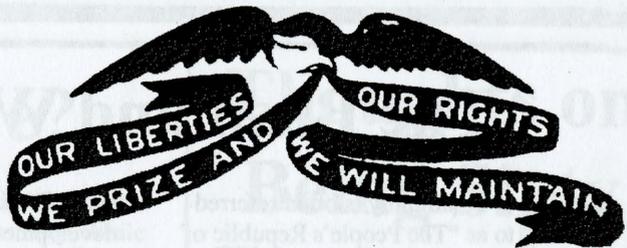


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Fall 2007

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Caucus on Christmas!

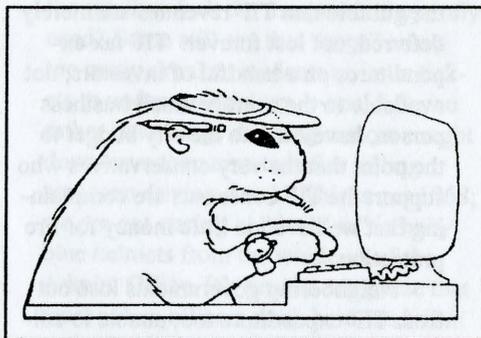
This time, make it count. That's the message from Florida Democrats who are determined to move their primary into January, forcing Iowa to hold its caucuses earlier than the currently-planned (and state-sanctioned) date of Jan. 14.

After much deliberation, the Prairie Progressive Editorial Board has concluded that the logical caucus date is clear. To promote family values and maximum participation in the democratic process, let's caucus on Christmas!

- It's a national holiday, so most people won't have to take time off from work
- After several hours with relatives, it's a good excuse to leave the house
- A walk to the schoolhouse or library will do you good after a day of gluttony
- Quickly bored with gifts, children will come along and view the civic process
- We all need a legal outlet for the season's repressed resentments and disappointments
- Wiccans, Muslims, and Jews will feel as welcome as Christians (may not apply to Republican caucuses)
- You can't go shopping anyway
- You can ease your guilt about Xmas-related carbon emissions
- You're not likely to hear dogs, cats, or Band Aid singing Xmas songs
- We might find an answer to the question, "Who would Jesus caucus for?" ❧ — *Prairie Dog*

Citizens to Vote on Police Citizen Review Board

Many readers may recall that Iowa City did not have a Police Citizens Review Board (PCRB) when Iowa City artist Eric Shaw was killed by police on August 30, 1996,



while working in his downtown studio. After a great outpouring of citizen demand a PCRB was formed on a temporary basis by the City Council; more citizen support and effort were required three years later in order to insure that the PCRB was not discontinued.

In 2001 over 1600 Iowa City eligible voters signed a petition asking for a City Charter Amendment to create a stronger PCRB. A lengthy journey through the legal system followed, but on August 30 of this year the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that the citizens' petition does not preempt Iowa law and must be submitted to the voters as a proposed amendment to the Iowa City Home Rule Charter.

The Police Citizens Review Board Amendment will be on this fall's November 6 City election ballot as Public

Measure D. The Amendment states that the PCRB will be required to hold at least one community forum annually to hear citizens' views on the policies and practices of the Iowa City Police Department and to make recommendations about such matters to the City Council. The last time such a meeting was held was several years ago; the meeting that evening was attended by over 100 persons and many constructive comments were heard and recorded by the Board.

The Amendment also authorizes the PCRB to investigate citizen claims of misconduct by sworn police officers and to issue independent reports of its findings to the City Council.

Finally, the Amendment grants to the PCRB the power to subpoena witnesses in the relatively rare cases of allegations of serious police misconduct.

Voting YES this fall on Public Measure D will strengthen the Police Citizens Review Board, give it permanent status by adding it to the City Charter, and be a positive step toward maintaining and improving citizen/police relations by giving residents a voice that might otherwise not be heard.

An organization to promote passage of the Charter Amendment has been formed. Visit www.betterpcrb.com/ and help make Iowa City an even better place to live by donating to assist in the passage of this amendment. ❧

— *Caroline Dieterle lives in Iowa City and Carol deProsse lives in Lone Tree.*

The Bush and Wilburn Administrations

Our community is often referred to as “The People’s Republic of Johnson County”, a very old joke that still gets a laugh from David Yepsen. In a People’s Republic, you would expect to find People’s Elected Officials. In Iowa City, though, for the last thirty years there has been a permanent right-wing majority on the city council. At various times there have been progressive dissenters, and at one time a progressive bloc of three councilors, Karen Kubby, Bruno Piggott, and Jim Throgmorton, who managed to have some impact on the way the city is governed. Recently, though, under the consensus politics practiced by Mayor Ross Wilburn, the long-standing right-wing policies of the city have solidified into a unanimous conventional wisdom in support of corporate welfare for wealthy investors and aggressive policing, the hallmarks of American conservatism.

In the upcoming city council race, incumbents Ross Wilburn and Regenia Bailey are entirely unopposed. Two progressive candidates, Mike Wright and Brandon Ross, are competing with three others for the two at-large slots. If the two progressives were to be elected, we could perhaps expect some dissent from the right-wing consensus, but the conservative majority would still be intact. There would be little reason to expect any serious change of policy from the new city council.

The underlying principles the Iowa City City Council are very little different from the fundamental principles of the Bush Administration. First, city government should serve the interests of wealthy elites first. The costs of government should be shifted from the business community to working people, homeowners, and small business owners through the use of regressive sales taxes, tax subsidies for the wealthy in the name of economic development, and fee increases of the sort used to fund the new water plant. Funding for education and social services, especially for children,

should be cut back to pay for “economic development”. Finally, major problems in society should be dealt with by a combination of arrests, incarceration, and the use of force.

While the Bush Administration uses massive tax cuts to redistribute wealth upwards, the Wilburn Administration uses the tools of economic development. Tax Increment Financing Schemes (TIFs) are not the only way the city subsidizes a handful of wealthy investors, but they are the most effective because of their sheer complexity, which shields them from public scrutiny. The City Council has a new staff person, a director of economic development, whose full time jobs are (1) to shred the city’s tax base with unintelligible new TIF proposals and (2) persuade the gullible that TIF revenues are merely deferred, not lost forever. TIF tax expenditures on a handful of investors, not available to the average small business person, have cut into the city budget to the point that the very conservatives who support the TIF consensus are complaining that we have too little money for fire protection.

Neighboring governments lose out from TIF expenditure too, unable to collect property taxes on TIF developments. Thanks to the TIF policies of both Iowa City and Coralville, Johnson County is now losing more than a million dollars a year in tax revenue that could be used to support social welfare programs such as Shelter House, the Crisis Center, the Free Medical Clinic, United Action for Youth, and the Domestic Violence Project.

Not content with raiding the budget of Johnson County, the city even tried to extend its reach into Iowa City schools. City council member Bailey asked the School Board, which also suffers from TIF expansion, to divert some of the new school sales tax revenue from our school children to help fund the police! There in a nutshell is the combination of tax breaks for the wealthy, the defunding of education, and deference to the police that are the hallmarks of the grand consensus on the City Council.

The Bush Administration pursues a nationwide campaign of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration that has turned America into a competitor with China for the title of the World’s Largest Prison. The Wilburn Administration does its part through high-arrest policies that have turned Johnson County into a competitor for the title of Most Over-Policed College Town. 17% of University of Iowa Graduates leave the university with an arrest record. 10% of undergraduate males are arrested each year.

Defenders of this appalling record refer to Johnson County’s very high density of bars and levels of alcohol consumption, but the arrest record is clearly related more closely to policing policy than to variations in the consumption of alcohol. Arrests for underage drinking (PAULAs) go up and down from year to year, varying from just over a thousand some years to nearly 3000 in others. Arresting young people for drinking is a higher priority in some years than in others. The level of alcohol consumption apparently goes up year after year, regardless of the level of arrests, which clearly have no deterrent effect whatsoever. All they do is produce a generation of young people with arrest records that will interfere with their ability to get good jobs and get into graduate schools.

Iowa City has higher arrest rates for marijuana possession than comparable counties as well. At last count, narcotics violations in Story County, home to Iowa State, were measured at a rate of 237/100,000 people; in Johnson county the rate was 584/100,000. This too is a matter of police policy rather than a greater prevalence of marijuana consumption here. The Iowa City Police use tactics such as a garbage searches, sniffer dogs, and “knock and talks” on the doorstep to gain entry to homes under false pretenses. All of these disgusting tactics have the warm approval of the city council, including Mayor Wilburn, who voted

*Bush and Wilburn,
Continued on Page 6*

What Do You Believe?

Do you believe that a 61-year old frat boy, addled by cocaine and binge drinking, runs the country? Or does the cloven-hoofed Vice President call the shots while George W. gallops around the White House on his stick horse, wearing a cowboy hat and toy six-guns? Do you believe that 3,800 American soldiers who have died, the 27,000 wounded who rot in cash starved Veterans hospitals; and the estimated 70,000-600,000 Iraqis killed make us safer here in the Homeland? Do you believe that our vaunted Democratic opposition, elected to end the war and the Orwellian security state, has really tried to stop the murder in Iraq?

What about the 45 million -- that's 45,000,000 -- people in the United States who have no health insurance? Are the various Democratic candidates' plans for half-measures, glacial reform, and private sector cherry-picking really credible? Why is it that none of the top- money Democratic candidates has the sense to support single-payer health insurance? All they have to do is open Medicare to everyone. It runs on 3-5% overhead, covers everyone over 65, and allows choice of doctors. And with some backbone, Congress and the next President could do it in a stroke. Or do you put more faith in the free market that the GOP jihad-ists champion? As they say, we have the best health care in the world -- they just neglect to say it's only available to those with insurance or who inherit millions like Mitt Romney. And of course the GOP members of Congress running to be the next Cheney in Chief all have GOVERNMENT-run health care.

Here in Iowa, for one brief moment, gay Iowans enjoyed the dubious privilege of being able to marry their life partners. One couple from Ames rushed to Des Moines and actually got married. One. Do you think, as the mouth-foaming fundamentalists cry, that heterosexual marriage is on the brink of destruction? Do you agree with the gay-bashers that it is fine for conservatives to cruise for sex

in public bathrooms, but God forbid that two people should want to marry. While I'm at it, isn't it hilarious that Senator Larry Craig thinks that by changing his guilty plea in Minnesota he will reverse his sexual polarity? I guess maybe I should feel sorry for him having to conceal his inner self, but I am enjoying seeing the damned hypocrite twist in the wind too much.

Iowa City is experiencing an epidemic of attacks on women. Since Cheney's errand boy ended Clinton's COPS program that helped local police forces, the Iowa City police have been short-staffed, to the point of having to cancel community policing programs. Does anyone think that the local police are not doing all that they can to solve this crisis, though they lack the manpower they truly need? Some still say that "cops" arrest too many drunken students or issue tickets to underage drinkers—wouldn't you rather have binge drinking minors caught downtown than arrested after killing someone driving drunk? This is not 1968; we are not staring at "the Man" in baby blue helmets from the windows of the Admin. Office. It's time to recognize that most police officers work hard, and want to do the right thing.

Does anyone really believe that the bar owners bankrolling the anti-21 movement are libertarian heroes? They just want to get students, all students, stinking drunk, and damn the consequences to their health or the puke on the pedestrian mall. Instead of struggling for the freedom to become a 20-year-old alcoholic, why not fight to change the idiotic drinking age from 21 to 18? If you are old enough to vote or get blown to bits in Iraq why should you be too young to drink an expensive beer in Bo' James? But then we all know that those under 21 go to bars to socialize, never to sip illicit brew.

I believe I'll have a beer myself. ✕
—Donnchadh Stiubhart,
AKA Duncan Stewart,
lives in Johnson County

Thoughts on Being Sixty

I'm now twice the age at which we weren't supposed to trust any one. That was one belief of the 60s that my favorite uncle called "sophomoric." At the time I had to go look the word up in the dictionary. I took mild offense at his criticism and now I agree with him.

My parents are both dead and, as my brother said after our mother's death two years ago, "Well, I guess we're next." And that's my perspective at sixty. I really don't feel what I thought sixty would feel like when I looked ahead from my thirties. Except for minor aches, I feel pretty good.

Learning I had cancer shortly before my fiftieth birthday did quite a bit to take the sting out of turning fifty. I was quite happy to be alive for my fiftieth birthday. I had no sympathy for friends who bemoaned turning fifty. There are worse things that can happen than turning fifty.

I feel different being sixty. Even though I still appreciate being around for sixty, distance from the cancer diagnosis has diminished my gratitude for just being alive. It's all going too fast. Paul Simon is singing "I'm Old" and "Who's gonna love you when your looks are gone?" I would be fine if I just stayed 60, but I really don't want to keep getting older.

I used to think I wanted to live forever. I didn't want to miss anything. I still feel like I want a lot more of life, but occasionally now I can glimpse a time when I will have had enough. I remember my 96-year-old grandfather matter-of-factly saying, "It's enough already."

When I went recently to visit 99-year-old Grandma Sally, my sister-in-law's mother, I could tell she was beginning to check out. She greeted me in the lobby of the assisted-living facility she where she lives. She was happy to see me but at the same time, I think it

*Being Sixty,
Continued on Page 5*

Pee and Sympathy

My kidneys quit working ten years ago. I should have died but because of modern medicine I am alive.

I survive because of a process of cleaning the blood called hemodialysis. I go to a center where a team of technicians, nurses, doctors, social workers, and dieticians following the guidelines set down by Medicare keep me alive. They strain my blood through a machine to remove all toxins and excess fluid. In other words, the machine urinates for me. The team also provides all the support services the government thinks I will need. According to the center's handbook, I am also part of the team.

The kidney center I attend is the only one in the city. The richest person in town comes here as well as the mentally ill, the indigent and the criminal population. The center also reflects Anchorage's diverse population. There are many Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native Alaskans, Whites, Hispanics, and African-Americans.

I sit in my chair at the dialysis center trying to get comfortable. I casually glance at the person in the next chair. He must be some sort of petty criminal because he is in leg irons. That part is not unusual. What has gotten my attention is the fact that he is wearing pink socks, with a pair of innocent-looking black and white tennis shoes. A ring of metal loosely encircling his ankles seems somehow incongruent with his pastel socks. I wonder why he chose them.

I have always wanted to ask one of the criminals how they have the energy to go out and commit crimes while they are dialysis patients. Most kidney patients complain of a lack of energy and find it hard to hold a job. This guy is obviously industrious if not sensible.

A murderer used to be on my shift. He killed his wife before he became a kidney patient. Now the state brings him over with a guard who sits and reads or flirts with the female technicians while the murderer sits in manacles and has his treatment.

In the United States everyone who needs it gets dialysis. This is probably

good because America has such a problem deciding who is worthy of anything, particularly medical treatment.

Dialysis takes at least three hours, three times a week (according to the Medicare guideline). We sit in chairs that are three to five feet apart. We are attached to the machine by two needles inserted into a subcutaneous plastic or natural super vein in our arm sometime the vein is in the leg or even in the jugular. We have to lie still. We lie there listening to the various gurgles and beeps of the machine, with few distractions. We do have little individual televisions provided through the generosity of a local strip bar.

Our other distraction is listening to the dieticians, social workers, and doctors discuss our every physical function, habit, and behavior. Most of the illusions that we have about ourselves have been destroyed, either by the illness or by being a patient on dialysis.

The doctor checks on the state of our bowel movements (something I didn't use to discuss in crowds), the amount of fluid we have been drinking, any little fever or sore that may have appeared. They are also not very discreet about mentioning a person's weight.

One dietician likes to remind us of the really terrible things that can happen if we continue our poor eating habits or continue our pre-dialysis diet. She has lab reports so she knows when we've been naughty or nice.

Kidney patients can't eat a lot of the food most people think of as healthy. Dialysis machines are not as efficient as kidneys and can't do all the regulating, metabolizing and other mysterious functions of these tiny organs. We have to watch our intake of potassium. That means beans, leafy green vegetables, oranges, bananas, etc. We have to limit phosphates, all dairy products, nuts, and chocolate. Too much potassium -- your heart will stop. Too many phosphates -- calcium crystals can form in your heart or brain. They sometimes come out of your skin in little hard bumps that itch. You will be sorry. You will be really sorry if

your heart stops. People have been rushed to the hospital or even died from eating too many oranges.

The diet is really upsetting. Trying to figure out what you can eat so that you don't accidentally kill yourself is stressful. I ate a pink grapefruit one day. It tasted so good that I thought if I die, I die.

Most of us isolate ourselves during our treatment through sleep. The center discourages sleeping, but most people feel lucky if they can disappear into their dreams.

One of the few policies the center has regarding our privacy is if we go into the hospital or die. I'm not sure I understand this, since I know who is constipated and who cannot follow the diet. When a patient disappears, there is a noticeable ripple of anxiety through the other patients. Did they die? Why did they die? Of course there is the question that may not be asked aloud -- could that happen to me? We are not all close to each other or talk everyday but there is a bond between us. Death is always there at the edge of things.

Most of the time I come and I am grateful that I live in this century, in a country that thinks there is some reason to keep me alive. Some days the impact of having kidneys that cannot perform a simple biological function that would set me free from the center, the diet, and "the team" weighs on me. I even begin to resent those super-size drinks and bathroom breaks most people take for granted.

When I attended a conference last year, one of the presenters talked about getting a kidney transplant and peeing for the first time in years. This would normally be a private topic, but to a kidney patient it is a dream.

There was also a time at the conference when a speaker asked how many people had been on dialysis for more than 5, 10, 15, and then 20 years and over. People applauded and rejoiced. We do survive.

Without dialysis I would live maybe 7 to 10 days. Some people choose to leave dialysis. Some choose not to go on. It is a personal choice. I choose to stay and to live. ✂

— This article by former Iowan Toni Pounds first appeared in the January 2003 *Prairie Progressive*.

Bush and Wilburn,
Continued from Page 2

for them when some activists challenged them before the council.

The only serious challenge to the Wilburn Administration's policy of arrest and incarceration has come from outside the council, from citizen activists who petitioned for changes in the city charter to introduce more accountability into community policing and strengthen the Police Citizens Review Board. Determined to protect their high-arrest practices, and shield them from public scrutiny, the Wilburn Administration fought these petitions tooth and nail for years through the legal system, at considerable expense to the public.

Iowa City progressives have had much greater success with direct democracy than with electoral politics. Two regressive city sales tax referenda have

gone down in flames. A proposal to build a new jail to house the victims of municipal policies, one supported by virtually the entire leadership of the community, suffered a humiliating defeat. At the same time, Iowa Citizens voted overwhelmingly to build a new library funded by property taxes. The right-wing city council majority fought for years to keep a bond issue off the ballot, only giving in to public opinion when their regressive sales tax initiatives failed.

Progressives will have another chance to exercise direct democracy this November when a City Charter Amendment, authorized by the Iowa Supreme Court and addressed elsewhere in this issue, will be on the ballot. It would give the Police Citizens Review Board the same powers to investigate complaints as

the Iowa City Human Rights Commission.

If the people of Iowa City could vote on TIFs, they would be voted down regularly. Thanks to the hard work of Caroline Dieterle and Carol deProse, and the cooperation of the Iowa Supreme Court, we can vote on changing the City Charter to make the police more accountable. ✂

—Jeff Cox

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945

Iowa City, IA 52244



"We have all known the long
loneliness and we have learned
that the only solution is love and
that love comes with community."

—Dorothy Day