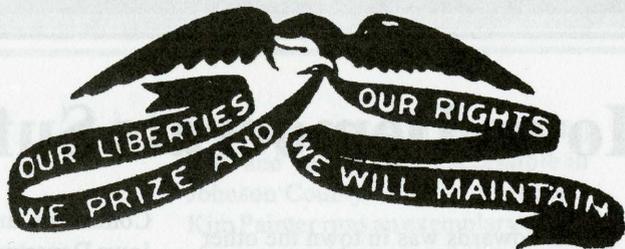


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Spring 2006

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Constitution Questioned at the Capitol

"People place their hand on the Bible and swear to uphold the Constitution; they don't put their hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible."

—*Jamie Raskin (constitutional law professor, American University)*

Is anyone reading the Iowa Constitution under the Golden Dome in Des Moines? Or, are they only trying to amend it or flout it?

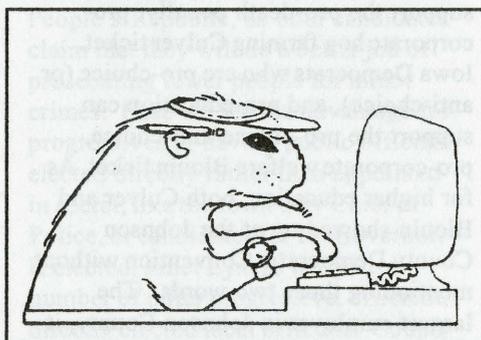
Dave Barry often wrote, "I'm not making this up." It may be hard to believe, but the following is actually true.

Representative Jamie Van Fossen, occasionally and affectionately called "Van Fossen the Younger" by Speaker Christopher Rants, offered an amendment to a bill that would require each agency's rules to expire on June 30th of every year unless the effective date was extended by the legislature. In part, the amendment states that "[a]ny rule which has not had its effective date extended . . . is void the following June 30 and the administrative code editor shall remove it from the Iowa administrative code."

Even if we grant "the Younger" a bit of leeway on that problematic "separation of powers" thing, Article III, section 40 of the Iowa Constitution states that "[t]he general assembly may nullify an adopted administrative rule of a state agency by the passage of a resolution by a majority of all of the members of each house of the general

assembly." Do you see a conflict here? Now, get this: This amendment was adopted. By Republicans. Who want smaller government.

Rep. Bill Dix, who hopes to swear on a Bible next year to uphold the U.S. Constitution while serving in Congress, introduced and floor-managed a bill



that will, among other immigrant-bashing provisions, prohibit banks and lenders from servicing first mortgages to illegal aliens. Article I, section 22 of the Iowa Constitution states: "Foreigners who are, or may hereafter become residents of this state, shall enjoy the same rights in respect to the possession, enjoyment and descent of property, as native born citizens." Notice that the section doesn't identify foreigners as "illegal foreigners." The bill passed as sixty-nine House members must have forgotten which document they swore to uphold.

The Iowa Constitution is the only state constitution in the nation that does not include a right to a free public

education. Alabama's state constitution, the longest in the nation, does include a section on education, but it states that "[s]eparate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race." The voters of Alabama almost amended this section in 2000. It fell short of being adopted by a mere 1850 votes out of 1.38 million cast. Iowa is almost up there with Alabama when it comes to educational rights.

So what's the big story coming out of Des Moines about our state constitution? Traditional marriage is evidently endangered and we need to amend our constitution.

—Marty Ryan lives in Des Moines

Thank you!

...to 71 readers who have contributed \$1236, an average of \$17.40, since Jan. 1st.

In addition to your financial contributions, we welcome your comments, letters to the editor, and articles (250-1000 words).

Iowa Democrats Suffer Nervous Breakdown

John Edwards was in town the other day running for President again, stirring up racial hatred, and making Americans paranoid about "national security." The Dubai ports deal was an outrage, he claimed, Arabs being wholly unreliable because they are Arabs. This is the same John Edwards who came in second in The People's Republic of Johnson County during the last presidential caucuses. It is also the same John Edwards whose speeches were so hysterically pro-war that the Bush Administration put them on their own pro-war web sites.

Edwards now is mildly repentant about his support for the war, claiming he was misled. His visit, though, is an opportunity to consider the state of the Democratic Party in Iowa. With the Republican Party on its knees, saddled with an unpopular president and an unpopular war, some Iowa Democrats appear to be going through a kind of collective nervous breakdown characterized by cognitive dissonance, i.e. the ability to hold contradictory views simultaneously without noticing the contradiction. The symptoms were evident in the last presidential caucus, as anti-war Democrats in Johnson County turned out to back pro-war presidential candidates Kerry and Edwards.

The same disorder is evident this year in the support given to Chet Culver and Mike Blouin in their campaigns for Governor. Chet Culver has endorsed the death penalty, and chosen as his running mate Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge, an outspoken advocate for corporate factory hog farms. Then there is Mike Blouin, who many people regard as a strong candidate despite the fact that he lost his Democratic seat in Congress to a Republican in a country where incumbents almost never lose. What has he done since? Well, first Blouin was head of the Cedar Rapids Chamber of

Commerce, and then director of the Iowa Department of Economic Development. He has devoted the best part of his life to diverting state money from public education to corporate welfare schemes such as the Iowa Values Fund, and he is proud of it. Blouin also supported a federal constitutional amendment to overturn Roe vs. Wade. In order to provide balance, he has chosen as his running mate a pro-abortion doctor, entirely unknown outside of economic development circles, who has over many years not only voted regularly in the Republican primary, but contributed to prominent Republican candidates for office.

Iowa Democrats who are opposed to the death penalty, and opposed to corporate hog farming, can now support the pro-death penalty, pro-corporate hog farming Culver ticket. Iowa Democrats who are pro-choice (or anti-choice), and pro-education can support the pro-choice/anti-choice, pro-corporate welfare Blouin ticket. As for higher education, both Culver and Blouin showed up at the Johnson County Democratic Convention without mentioning those two words. The largest employer in Johnson County, it appears, does not exist for either candidate. Click on Blouin's website under education, and you will find that it says nothing, like the candidate himself, but promises that he will be announcing his views at some time in the future.

What about our congressional race? There is really only one issue on the ballot next November, and that is the war in Iraq. Other issues including impeachment, wire tapping, torture, health care, cuts in domestic spending for poor children and scientific research, Hurricane Katrina, you name it, all come back to the war. A courageous right-wing Democrat, John Murtha, speaking for the leadership of the U. S. Army, has introduced a resolution in the U. S. House calling for the termina-

tion of the deployment of American troops in Iraq within a reasonable period of time, which he has described as six months. It has 100 co-sponsors, all Democrats, an impressive showing. Surely we will have a Democrat on the ballot who supports the Murtha Resolution, the only serious legislative initiative to end this murderous and illegal war?

Think again. For an example of cognitive dissonance, consult the web site of our only candidate for the Democratic nomination for Congress, Dave Loeb sack, which contains pro-war and anti-war language side by side. On the one hand, "This is a war that did not need to happen and one from which we should begin to disengage immediately." On the other hand, "Our troops have successfully laid the groundwork for the Iraqis to construct a political system of their choosing." Voters of the second district deserve to have the chance to vote to withdraw our troops from Iraq next November, but Dave Loeb sack cannot bring himself to support the Murtha amendment. In fact, he opposes it. As of now, it appears that anti-war Democrats in the Second District will be deprived of any way to vote next November for the termination of the war in Iraq, unless Jim Leach endorses the Murtha Resolution, or the Greens can find a candidate who can talk about something other than electoral reform and organic farming.

While contemplating this catalog of failed leadership, it is important to remember what is the saving grace of the Democratic Party, i.e. the presence on the ballot of Democrats who are worth supporting. Unlike four years ago, when the Democratic primary ballot in Johnson County had not one single contested race, there are courageous progressive Democrats on the

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The Perfect Speech

A few days prior to the announcement in the May 1998 *Prairie Progressive*, that I might run for President of the United States, my wife said she would divorce me if I ran. Then my campaign finance lawyer said that if I had a choice between filing with the Federal Election Commission and going to hell for eternity, I should choose hell for eternity. The FEC had told me that my financial plan bordered on larceny. I wanted to get matching funds by promising to return the initial contributions that made the matching funds available. I would put contributions in the bank and then send the contributor back their money plus half of the federal funds that matched it. Let me explain:

To receive matching federal funds, a presidential candidate must raise \$5000 in increments of no larger than \$200 in at least eleven states. With enough artists volunteering a little time and money, I could roll in dough like a politician. It wouldn't take much to raise the contributions required. Then I give everyone back their money, plus half of mine.

I explained to the FEC that I wanted to give everyone who contributed to my campaign a return on their money. (\$150 for \$100, for example.)

The FEC said that federal matching funds are meant for promotion, advertising, salaries and publicity. They implied that my plan might not meet these CFR-11 conditions. I argued that if I did what I planned, I would become the most popular, well-loved politician in America. What politician has every offered such a good deal, I asked. Has a politician ever given money instead of taking it?

I couldn't afford the lawyers needed to argue my point. In the *Prairie Progressive* I wrote, "It is not our votes that decide who will be President. A handful of lawyers who can navigate CFR-11, the federal code for presidential elections, decide who

will be President." Not long after that, the Supreme Court proved those words correct.

From my point of view it looked like America had finally had an obvious coup. I was in England, a guest of the London Artist's Book Fair, at the

What do you ask of the next President of the United States?

Barbican Centre. I exhibited blank presidential filing papers. Also made a small speech. Said that everyone should be allowed to run for President. He influences world economics and political policies to the extent of changing foreign governments. Consequently, everyone should be allowed to decide who is elected to do the job.

In September of 2001 I lost my taste for satire. By 2003, however, I decided to try again. Soon I was in Berlin, signing up Europeans to run for President of the United States. Ironically, back in the states, right wing Republicans were saying that the US Constitution should be changed in order to allow the Austrian Governor of California to run for President of the United States. That's when I gave up satire.

Today I am working on a project called *The Perfect Speech*.

The Perfect Speech is essentially a poll to learn what non-Americans would ask of the President of the United States. Throughout the world people are being invited to write *The Perfect Speech* by submitting statements of what they want the President to do. In the spirit of public service

and bi-partisan politics, once *The Perfect Speech* is finished, copies will be given to all presidential candidates.

After this article was submitted to the PP I was convinced by *The Perfect Speech* staff and my brother Darrell to stick with my earlier promise to run for President of the United States in Europe. So I have decided to hit the campaign trail this summer. We will continue until the 2008 Primary Election, using *The Perfect Speech* that we gather as the foundation of our platform.

It is my intention to seek every legal avenue for implementing my original campaign financial plan: hiring my contributors to promote my campaign for an amount of time equal to the amount of matching funds they receive.

I am also staying with my original plan to push for PTN, the Presidential Television Network. PTN would broadcast what the President says, sees and hears, 24-7. I would never be charged with not telling the truth to the people or having affairs in the Oval Office.

I will also continue to explore a policy of withdrawing our troops from foreign soil. The President would cease being Commander-in-Chief and become Head Park Ranger, because I would turn our troops into Park Rangers. America would return to its roots, inviting the world to its shores, embracing our visitors. We will become what we were in the beginning (after the European invasion, that is): an international recreation park where people of the world came to live out their fantasies.

All of this makes economic sense when you consider that for a few years now America's number one export has been entertainment. Let's pay off the National Debt. Franchise the Presidency!

—Lowell Darling is a former candidate for Governor of California, and an artist who has exhibited at CSPPS in Cedar Rapids. He is divorced.

Oscar's Unbroken Ceiling

Oscar's movies may have been bluer than ever before, but they went in the red at the box office. *The Lord of the Rings III*, the Best Picture winner in 2003, more than doubled the combined gross of all five nominees this time. And the viewer share this Oscar night was the second lowest in twenty years. But this should come as no surprise when you consider that half the country is terrified of Osama Bin Laden and the rest are scared to death of George W. Bush. For the first group it was no longer safe to go to the movies. Just try to imagine Mr. and Mrs. Red State settling in for a western at their local Cineplex, fleeing the theater at the first cowboy kiss, and seeking refuge next door in *Transamerica*.

A reminder of recent Oscar winners brings home just how political this year's line up was: *Gladiator*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Chicago*, *The Lord of the Rings III*, and *Million Dollar Baby*. Those are the winners since the Compassionate Conservative road into town. Euthanasia was the only controversial subject in the whole bunch. With this year's movies, Oscar returned from Middle-Earth to carry out a major offensive in the culture wars. Oscar is back in the real world, with real issues, and really few special effects.

"Nothing tells you more about Hollywood than what it chooses to honor," wrote neo-con Krauthammer. One could also say: "Nothing tells you more about the White House than what Hollywood dares to honor." And as the cowboys in the White House kept shooting themselves in the foot, they opened the door for movies that matter, including one that would change the way Americans look at iconic cowboys for a long time.

Movie after movie in the major Oscar categories was an affront to half the country. Just when a children's book about two male penguins adopt-

ing an abandoned egg was removed from the children's section in a Missouri library because of its "homosexual undertones," the last bastion of heterosexuality bit the dust in *Brokeback Mountain*. With *Capote*, people leave the theater more disturbed by Red State-sponsored executions than by the exploitative narcissism of the title figure. *Crash* could be subtitled "Rodney King's Revenge," as the melting pot of a major American city boils over. In *Good Night, and Good Luck* simply substitute "anyone who's not with us" for "commie." The message of *Munich*, a movie about revenge, is clearly stated: "Every man we killed was replaced by somebody worse." Sound familiar? *The Constant Gardener* exposes to what lengths the huge drug companies will go to feed their addiction to profits, testing their drugs in Africa with deadly results. And *Syriana* clearly shows that Democracy is just another name for gotta have that oil profit. No wonder liberalphobe Ann Coulter was driven to scream "Screw you, Hollywood!" in her post-Oscar column.

Those are strong themes, matched by muscular titles: *Brokeback Mountain*, *Crash*, *Munich*, *Syriana*, *A History of Violence*.

And the Best Supporting Actor roles read like an homage to testosterone. There was a CIA field agent (George Clooney), a racist LA cop (Matt Dillon), a boxing trainer (Paul Giamatti), a rodeo bull rider (Jake Gyllenhaal), and a mobster dead set on killing his own brother (William Hurt). Yes, it looks like Oscar has found his missing vital part.

But how did the women fare? Their movies had titles like *Junebug*, *Mrs. Henderson Presents*, and *Pride & Prejudice*. It's always a bad sign when Oscar has to outsource the actress nominees, two from England (Judi Dench and Keira Knightley) and one

from South Africa (Charlize Theron). Dench, in a role unworthy of a Dame, bankrolls variety shows featuring nude women to help the lads keep more than a stiff upper lip during wartime. Knightley, playing a Jane Austen heroine, is the furthest removed of all from today's cultural battleground. Felicity Huffman, who should have won Best Actress, played—a man. Reece Witherspoon won, in a real (supporting, of course) stand-by-your-man role.

Appropriately, the strongest political role for a woman falls into the supporting category. *The Constant Gardener* script spices Rachel Weisz's activism with a protest of the Iraq invasion. She dies in the opening minutes of the movie at the hands of the pharmaceutical giants she is fighting to expose, leaving her hapless apolitical husband to carry the film. Charlize Theron has the only other political role, but after watching her endure about an hour and a half of some of the most unrelenting vile abuse ever put to film you almost find yourself wishing that she would leave the North Country mining to the men and find a nice secretarial job in Minneapolis.

There was one word left unspoken on Oscar night, even by our answer to Edward R. Murrow, host Jon Stewart. That word was "Bush." Still, Oscar amassed this past year a formidable army for the culture wars. But he should let more women enlist, especially since a recent study learned that parents with girls lean left, while those with boys lean right.✂

— Jae Retz



**Iowa Democrats Suffer
Nervous Breakdown**
Continued from Page 2

April 6-8

Creating Inclusive Communities,
with Wilma Mankiller.
Sponsored by Women's
Resource & Action Center
in Iowa City.
319-335-1486

April 7-8

Democracy for America Training
Academy, Moline, IL.
563-332-5051

April 24

Making Schools Safe for
GLBT Youth Public Forum,
7:00 P.M. in Waterloo.
515-321-4226

Workers Memorial Day

Mason City: April 22, 2:00 P.M.
641-420-6195

Iowa City, April 28, noon,
319-351-3238

Dubuque, April 28, 5:00 P.M.
563-557-9823

ballot this June. In the governor's race, there is State Representative Ed Fallon, who has led a lonely fight against the diversion of state resources from public education to corporate welfare, from the University of Iowa to Well Fargo. As governor, Fallon will govern from the Democratic Party Wing of the Democratic Party, representing the progressive tradition of Governor Harold Hughes, who believed that tax money should go toward institutions that serve the people of Iowa rather than the interests of corporate investors.

Then there is Janet Lyness, candidate for County Attorney. In this contested race, Johnson County is finally living up to its reputation as The People's Republic, as both candidates claim that they will do a better job of prosecuting fewer people for minor crimes. Here we see the advantage for progressives of having public officials elected directly rather than appointed in secret, like the Iowa City Chief of Police, or candidates for Lt. Governor. If elected, Janet Lyness will join a number of other progressive, efficient, directly elected local officials. County Auditor Tom Slockett has been one of

the nation's leaders in making voting easy and voting places accessible in Johnson County. County Recorder Kim Painter runs an exemplary office, characterized by accessibility, transparency, and consumer-friendly access to real estate information. Sheriff Lonny Pulkrabek finally blew the whistle on the justly unpopular high arrest policies pursued by our community leaders: County Attorney Pat White, City Manager Steve Atkins, Iowa City Mayor Ross Wilburn, and University of Iowa Vice-President for Student Services Phil Jones. Representing the overwhelming majority of people in Johnson County, including the 65% of the electorate who voted against a new jail, and the 17% of UI graduates who have an arrest record when they receive a diploma, Pulkrabek got national publicity for his intervention. With Janet Lyness as County Attorney, we can expect to see more pressure to adopt sensible incarceration policies

As usual there are no contested races for Democratic nomination for state legislature in Johnson County, but voters will be able to support progressive State Senator Joe Bolckom against a conservative independent candidate in November. In neighboring Cedar County, local human rights activist Clara Oleson will take the fight for progressive values into a race for state representative. Keep an eye on that race. Get out your checkbooks.

Finally, with any luck, we can look forward to a decent, progressive, humane candidate for president in the Iowa Caucuses in 2008 if we can persuade Senator Russ Feingold to run. His lonely vote against the original Patriot Act is alone grounds for supporting him. His courageous stand against the renewed Patriot Act drew only eight other Democratic

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votes in the Senate (including one from Senator Tom Harkin). His legislation to censure George Bush for breaking the law with domestic wiretapping (endorsed by only two other Senators, Tom Harkin and Barbara Boxer) has sent into hiding Democratic Party leaders such as Senator Hillary Clinton. E-mail him, and ask him to run. Perhaps a county that voted for the likes of Kerry and Edwards in the last caucus will yet have a chance to live up to its progressive reputation.✂

— Jeff Cox

Three years and counting

“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.”

—Prairie Dog,
Prairie Progressive,
Spring 2003

“The struggle against racial injustice must continue. But justice requires that we be equally vigilant in protesting against all forms of bigotry, prejudice and discrimination based on religion, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental disability and other kinds of injustice that degrade the quality of life for millions of citizens.”

—Coretta Scott King (1927-2006)

“We are all capable of believing things which we know to be untrue, and then, when we are finally proved wrong, impudently twisting the facts so as to show that we were right. Intellectually, it is possible to carry on this process for an indefinite time; the only check on it is that sooner or later a false belief bumps up against solid reality, usually on a battlefield.”

—George Orwell

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Jae Retz Returns!
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