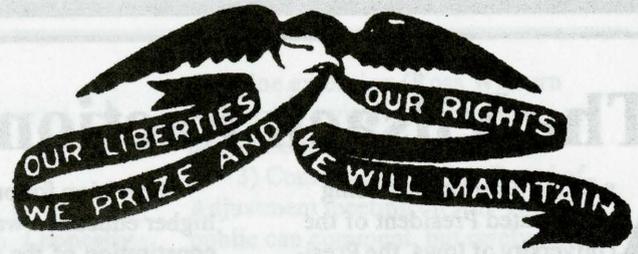


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Summer 2006

## A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

### What is the sound of one man standing?

**L**ame duck he may be, but Tom Vilsack owned the 2006 Democratic State Convention on June 17.

Dressed in a pink shirt and red tie, the self-term-limited Governor gave the best speech, doled out a half-million-dollar check to Chet Culver, and summoned party activists to his holding room all day long to persuade and cajole them into backing his nascent presidential run.

As "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet" faded out, Vilsack told the crowd of 700, "I'm Tom Vilsack and I'm proud to be a Democrat." He ran through a list of Jim "Nussle's hustles," from dressing up in a firefighter's uniform while cutting funds for fire protection, to expressing moral outrage about the CIETC scandal but none about DeLay, Libby, or Duke Cunningham. His practiced blend of conviction and optimism was, well, gubernatorial, if not presidential.

In the carefully orchestrated small group meetings, Vilsack described (with his wife occasionally joining in) his success in "changing the landscape of Iowa." He took credit for achieving a comprehensive health care program, suggesting that the accomplishment was overlooked because he did it piece by piece. He boasted of improved air quality and water monitoring, with 10% of Iowa's energy now provided by wind. 388 companies have been helped by the Dept. of Economic Development, said the landscape artist, with a net

gain of 4800 jobs. "We've got a great story to tell, and people around the country are responding to it."

Vilsack defended his veto of the eminent domain bill, calling it "a job-killer" that could negatively impact projects in towns like Pella and Burlington. In response to a question



about Iraq, his main criticism of Bush was that he failed the moral and constitutional obligation to "be a doubting Thomas" before putting people in harm's way.

The most frequently used word in the Governor's printed hand-out of the day was "tomorrow," as in "challenges of tomorrow," "continues to prosper tomorrow," "healthier families tomorrow," and "resources to prosper tomorrow."

Meanwhile, Patty Judge took the stage to the sound of "I was Born in a Small Town." The crowd loved her feisty vow to fight back when Nussle begins to slash and burn — except for one man in the Scott County

delegation who rose and stood with his back to the stage as she spoke. He remained standing, facing the rear of the hall, during Culver's speech as well, in protest of the ticket's stand on civil unions. Aides to Culver claim that he supports all the rights for gays and lesbians that civil unions bring; he just hasn't gotten his mind around the legal arrangement that would encompass those rights for thousands of Iowans and their children. Curiously, no one yelled 'Down in front!' or even seemed to care.

Culver was treated respectfully if not enthusiastically by the crowd (in contrast to wild cheers for Ed Fallon earlier). His support of stem cell research evoked the greatest applause. Response was more restrained for his announced desire to make Iowa the Silicon Valley of the Midwest.

Culver and Judge are tough campaigners who crafted a smart rural strategy, allowing them to win decisively while doing poorly in the traditionally must-win counties of Polk, Story, and Johnson (they did poorly in Dubuque County, too, but weren't expected to make a dent in Blouin's home turf). Fallon proved formidable, winning 8 counties and finishing second in 25, without the benefit of a single statewide TV ad. He could be a key player in helping where Culver is weakest.

*The sound of one man standing  
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# The Vilsack Faction's Marching Orders

As David Skorton was being inaugurated President of the University of Iowa, the President of the Iowa Board of Regents, Owen Newlin, turned to our state legislators and pleaded with them: "Let's keep our public universities public." Owen Newlin is no longer on the Board of Regents, and David Skorton is no longer President of the University of Iowa. Governor Tom Vilsack has very different ideas for higher education in Iowa.

He made those ideas clear in an interview with David Yepsen in the Des Moines Register (April 24, 2005). The universities in the past have been about research and teaching, he argued. In the past when faculty did things like "publish a paper" or "write a book," they were rewarded, but that has to change. "Now it's come up with an idea and start a business and you'll get rewarded." Hired for their expertise in research and teaching, faculty are now expected to become entrepreneurs. Instead of serving all the people of Iowa, they are to serve the interests of corporate investors.

In order to transform the university, Vilsack appointed four new members of the Board of Regents: Mike Gardner, Teresa Wahlert, Ruth Harkin, and Tom Bedell. These regents, he told Yepsen, must "put their foot down and say 'This is the way it's got to be.'...Mike Gartner is going to be the next president of the board, and those are my marching orders to him."

Gartner and other members of the Vilsack Faction wasted little time. They took over key roles in the search committees for the presidencies of the University of Northern Iowa and the University of Iowa. Their habit of direct interference in university affairs has led to legislative hearings on their conduct. Far more important than the Vilsack Faction's managerial style is their campaign to undermine state support for public higher education.

Provision for publicly funded higher education was in the original constitution of the state, and Iowans have ever since shared a consensus that it is not only an advantage to the state, but essential to a healthy democracy, to have publicly supported and accessible institutions of higher education. The level of public support for higher education has varied enormously over the past century and a half, depending on political circumstances, the condition of the state budget, and the commitments of Iowa's political and civic leaders. Over the decades, though, Iowans have been proud of their support for higher education. Iowa is one of very few states of comparable size and wealth with two public research universities that belong to the prestigious Association of American Universities.

Key members of the Vilsack Faction do not share the Iowa consensus on higher education. When the chair of the University of Iowa's presidential search committee, Regent Teresa Wahlert, met with the faculty committee responsible for giving advice on such appointments, she informed the faculty that she believed that all state aid should be eliminated from the University of Iowa. She acknowledged that the privatization of the university would be controversial, and called for a public debate on the topic.

It would take an endowment of more than four billion dollars to make up for the quarter of a billion dollars in yearly support that the University of Iowa receives from the taxpayers. Regent Wahlert had no suggestions as to where that extra money might come from, other than a vague suggestion that we might recruit more out of state students. Nonetheless, both Governor Vilsack and the Vilsack Faction on the Regents are busily reducing state aid to the university, with or without debate. During his first term in office Vilsack cut roughly one hundred million dollars

out of the University of Iowa operating budget in order to fund his economic development schemes and buy off the Republicans with tax cuts. As Vilsack's second term began, and state revenues improved, an earlier Board of Regents put in place a reasonable and affordable "transformation plan" that would have provided an additional 40 million dollars a year for higher education in 2005, 2006, and 2007 to help make up for the Vilsack Cuts. In 2005 the transformation plan was only partially funded, although unlike the Governor the Regents at least supported full funding that year.

In 2006, by way of contrast, new Regents President Michael Gartner gave the green light to our legislators to divert 20 million dollars of the 40 million transformation plan into an economic development boondoggle that had been proposed in an obscure consultant's document known as the Battelle Institute Report on Iowa's Bioeconomy (watch this space for more). All three Regents institutions were left, not with the additional 40 million originally proposed by the Regents, but with a mere 11 million in recurring funds.

In response to the Vilsack Cuts, and the failure to fund the transformation plan, the University of Iowa has been shrinking the size of its teaching staff while increasing the number of students. You can do the math about classroom size and the quality of teaching. The university has tried mightily to avoid disaster by finding funds for competitive faculty and staff pay raises, but cutting back on faculty and staff numbers alone does not free up enough money for pay increases.

The university administration was hoping for additional funds from the transformation plan. When those weren't forthcoming, thanks to lack of

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## Dave's the Man

support from Vilsack and the Vilsack Faction, the university asked the Regents for a tuition surcharge to fund pay raises. Instead of funding pay increases with state money, the Regents supported the diversion of state funding to economic development and funded pay raises with a tuition surcharge instead (it should be called the Battelle Surcharge). In terms of Vilsack's marching orders to Michael Gartner, that is not all. In order to receive the tuition surcharge this year, the university promised the Board of Regents that they will not ask for state money for any new buildings for the next three years.

Those are the elements of the privatization of higher education being put into place by Vilsack and the Vilsack faction. First comes (1) the Vilsack Cuts, then (2) a faculty hiring freeze, then (3) the diversion of research and teaching money into the Battelle Report, then (4) the tuition surcharge, then (5) a building moratorium. Most Iowans would be shocked to hear that the University of Iowa is being transformed into a private university by a faction of the Iowa Democratic Party. The Governor has given his marching orders, though, and the Regents are marching. When a new President comes to the University of Iowa, he will take charge of a corporate-based privatization program that is well under way. ✕

—Jeff Cox

**A**s someone who has known Dave Loeb sack for years, I can attest to his commitment to solving international disputes in a multilateral and peaceful manner.

As a professor of international politics at Cornell College and a community educator, he has worked tirelessly over the years to bring to the attention of the public the complexities of world politics and the harsh realities of American military intervention abroad. Dave has served on the Iowa Board of the United Nations Association, he has delivered numerous lectures on American foreign policy to a variety of civic groups, and he has assisted organizations such as Women for Peace Iowa in their efforts to reach out to the citizens of Iowa on international issues.

Regarding Iraq, I know for a fact that Dave has long been opposed to this Bush misadventure. Indeed, prior to the U.S. incursion, Dave spoke eloquently for a continuation of the containment policy in place at that time. He was never convinced that Saddam Hussein constituted an imminent or even medium term threat to America and that an invasion would likely lead to the very consequences we have all witnessed.

For some time, Dave has advocated an immediate commencement of troop withdrawal on America's part. Here are his own words on Iraq from his website:

"Nowhere has the failure of the Bush approach been more evident than in Iraq. This is a war that did not need to happen and one from which we should begin to disengage immedi-

ately. Our troops have successfully laid the groundwork for the Iraqis to construct a political system of their choosing. The costs of a continued U.S. presence will far outweigh any conceivable gains. Nor should the removal of American combat forces from Iraq be followed by any kind of permanent or semi-permanent base presence in that country or even a redeployment "on the horizon" as called for by Congressman Murtha. The continued presence of U.S. troops near

Iraq would only bring more instability to the region and place U.S. troops at constant risk from enemies of America. Complete disengagement from Iraq

**Dave has advocated an immediate commencement of troop withdrawal on America's part.**

in the next year will serve to enhance America's security. The current legislation before the Congress that comes closest to my position on Iraq is H.J. Res. 73, introduced by Congressman Murtha last November. I support his efforts to end America's involvement in Iraq as quickly and effectively as possible."

Finally, as an educator, I have learned a great deal from Dave Loeb sack on domestic and international political issues, but because he has traveled extensively I also have realized that he has a complex understanding and appreciation of culture and history. Beyond the scope of education, I know that I have listened to the voice of a humanitarian and leader.

This should put to rest any doubt about Dave Loeb sack's position on the Iraq occupation. ✕

—Ellen Ballas lives in Coralville.

# An Open Letter to Chet Culver

**D**ear Secretary Culver:

Congratulations on your victory in the Democratic Primary for Governor. The victory is a testament to your entire team.

You might recall that we have met twice in meetings with the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and allied (GLBTA) community. I went into both those meetings encouraged that you were interested in reaching out, but I left the meetings discouraged.

During our meetings with you, I became concerned that you didn't quite understand the difficulties and discrimination that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people face. You seemed vague on your commitments to support civil rights for GLBT people. It was also clear that you haven't decided on how much you are willing to support same-sex couples. I'm left with the impression that you see civil rights for GLBT people through a lens of politics, instead of through the eyes of justice.

When you appeared at the Des Moines Register Debate on May 20 and took a position against civil unions, it was like a shock wave went through the state among people that care about civil rights and diversity. **You see, same-sex couples are denied over 1,100 federal and over 500 state rights and responsibilities automatically granted to married couples.** I've been with my partner over 17 years and I still can't have inheritance, insurance, social security, or the responsibilities of marriage, yet when Brittany Spears got married in Las Vegas in a drunken stupor she automatically had her relationship recognized by over 1,600 hundred laws in every state of the union.

You proudly describe yourself as a progressive Democrat. **Frankly, it should be a minimum requirement of a progressive Democrat to support civil**

**unions.** Civil unions were created by politicians looking for a compromise between doing the right thing and ending marriage discrimination and doing what they thought the public would accept. During the years that we've had civil unions in Vermont,

**Civil unions  
are already  
the compromise.**

even some conservative elected officials have become supportive of civil unions, and many now support marriage equality. Support for true marriage equality is on an upward trend in national opinion polls. Civil unions are already the compromise.

Marriage for same-sex couples would allow gay and lesbian couples to obtain a civil marriage license and be married in a civil ceremony. Each individual religious institution would be free to marry or not marry couples as they see fit. Civil unions would create an entirely new classification of a contract between couples. Politicians created civil unions, because they were trying to create something that would help same-sex couples have rights and responsibilities of marriage, yet not call it marriage. Civil unions are already the political compromise while people get adjusted to marriage equality for same-sex couples.

**Perhaps you are not quite ready for marriage equality, but you certainly should be supportive of civil unions. I believe with all of my being that I should be equal to Chet Culver in every way, shape, and form. I believe my 17-year commitment to Robin Butler is every bit as important as**

**your commitment to your spouse. Just because I'm a lesbian, doesn't mean I should be denied marriage rights.**

I am ashamed that our Democratic nominee for Governor has abandoned the principals of freedom and liberty to scapegoat gay and lesbian couples. I hope you can find room to truly think about these issues away from the glare of politics and find a place in your heart to embrace civil rights for all people. I remain available to discuss this with you in person and help you find a path to mend the discontent you created in the base by opposing civil unions. **Civil unions are the first step to justice. I hope you can take that step.** ✕

*—Janelle Rettig is a former staff member for Congressman Jim Leach.*

## Prairie Progressive Quiz!

**Name the only two Iowa legislators to ever lose an election over the issue of gay rights. (Hint: they were both Republicans.) The first correct responder wins a free one-year subscription or renewal to the PP.**

# Bluff and bluster on the edge of town

**B**ecause of two lawsuits that Iowa City Stop Wal-Mart filed last summer, the deal that would have allowed the City of Iowa City to rezone and sell 22 acres of public land to Wal-Mart for construction of a Supercenter has not been able to be finalized. There are several possibilities for what will occur in the next critical six weeks. The key date is July 31. That is the day that the purchase agreement between Iowa City and Wal-Mart expires. In the last nine months the city council has twice extended the purchase deadline because Wal-Mart did not want to pay for the land while our lawsuits were hanging over the project. (On June 13, the council rejected Wal-Mart's request for an indefinite delay until the appeals process is over).

Possible scenarios: At the July 18 city council meeting, Wal-Mart asks for a delay of a fixed time, e.g., 3 months. The council says "yes" and our lawsuits continue in the appeals process. If the council says "no," Wal-Mart must pay up by July 31 or quit the project. If Wal-Mart pays up, the lawsuits continue, with our appeals to be submitted this fall. If Wal-Mart quits the project, then we will

have a very, very big party. I honestly do not see them walking away from this deal, but who knows what lurks in their hearts in Bentonville, Arkansas (maybe moving to a different Iowa City or Johnson County site where they don't have to get a rezoning?).

Meanwhile, Wal-Mart is coming to the Iowa City Zoning Board of Adjustment at 5 pm, July 12, to ask for another "special exception" to the zoning code so that they can dump 10 acres of fill dirt onto the site in order to get it magically moved out of the floodplain designation by the City of Iowa City and FEMA (yes, FEMA!).

What can you do between now and July 31?

1) Send us money to help keep the fight going. Our lawyer, Wally Taylor of Cedar Rapids, has managed to keep this fight going for a year with his legal maneuvers. He has battled the city's attorneys, and more recently Wal-Mart has hired Iowa City's top gun corporate lawyer Bob Downer (a member of the Board of Regents) and the very costly Belin law firm of Des Moines.

2) Come to the City Council meeting at 7pm, July 13, if Wal-Mart has requested another purchase

deadline extension (Ross Wilburn will be the swing vote; the others are deadlocked three to three).

3) Come to the Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting on July 12. The public can comment, but rarely does anyone from "the public" do so.

4) Write the Des Moines Register and ask when the hell are they going to cover this story? The Daily Iowan, Iowa City Press-Citizen, Cedar Rapids Gazette and Corridor Business Journal have all done a good job. The Register has pretty much ignored it, even though a state-wide land use advocacy group started by Ed Fallon, 1000 Friends of Iowa, is an "intervenor" in the lawsuits, our attorney is the attorney for the Sierra Club of Iowa, and Wal-Mart has hired a member of the Board of Regents.

I hope I haven't confused anyone by recently challenging the city council to hold a referendum on this deal. I had wanted to start the referendum process after the first city council vote to sell the land to Wal-Mart on March 1, 2005, but I was told by the city attorney and others that because of a change in the city charter it was no longer legal to hold a referendum on a zoning change (as we had done in 1989 when the city council rezoned land for the first Iowa City Wal-Mart!). So I hired a lawyer and initiated the lawsuits against the city. But councilmen Bob Elliot and Mike O'Donnell have been claiming that the lawsuits are somehow subverting the will of the majority of Iowa Citizens whom, they claim, want this Supercenter. I got tired of hearing this, so I called their bluff and bluster, and asked for a referendum. At this point I have no idea what the council or city attorney will say on this.

I hope to hear from Prairie Progressives at [www.iowacitystopwalmart.com](http://www.iowacitystopwalmart.com), or see you at the city council or zoning board of adjustment meeting. ✂

—Gary Sanders is chair of Iowa City Stop Wal-Mart.

Contributions are welcome at 831 Maggard St., Iowa City, IA 52240.

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**The sound of one man standing**  
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Culver's limitations as a candidate are obvious (although one onlooker gushed, "He's a great candidate for TV"). To win, Culver will need Fallon voters, the ability to speak without a script, a plan for higher education funding that can't be outflanked by Nussle, and the skill to force the House Budget Committee Chair to defend the pitiful condition of America's finances.

Culver and Vilsack have proven their political shrewdness. As each seeks a higher prize, they'll have plenty of opportunities to show true leadership based on genuine Democratic principles.

Prairie progressives will be watching carefully. ☘

—Prairie Dog

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**"It was a bright cold day in  
April, and the clocks were  
striking thirteen."**

— **George Orwell**