1, 2005, to approve the sale of land to Wal-Mart for a 'Super Center' in Iowa City:

"Government should not be telling business what it can and can't do."

Ernie Lehman

"There's nothing you can do to stop it."

Bob Elliott

"You don't have to shop there."

Ross Wilburn

Iowa City
Federation of Labor

Labor Day Picnic

Noon, Sept. 5
Shelter #2,
City Park,
Iowa City

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945

Iowa City, IA 52244

"I have a grandson who's already received a Purple Heart in Baghdad, and they just put him back to duty. One Purple Heart wasn't enough. I just wish George Bush would step up to the microphone and say, 'Folks, it's about oil.'"

—Merle Haggard