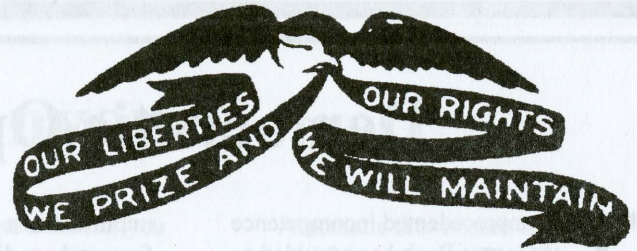


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



January 2007

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

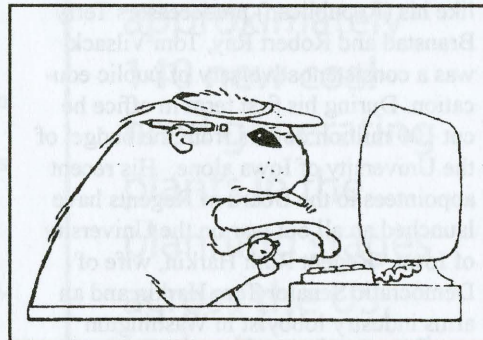
Prairie Dog's Honor Roll for 2006

Viivi Shirley, mayor of Perry, serves a mostly rural population of 8,000, more than a quarter of which is Latino. Somehow the fear of immigrants has passed her by: "I don't care whether these people are legal or illegal because when you look at their determination, the guts, the courage and stamina, the belief in something better and what they endured to get here – my gosh, now we are saying we don't want these people?"

The Iowa House passed unani- mously a bill to create a prescription drug database which threatened to invade the privacy of thousands of innocent Iowans. Although touted as a way to improve services for patients, the bill drew an unusual amount of hungry looks from law enforcement folks. Enter **State Senator Jack Hatch**, who insisted that access to data for law enforcement should only be allowed with probable cause in specific investigations of specific individuals. In other words, No Fishing Allowed. Thanks largely to Hatch, HF 722 contains no references to law enforcement, with only the prescribing doctor and the dispensing pharmacist allowed access to the database. In addition – with help from the **American Civil Liberties of Iowa** – an advisory council was charged with "ensuring that patient confidentiality, best interests, and civil liberties are at all times protected and preserved."

Alice Weick, a soft-spoken regis- tered nurse of 31 years at Finley Hospital in Dubuque, was fired for exercising her freedom of speech during a 3-day nurses' strike. After devoting her entire adult life

to her employer, Weick dared to publicly state her belief that Finley knowingly underpaid its nurses. For this, hospital management claimed that she failed to 'represent the organization positively in the workplace and the community' as called for in her contract. Apparently her leadership in SEIU, the nurses' union, had nothing to do with it. Weick contin-



ues to support her fellow nurses, but now works in a hospital in Wisconsin. It's a long commute, but worth the better pay and respect in her workplace.

Tax increment financing is a handy governmental mechanism for diverting taxes from public infrastructure, like schools and services, to rebates for busi- nesses. **Peter Fisher of the Iowa Policy Project** profusely punches holes in the arguments of free-market fanatics who perversely promote TIFs as a legitimate tool to boost local commerce. 'I always like to ask,' said Fisher, 'couldn't you have got there some other way? The truth is, they get someone else to pay a greater share of the cost of government so they can put the money toward economic development.'

Johnson County Supervisor Rod Sullivan has been equally outspoken (and nearly alone in local government) on the inequities and hypocrisies of TIFs gone wild in Iowa. Sullivan is also the most passionate public voice against the regressive sales tax that cities and schools increasingly rely on.

Dennis Harbaugh and Juanita Williams of Waterloo can afford to send their two sons to college. Why, they wondered, couldn't less privileged kids have the same opportunities? Instead of just wondering, the retired UNI administrator and nurse mortgaged an apartment building they own and started a scholarship fund for all 17 students in a second-grade class at Cunningham School. **Former Black Hawk County Supervisor Robert Smith** made the first individual contribution and pledged to raise \$85,000 (matching Harbaugh and Williams' initial contribution) from local African-American –owned businesses. Contributions to the Harbaugh-Williams Education Promise Fund can be sent to Community Foundation, P.O. Box 1176, Waterloo 50704.

Five Cedar Rapids police detectives were promised a substantial raise if they withdrew from their union. When the raise never came, they sued the chief and his assistants for fraudulent misrep- resentation. The **Iowa Court of Appeals** threw out the lawsuit, ruling that the detectives 'were not justified in relying on any promises made by [management].'

U.S. District Judge Robert Pratt ruled that taxpayer funding of Iowa's

*Honor Roll 2006,
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Democratic Opportunity in Iowa

The unprecedented incompetence of George Bush has provided a surprising opportunity for the Democratic Party to recover its majority status once again. For half a century following Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the Democratic Party was the natural party of government. The majority status of Democrats survived until the presidency of Bill Clinton, who turned against the Democratic Party base and ushered in a period of Republican rule at every level of government.

Things happen a bit later in Iowa, but we had our own Franklin D. Roosevelt in Harold Hughes, who served as Governor from 1963-1968 and ushered in an unprecedented period of reform in Iowa, strengthening the Democratic Party base with his commitment to public education. Iowa also had its own Bill Clinton in the person of outgoing governor Tom Vilsack, who cooperated with the Republican leadership of the Iowa legislature to undermine the achievements of Harold Hughes. Vilsack reached a deal with the Republicans: you can cut taxes on the wealthy, and I will divert what is left in the state budget from education to "economic development." The result has been a free fall in the quality of education in Iowa, as K-12 teacher pay sank to unprecedented levels, and the national rankings of our state universities fell.

With a new governor, and new majorities in both House and Senate, the Iowa Democratic Party has a chance to redeem itself. But will it? Will party leaders build on our working class base of Iowans who are committed to labor unions and public education, or will they abandon the base and repeat the mistakes of Clinton and Vilsack by catering to investors and big corporations?

The early evidence is mixed. Democrats will certainly pass an increase in the minimum wage, which is overwhelmingly popular and will strengthen their electoral position. But will they act to strengthen the power of Iowa's labor unions? The minimum wage is very

important as a symbol, but it affects very few workers directly. Increasing the number of unionized workers in Iowa, who can then negotiate not only higher wages but improvements in health care and retirement benefits, is far more important. When John L. Lewis went around the country organizing mine workers in the 1930s, he put up a poster with a picture of President Roosevelt on it, and the caption: "The President Wants You to Join the Union." Will union organizers be able to put up a similar poster with a picture of Governor Chet Culver? Let's wait and see what happens to the Fair Share legislation that is now on the table, which would allow unions to collect dues from everyone who they are obliged by law to represent.

What about public education? Unlike his (Republican) predecessors Terry Branstad and Robert Ray, Tom Vilsack was a consistent adversary of public education. During his first term in office he cut 100 million dollars from the budget of the University of Iowa alone. His recent appointees to the Board of Regents have launched an all out war on the University of Iowa. Regent Ruth Harkin, wife of Democratic Senator Tom Harkin and an arms industry lobbyist in Washington who hasn't lived in Iowa for decades, has been a rock-solid supporter of Vilsack appointees Michael Gartner and Teresa Wahlert in their campaign to impose a corporate model of governance on our Regents' institutions.

What will our new governor, and our new legislative leaders, do about education, particularly as educators compete with other priorities such as "economic development" (i.e. corporate welfare) and a massively expensive expansion of our prison system? We'll have to wait and see what Culver proposes for spending for education at all levels: K-12, community college, and higher education. Public education is overwhelmingly popular with Iowans, including many Republicans. If education comes first in Democratic priorities, we could enter a

period in which Democrats become the natural party of government in Iowa, with permanent majorities at all levels of government.

There are, however, some disturbing signs that our Democratic leaders do not get it. Senate Majority leader Mike Gronstal is talking about building a huge, enormously expensive new prison at Fort Madison, which will soak up tax money that could be used for education. Equally disturbing is Governor-elect Chet Culver's rapid move to address an issue that was completely invisible in the November election, i.e. the allegedly disproportionate property tax burden borne by commercial property owners. How many commercial property owners voted Democratic in November? How many home owners, by way of contrast, voted Democratic? You can answer that question yourself, yet Culver has put together a blue ribbon committee, packed with Republicans, Chamber of Commerce officials, and representatives of the home builders lobby, to make recommendations that are entirely predictable. Shift the property tax burden from businesses to homeowners!

Among Democratic voters, homeowners and union members outnumber commercial property owners by a large margin. Why the urgency on Culver's part to address the concerns of commercial property owners? What does that priority say about our system of campaign finance? There is plenty of time left for Culver to follow the model of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harold Hughes rather than Bill Clinton and Tom Vilsack. It will be interesting to see if he chooses property owners and prosecutors over homeowners and wage earners. ✕

—Jeff Cox

Kaizen, Anyone?

Now that the holidays are over and New Year's resolutions have been made, I'm inviting you to join me in a life-saving diet. No, you say? Sick of diets? Well, this is not Atkins or South Beach, but an ENERGY diet.

It's "life saving" because if we humans continue to heat up our planet, we are going to be living on top of each other in northern Canada – or much worse. We each make many energy choices every day which impact our environment. Even though they are small choices, when added together with hundreds and thousands of others, they count up. The Japanese word "kaizen" means "small steps lead to a large outcome," thus the Kaizen Diet.

There are approximately 140 new coal-fired generating plants in the planning stages across the US, including Iowa, which would increase CO2 tremendously, even with so-called "clean coal technology." The Iowa one alone will be like adding one million more cars to our roads. But if each household in the US replaces just TWO of their most used 100-watt incandescent bulbs with comparable compact fluorescents (CFB), that in itself would remove the need for those 140 new coal burning plants. Two bulbs per household is a small step if ever there was one!

My husband and I have replaced at least 30 incandescent bulbs in our old farmhouse. Our REC earlier offered a set of free CFBs to customers to get them started. We participate in our utility's green power program even though it is slightly more expensive than "dirty power." All utilities are required by law to offer one – have you investigated yours? The utility must purchase enough renewable energy to fulfill their green power customers' needs. You may not be able to install a wind turbine in your back yard, but buying some green energy from your utility is another small step you can take. If you can afford to pay \$2.50 or more for a cup of specialty coffee, or

smoke a pack of cigarettes a month, you can afford some green power.

We have placed all our computer gear, printer, scanner, etc. on a power strip and turn off the power to the strip each night or when we are gone. Ditto for our TV, VCR, stereo, and other gadgets. Real Goods' Holiday 2006 Resource Guide offers a new "smart power strip" with which "high tech sensors know when you shut down the main device, and they cut off everything else. Saves up to 72% of the energy your systems use and offers state of the art surge protection too, \$29!" All electronic gadgets have a "phantom load" even when supposedly turned off. Day after

" There are approximately 140 new coal-fired generating plants in the planning stages across the US, including Iowa."

day, week after week, these small loads add up.

The University of Iowa, with the help of other groups, set in motion an energy conservation program a couple of years ago – with a goal of \$250,000 savings – initially prompted by budget cuts. Forty per cent of the faculty and staff left their 25,200 computers running round the clock. Shutting off those computers nights and weekends saved up to 75% of the electricity to keep them running & avoided burning 10,000 tons of coal! Other small steps reminded employees to unplug coffee makers, battery & phone chargers, turn off lights, etc. when not in use.

Automatic thermostats have been around a long time, but I'm always surprised to run into people who don't use one. We lower our heat to 60 degrees at night and when we are gone. There is no heat upstairs where we sleep. We use an electric blanket for an hour to warm up the bed, then turn it off while sleeping in stocking caps under plenty of blankets. Just like *The Night Before Christmas*, complete with mice!

A daughter gave us two 39-watt solar panels. We've used them to power a small TV and fans in our camper (which has recently become more of a guest house due to high fuel prices). During the winter we tilt one of the panels to the south on our deck and hook it up to a 12 v. DC camper fan in the basement to help dry clothes hanging on lines. This adds needed humidity to the air we breathe. Not everyone has solar panels, but almost everyone can use clothes lines or racks – summer and winter – to dry their clothes instead of using energy-hog clothes dryers.

Not everyone can take big steps, but EVERYONE can take small steps. By encouraging family, friends, and others to do the same, together we can take a large step toward reducing our use of pollution-producing energy. I'm curious to know how many PP readers will undertake a personal "Kaizen diet." Please tell me at: bahannon@netins.net. ☘

— Beverly Hahesy Hannon lives on a small farm south of Anamosa. She served 8 years as a state senator, and one year as President of Iowa Renewable Energy Association.

Area Man Weighs In on 2008 Caucuses

As Party boss in University Heights, I've been fielding calls from prospective presidential candidates.

I vowed not to support anyone who voted for Bush's idiocy in Iraq, so that made Feingold my guy—but Rusty called to say he's not running. I asked him, "What's a peace Democrat to do?" The other candidates have vague plans to pull out troops within 50 years, redeploy them to protect our oil, or just slaughter fewer Iraqis and American soldiers than the ventriloquist's dummy who sits on Cheney's knee.

Hillary called, too. I told her straight out, "Hi, I'd rather be waterboarded than back you. The rightwing attack machine can't wait to serve you up on a silver platter." Clinton was once a progressive's dream: strong woman, smart lawyer, street fighter. You can only coast so far on having worked for McGovern in '72. On her own, Hillary would have been great, but she hitched her racing sulky to an Arkansas mule. She's shed all principle and wallows in corporate cash, lapping up moderate swill while she deigns to sit in Bobby's seat. Clinton voted for the war, and before it became unpopular, wanted to send more troops to die. She leads the pack now only because her name is Clinton.

Evan called during my bagpipe lesson. "Ev," I said, "I snored through your governorship when I lived in Indiana. I liked your executive order allowing state employees to organize, but honestly you're the most boring and cautious politician since Thomas Dewey. You take polls on your hairstyle! Serving longer than any chair of the Democratic Loser-ship Council isn't a plus, nor is being in the Senate Centrist Coalition." I can't find it now, but I swear that earlier this year Evan said something about taking the Democratic Party back from the peace fringe. If Birch were dead he'd be spinning in his grave.

John Edwards dropped by. I wasn't too hard on him — he's the only politi-

cian talking about poverty. He voted for Bush's frigging war, but now says that was a mistake. I told him, "You're a nice guy, but I swore on Wellstone's autobiography never to support a candidate from south of the Mason-Dixon Line."

While I'm bashing southerners, wouldn't it be great if we could get the new Congress to abrogate the treaty admitting Texas into the Union? There'd be no need to impeach Bush; he wouldn't be eligible to be president. I'd even buy him and Rove matching luggage for the trip home. We'd allow immigration from Tejas, just no Republicans. Let's get Loesack on that.

John "I cannot tell a joke" Kerry emailed me, but he forgot to remove his speechwriter's name before forwarding it. I replied that I've seen two too many Massachusetts nominees crash and burn. There must be something in the water that renders Bay State politicians helpless against GOP dirty tricks. (The Kennedys drink Perrier). I still recall Dukakis folding up under Daddy Bush's smears. Kerry could have silenced Junior in 2004 by calling him what he is: a coward and a deserter who shirked military service while bleating that everyone else, except Dick, should go and fight International Communism. John, you blew your chance. Next!

People say that Chris "I'm the good Senator from Connecticut" Dodd looks presidential—or maybe he doesn't know about Grecian formula. He plays a liberal on TV, but voted for the war. I give him credit for meeting with Hugo Chavez, but I'd like him more if he called Bush "El Diablo," too.

Barak and I did coffee after his speech. He may be charismatic and speak well, but I advised him to build more of a record before running. He himself says he's a blank slate. God knows what the Republicans would write there. The latter-day Goebbels who made the ads against Harold Ford Jr. now works for

McCain. Can anyone blink "Rightwing pandering" in Morse code?

Tom V. stopped by while he was in town to scoop the Regents' poop. "Governor," I said, "You're a puzzle. You say F-you to the Farm Bureau by suggesting farm subsidy cuts, but you signed that moronic English only law. I worked with you to mandate a school librarian in every district, but you went and staffed the Board of Regents with escaped lunatics and aliens from Planet Wellmark. You can quote the minutiae of legislation, but you were ignorant of the race-biased job tests used in the executive branch."

"Tom, you've been to Iraq, and you've called 46 Iowa families whose soldiers were sacrificed to enrich Haliburton, yet you won't demand an immediate pullout. That guarantees Iowans will be coming home in body bags for the next 10 years." A light bulb appeared over his head. The Gov. cried out, "Duncan, you're a genius! I'll ditch Gartner and Wahlert, hire the people who failed that job test, and be the first candidate to insist the troops come home today!" Actually he didn't say that, but I like the genius part.

Lacking a viable candidate among the living, I'm going out to Ida Grove to summon Harold Hughes from the Great Beyond. He'd pull our soldiers out now and he wouldn't sit still for all this centrist crap. Can you lend me a shovel? ✂

—Duncan "The Librarian" Stewart
runs his precinct by the book.

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Prison Fellowship Ministries program at the Newton Correctional Facility is unconstitutional. Pratt didn't settle for a slap on the wrist. He ordered the Fellowship to repay \$1.5 million to the state for "the severe nature of the violation," including a reliance on conversion to Evangelical Christianity as a requirement for behavior change. Too bad the judge couldn't also fine the legislators who voted to use public money for religious indoctrination.

Denise O'Brien defied mainstream predictions by handily winning the Democratic nomination for Secretary of Agriculture, then managed to come within 2% of winning the general election despite a well-funded smear campaign by the Iowa Farm Bureau.

Jeff Strottman, Health and Safety Committee head of AFSCME 12, held University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics accountable after several violations involving mishandling of blood. Iowa's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, responding to a complaint filed by Strottman, cited and fined UIHC for leaking containers, improperly cleaned equipment, and other blood-related dangers to workers.

Trish Nelson, activist jack-of-all-trades, was a quiet but powerful force

in many grassroots efforts, including Iowans for Better Local TV, Democracy for America, and Iowa's Rapid Response Network, as well as volunteering for numerous local candidates.

David vs. Goliath: He kept the faith, stayed on message, and rode the tide to an astonishing victory over Jim Leach.

Congressman-elect Dave Loebsack made the most of being in the right time and the right place while not shying away from support for a single-payer health care system, re-writing US trade agreements harmful to workers and communities, and getting the hell out of Iraq.

David vs. Goliath, Part II: Rare is the pair that makes Prairie Dog's Honor Roll two consecutive years, but the daring duo of **Gary Sanders and Wally Taylor** deserves it. The two were victorious in keeping Iowa City from becoming even more complicit in supporting the Wal-Mart juggernaut that destroys small-town culture, exploits low-wage workers, relies on taxpayers to provide health coverage for its employees in the form of Medicaid, contributes to our national deficit through its massive trade with China, ad nauseam. Thanks to their legal skill and a knack for public relations, Wal-Mart will not be building a Super Center on public land within the city limits.

David vs. Goliath, Part III: No one gave her a chance a year ago, but

Elesha Gayman knocked off a long-term incumbent in Davenport to become the youngest female state representative in the history of the Iowa House. The 28-year old grad student ran like an old pro, with important grassroots help from members of Progressive Action for the Common Good, Quad City Federation of Labor, and Iowa for Health Care.

Prophet of the Year: "Some people are...afraid to bring in a business model. But at the end of the day it's the economic formula that will make us great. And that's the most important thing to get right. And that's what all these activities are really focused on, is to get that right."
--Teresa Wahlert, Board of Regents (Cedar Rapids Gazette, 6/16/06) ✂

—*Prairie Dog*

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Most tortured metaphor of 2006:

"Many of those people [who opposed Wal-Mart's purchase of public property in Iowa City] are overzealous Boy Scouts who want to help the old lady cross the street when she may not want the help. Will we come down on the next big sports store because they sell weapons that kill animals?"

—*Bob Elliott,*
Iowa City City Council

Most tortured metaphor of all time:

"They overplayed their hand...the goodwill bank hasn't run dry, but it's been bruised."

—*State Senator Mike Gronstal*

Beatitude

I respected Mr. Lewis; respected him a great deal for he had "paid his dues" and turned the other cheek many times over. His professional goals were of necessity modest, as he was a Black man in the South in the 1960s. My acquaintance with him rested on his role as an accomplished toxicologist at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, where we were colleagues in the Forensic Sciences. His aspirations were truncated by bigotry, geography, the times and politics of the South. Mr. Lewis was competent, courteous, remote, and quietly dignified. His hair was graying and thinning, his eyes were bright and penetrating, and he was portly, which gave him the appearance of strength, not obesity.

The city had many problems. The most pressing at that time was school integration. The newspaper reported a vocal, aggressive, and potentially threatening gathering in the Black section

of the city. This gathering consisted of Black community members and a few white city leaders. Their demands were for fairness for the Black school children. In the newspaper account of the meeting was a picture with Mr. Lewis in the front row. He was not only articulate but had the strength of will and purpose to speak out publicly – such courage.

The next day I went to visit him at the Hospital Laboratory and asked him, "How is it that you, a committed leader in the Black community, have the strength and courage to press your will for what is obviously right but potentially self-destructive if pushed? Why do you do this when there is nothing in it for you?" I remember he stood next to the lab bench and, after much thought, shared an answer of wisdom: "If you don't do nothing, you can't be right." ✂

—Earl Rose lives in Iowa City.

Headlines

The best mainstream editorial headline of 2006 appeared in the Iowa City Press-Citizen on 12/10/06:

"Rogue regents wreck search"

Political junkies in Iowa love the caucuses, but no one is more obsessed than the Des Moines Register. On October 15, a full 15 months before the 2008 caucus, a Sunday Register headline read,

"Warner's departure leaves void"

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" The only tired I was,
was tired of giving in."
—Rosa Parks