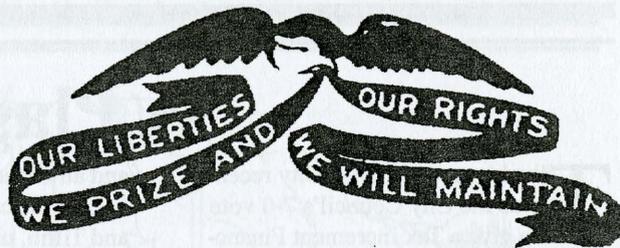


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Summer 2011

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog's Honor Roll: Heroes then and now

*But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near*
— Andrew Marvell

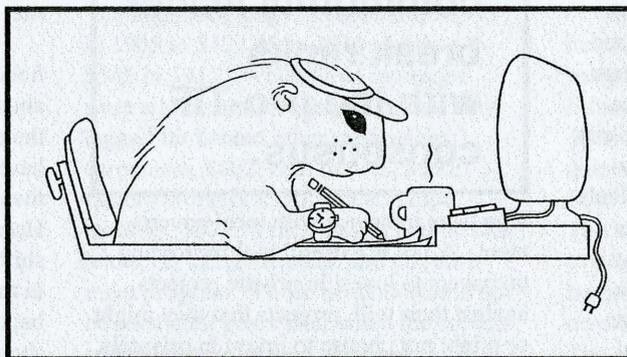
The Prairie Progressive printed its first Honor Roll in 1987. Many who have appeared in our pages have shuffled off this mortal coil. None will be more vividly remembered than Jean Martin, who died on May 16, 2011. Jean was one of the PP's first financial supporters, and continued to be a loyal subscriber for a quarter of a century. This issue is dedicated to her memory.

No one on the PP Honor Roll can top the day-to-day, year-after-year accomplishments of Jean Martin. A single mother who holds two jobs, Martin is a community activist of unparalleled dedication, never in the news but always in the background of every grassroots effort for social justice. Martin gives time, encouragement, money -- as well as honest and useful criticism -- to the Iowa City Federation of Labor, New Pioneer Co-op, Emma Goldman Clinic, Environmental Advocates, and elected officials and candidates. Long may she serve.

—from *Prairie Dog's Honor Roll*, December 1999

Beverly Rens has been a nurse, SEIU organizer, school board member, Poweshiek County Democrats co-chair, one of the first supporters of Barack

Obama in Brooklyn, Iowa, and friend and mentor to countless health care providers, teachers, and activists. Like Jean Martin,



Bev worked best behind the scenes, but never feared speaking truth to power. For decades she has contributed to the ACLU, progressive candidates, and the Prairie Progressive. From her farmhouse on the highest point in Poweshiek County, she befriended immigrants, gays and lesbians, and the folks struggling to get by in their trailer down the road.

As President of the Brooklyn-Guernsey-Malcom Community School Board, Bev decided — against her superintendent's objections — that sexual orientation and gender identity should be included in the schools' anti-bullying policy. Bill Morain of Lamoni and members of other school boards warned her that it could get ugly (this was before Iowa's Safe Schools Law required such policies). Bev lined

up a student who had been harassed at school and was willing to speak publicly. After Bev presented her resolution to the board, the student's testimony wasn't needed. "We must be an inclusive, not exclusive, community," Bev told the board. "This is not an issue of boys wearing t-shirts or girls putting on make-up. This is an issue of civil rights. If enforcement is difficult, so be it. And it has to be enforced not only with the kids, but with teachers in this school district who have allowed and even added to the harassment of gay students." Bev concluded with a promise: "If this doesn't pass tonight, you can count on me to bring it up every year for as long as I'm on this board." Despite the superintendent's vigorous resistance, Bev's resolution was passed and remains in place.

Bev was at the home of the Mayor of Brooklyn, Iowa, on the night that the visiting Mayor of Brooklyn, New York, persuaded his counterpart — with Bev's help — to support Barack Obama. Bev was also one of the first rural Iowans to publicly support Jesse Jackson for President in 1987, helping to set the table for Obama twenty years later.

Backed by the Poweshiek County Democratic Central Committee, Bev gave serious thought in 2008 to challeng-

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A Plague of TIFs

The big news in Iowa City recently was the City Council's 7-0 vote to give a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) grant to local developer Marc Moen to refurbish a former downtown restaurant and bar which is now sitting empty. The purpose of a TIF is to allow an investor to retain, for his own purposes, a portion of the property taxes that would otherwise be paid to the City of Iowa City, the Iowa City Community School District, and Johnson County.

Why should Marc Moen be allowed to pay a lower property tax rate than other small business people who are also making investments? Why should homeowners be required to pay higher taxes than a TIF recipient? Why should Johnson County and the Iowa City Community School District have to consider cuts in social welfare spending and teacher layoffs in order to increase Marc Moen's return on his investment? The main reason given by members of the city council is that he is not opening a new bar downtown, although it seems unlikely that anyone would invest in a new bar when several are already sitting empty.

If there is anything approaching a consensus among the leadership of our community, it is that TIFs are a useful tool in promoting economic growth. There is no scientific evidence to support the belief that TIFs increase the overall level of investment, jobs, or net tax returns in the short or long run. On the contrary, there has been a great deal of research, much of it done right here in Iowa City by Peter Fisher, on the effectiveness of local grants and tax rebates to investors for economic development purposes. Fisher's research shows that, far from promoting economic growth, grants and tax credits for economic development simply shift around jobs and investment, at a large cost in tax revenues to local governments. People who believe that TIFs are useful in increasing tax revenue are, in scientific terms, no different from the people who believe that humans and dinosaurs roamed the earth together a mere 4000 years ago.

Why, then, do all of our legislators,

and all of the elected city council members of the cities of Iowa City, Coralville, and Tiffin, unanimously support TIFs? It can only be from a shared religious faith in the capitalist principle of "trickle down;" i.e., that the best thing a government can do to benefit the public is hand tax money over to private investors and watch the economy grow. That is what TIFs do with great efficiency: shift tax money away from working people and homeowners and the overwhelming majority of small business owners, and put it instead in the hands of wealthy investors

"It was refreshing to see a local community leader break ranks with the pro-TIF consensus."

who have influence with local government. A TIF is a useful tool for forcing taxpayers to invest in private projects against their will, projects that they might or might not choose to invest in privately.

The scientific reality of the shredding of our tax base is slowly beginning to become evident, though, even to the people who run our local governments. Johnson County has already lost millions of dollars in tax revenue to TIFs, putting pressure on county taxpayers and the county budget alike. Local school districts, especially Clear Creek/Amana, are beginning to feel the effects of the TIF-crazy communities of Tiffin and Coralville, despite desperate attempts by the state legislature to disguise the effects of their misguided TIF legislation with subsidies to schools.

It was refreshing to see a local community leader break ranks with the pro-TIF consensus. Former Iowa City City Council member Bob Elliott suggested in a column in the Iowa City Press-Citizen that TIFs, while no doubt "a good thing," had gotten out of hand,

especially in Coralville where 41% of all property is subject to a TIF. The ink was hardly dry on Elliott's column when he realized that he had made a terrible mistake in breaking ranks with the consensus among community leaders. Elliott quickly wrote not one but two Press-Citizen columns recanting much of what he had to say, and listing all of the many benefits of TIFs, all anecdotal, none scientific.

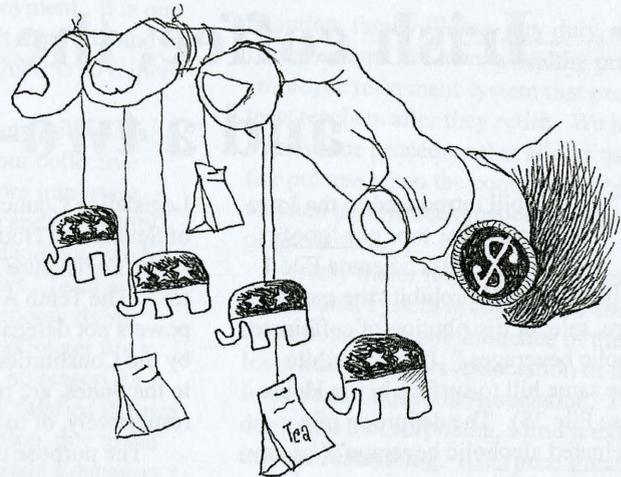
Elliott was right the first time, though, and we should be grateful to him for beginning a long overdue conversation. He simply did not go far enough in explaining how intrinsically harmful the entire TIF method is, corrupting as it does the fundamental purpose of local government, which is to levy taxes fairly in order to support government services that serve all the people equally.

It is time, now, for the elected officials most affected by the inherently abusive use of TIFs to speak out. With the exception of Rod Sullivan, where have our county supervisors been while their budget has been shredded by TIFs? Hardly anyone knows the facts of this tax shift because our supervisors have joined in the elected official/community leader bandwagon, and kept silent in public. We should keep their silence in mind when they come to us, hat in hand, asking for a large tax increase for a huge new jail.

Were any school board members down at the city council meeting, pleading with them not to shred the school budget with a TIF for a refurbished former downtown bar? Have any of them pointed out the harm that will be done to our schools by the planned extension of TIF-mania to University Heights? It's time for other elected officials and community leaders to join Bob Elliott, and break the silence about TIFs. If they find that they are no longer invited to receptions for elected officials sponsored by the Iowa City Area Development Agency, they can always take it all back. ❧

— Jeff Cox

Teachers Unions and the Strength of the Profession



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The Iowa State Teachers Association was founded in 1854, eight years after Iowa became a state. At that time there were over 2,000 organized school districts with 44,000 children in attendance. Only a third of the school-age population attended school in 1854.

Iowa, always a leader, was one of the first states in the nation to allow black children in its public school. The year was 1875. Most of the K-8 school districts consisted of a one-room, one-teacher school. Of Iowa's 1700 teachers, 55% were men. High schools were non-existent and were viewed as undemocratic since most saw them as serving only the wealthy.

In its early years the teachers' organization was a loosely-knit group made up primarily of administrators who occasionally dabbled in politics. Teaching was not viewed favorably by the public in the 1880s and 90s. Most teachers were poorly prepared and poorly paid. The average school teacher taught no longer than three or four years. Many looked upon teaching as a temporary occupation, a means of making a living until something better came along. In 1893 the average annual salary for men was \$298 and \$243 for women, far below the \$316 per year needed to provide the basic necessities of life.

In 1911 the ISTA initiated and supported the 'Better Schools Commission' to improve public education. The 35th General Assembly acted on those recommendations and made significant changes in the teaching profession. For the first

time minimum wages were established, based on preparation and experience. The beginning pay increased from \$345 in 1905 to \$423.85 in 1910 and then to \$545 in 1915. While these increases were significant for the profession, they lagged far behind other professions: carpenters, \$802; coal miners, \$660; factory workers \$550; and common laborers, \$572. Teachers still had no sick leave, no fringe benefits, and no retirement program. Those benefits would not be seen until years later when the second education renaissance occurred.

In 1944 a School Code Commission was established by the Legislature to equalized educational opportunities for all Iowa students. The most significant gain for the teaching profession was the establishment of the Iowa Old Age and Survivors Insurance System. For the first time in the history of the state, teachers and other public employees had a retirement system. This system was replaced in 1953 by our current Iowa Public Employees Retirement System. It wasn't until 1949 that public school teachers were granted sick leave.

During the 1960s the Association began to see the waning of administrators' influence in the organization. Teachers began to advocate for their rights in the classroom and fight against unfair treatment by school boards and administrators. While teachers fought

for the right to collectively bargain, that law was still a long way off.

The teachers' strike in Keokuk helped reinforce the need for a collective bargaining law in Iowa. The Keokuk Education Association was one of the few districts in the state who voluntarily bargained a contract with their school board. In 1970 the process was put to the test. The association and the board had agreed to a sophisticated impasse procedure for bargaining. During the bargaining process they reached an impasse over salary. The association wanted an increase in the index on the salary schedule; the school board wanted to eliminate the index completely. A mediator was called in but failed to help the parties reach a compromise. The association finally agreed to accept the mediator's final recommendation but the school board refused. The board voted to adopt a new salary schedule without an index; the teachers responded by going on strike. The community backed the teachers. After 19 hours, four teacher arrests, and a \$250 fine for the association, the school board agreed to further negotiations and the strike ended. It was the only teachers' strike in Iowa's history.

In 1971 a significant victory for teachers occurred when the courts ruled that pregnant teachers could no longer

*Teachers Unions,
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Irish coffee, the 10th amendment, and a two-year budget

The first bill introduced in the Iowa Senate this year tops our 'goofy bills' list for 2011. Senate File 1 is a bill that would prohibit "the manufacture, sale, or distribution of caffeinated alcoholic beverages." It took a while for the same bill to surface in the House (House File 25). The definition of a "caffeinated alcoholic beverage" [is] any beverage containing more than one-half of one percent of alcohol by volume, including alcoholic liquor, wine, and beer, to which caffeine is added."

These bills are designed to prevent the sale of those pre-mixed beverages in cans and bottles that become popular overnight. It appears as though young adults can't handle the mix of caffeine and alcohol, so the government has come to the rescue. No matter what you think of these prepared drinks, or the government's involvement in preventing them from getting into the hands of young binge-drinking adults, the legislation would actually prohibit a bartender from mixing a rum and Coke, a grasshopper, or an Irish coffee.

The federal Food and Drug Administration has already warned the manufacturers of the four major brands of pre-packaged caffeine/alcohol drinks that the caffeine added to the alcohol is an "unsafe food additive."

Freedom to be left alone means nothing to some legislators who also claim to want less government. HF 84 would prohibit a person who owes child support from entering a gambling casino. The bill doesn't specifically prohibit the person from gambling, just prohibits them from being there – of course, there's an exception if the person works there. Punishment for violating this prohibited act is a simple misdemeanor.

House File 419 creates a Tenth Amendment commission under the Legislative Council. Not many people know about the legislative council, so let's begin with a definition of that. The

Legislative Council is a "bipartisan group of Senate and House members that serves as the Legislature's executive committee." The Tenth Amendment states: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

The purpose of Tenth Amendment resolutions throughout the county is to nullify acts by Congress that states don't like. Those particular acts are health insurance reform, gun control laws, medical marijuana, cap & trade, sanctuary cities, and so on. Some issues are well-meant, but none of them are going to be properly addressed by a "bipartisan group of Senate and House members." The really goofy aspect of this legislation is that the decision would be left to an executive committee of the Legislature and not the Legislature as a whole. Hmmm.

HF 153, introduced by 28 Republican legislators (but not the Speaker or Majority Leader) would codify the precise moment when life begins. Well, why not? Several other laws predict the precise time of certain events. Adolescents magically transcend into maturity at specific times in their lives. They're mature enough at 16 to drive a car, mature at 18 for purposes of serving in the military and buying cigarettes, and at 21, they have gained enough maturity to gamble and drink. However, they're never mature enough to drink caffeinated alcoholic beverages (see the first goofy bills above). Here's the really goofy part of the bill: "The Iowa supreme court shall not have appellate jurisdiction over the provisions of this section."

If someone were to challenge the constitutionality of HF 153, wouldn't they go to federal court? It's a wonder that the legislation didn't place the appellate jurisdiction of the United States Supreme Court out of reach. Aside from that, enacting a law that tells the Iowa Supreme Court that it can't review a

law for constitutional flaw is taking the phrase "legislating from the bench" and flipping it to say "adjudicating from the chamber." The sponsors of the bill can't see the irony. The proof comes with the next entry – resolutions getting rid of the Supreme Court.

Toward the end of the session, four resolutions were introduced, each calling for the impeachment of Iowa Supreme Court Justices Mark Cady, Brent Appel, David Wiggins, and Daryl Hecht. Their crime was alleged malfeasance in office for going along with the *Varnum v. Brien* decision of April 3, 2009. According to House Resolutions 47 through 50, these four justices "created a constitutional imbalance and confusion within the State of Iowa as to the proper constitutional function of each department, thus undermining the integrity of the tripartite separation of powers among the departments and creating social disorder and unrest." The charges of impeachment were brought by a former peace officer, two farmers, a diesel technician, and a retired attorney and home educator. You have to wonder who is the confused party here.

The goofiest legislation of the year wasn't even a bill, it was a theory. The Governor's idea of implementing a two-year general fund budget is the dumbest measure yet. This proposal is so preposterous it has drawn criticism from some of the Republicans in the House who chair Appropriations subcommittees. If enacted, it will allow the governor to shift money from one department to another in the second year. Meanwhile, the Legislature is supposed to focus on policy bills. Ouch!

In 1995 the Iowa Code consisted of three volumes. Today, the printed Code is seven volumes, twice the size as it was 16 years ago.

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Teachers Union,
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be forced to resign. They could use their accumulated sick leave for maternity reasons and they had the right to return to work following their maternity leave.

The most important action improving the teaching profession in Iowa took place in 1974 when the collective bargaining law was adopted. At long last teachers were in control of their profession. They were now equal partners at the bargaining table and would be allowed a voice in determining their salaries, benefits, and working conditions. What followed was a time of record-breaking increases in salaries and substantial improvements in contract language governing leaves and fringe benefits.

I entered the teaching profession in the 1976. It was the first year that teachers in Iowa City were allowed to bargain. The teachers who came to the bargaining table represented hundreds of educators in Iowa City who were educating the children in our community. I benefited from all those teachers who came before me and fought for those salaries and benefits. I understand that it was the work of thousands of educators throughout the history of our state who fought for the right to bargain and to improve

our conditions of employment. It is our responsibility to protect that right and to educate others about why it is so important.

While there are many politicians who would like to gut our collective bargaining laws, it's more important than ever for the public and especially young people to understand how we have benefited from those laws. Teachers are now protected by due process rights, and school boards can no longer fire a teacher on a whim with no reason for the dismissal. Teachers' salaries in Iowa now rank 26th in the nation, due to the hard work of our Iowa State Education Association. New teachers are paired with mentors who can help them weather the challenges of those first two years in the classroom. Teachers, both male and female, are allowed leaves for maternity,

adoption, family illness, jury duty, and bereavement. We have a healthy public employee retirement system that protects teachers after they retire. We have a grievance procedure that allows us a fair process when the contract has been violated and we seek justice without fear of retribution.

Every major improvement in our educational system in Iowa came about through the help and influence of the Iowa State Teachers Association or the Iowa State Education Association. I don't find that surprising, I find it exciting and reaffirming. Kids need great teachers, and great teachers need great unions. ✂

— *Representative Mary Mascher of Iowa City has served in the Iowa House since 1994*

Many thanks to our generous friends who have contributed a total of \$1,905 and 10,000 yen (an average of \$26.16 per subscriber) to the Prairie Progressive in 2011.

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE is Iowa's oldest progressive newsletter. It is funded entirely by subscriptions from our readers. Editors for this issue: Jeff Cox and Dave Leshtz. We appreciate your support.

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ing State Representative Betty deBoef, a reliably anti-civil liberties, anti-worker, anti-education vote at the Capitol. Sen. Larry Murphy and the Iowa Democratic Party decided to run with Jim Van Scoyoc. DeBoef trounced him, 9,033 votes to 5,095, and has since gone on to join four of her most irresponsible and vindictive legislative peers in filing an impeachment resolution against four Iowa Supreme Court justices.

Recently Congressman Bruce Braley took to the floor of the US House and talked about the people he meets in his district who perform daily acts of heroism. Bev, Braley's longtime friend and constituent in the First District, "is one of those heroic people. She is passionate,

fierce in her dedication to her friends, and has devoted her entire life to making her community, state, and country a better place for all Americans."

On December 1st, 2010, Bev was diagnosed with ALS. Prairie Progressive readers can send her a card at St. Francis Manor, 2021 Fourth Ave., Grinnell, Iowa 50112. ✂

— *Prairie Dog*

Irish Coffee,
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Can you imagine the growth of the code in even-numbered years if that is all the Legislature deals with in a session? As it is, concentrating on how to spend money takes up a considerable amount of time during a session. Without this diversion there could be so many goofy bills introduced that some of them would actually become law.

Don't think for a minute that all these bills come from one specific political party. SF 1 and HF 25 were introduced by two respectable, long-time Democrats. But they were willing to amend the bills so that they weren't so goofy. ✂

— *Marty Ryan is the Prairie Progressive's senior correspondent for goofy bills*

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"The difference between doing nothing and doing something is everything."

— *Fr. Daniel Berrigan*