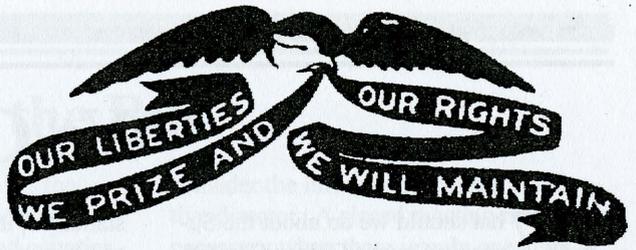


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



UNION LABEL 11

April 2012

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*A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT*

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## Life Sentences: Prairie Dog's Spring Reading List 2012

*"Each line should be a station of the cross."*

— Charles Wright

With the premature appearance of spring this year, the Prairie Progressive eagerly brings you our Summer Reading List one season too soon. Some day you may tell your grandchildren that these were the books you were reading when we still had winters.

*Emily, Alone* by Stewart O'Nan.

The author of *Last Night at the Lobster* deftly switches gears in this understated, precisely detailed description of several months in the life of a widow in Pittsburgh facing the daily twists and turns of aging. The Eat 'n Park's two-for-one breakfast buffet, grandchildren who don't send thank-you notes, friends who have strokes — all become profound and moving in O'Nan's deceptively simple and deeply humane novel.

*I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin's Life*

in *Letters* edited by Michael Long. One of the most skilled organizers in American history has never received full appreciation. The gay pacifist advisor to A. Phillip Randolph and Martin Luther King, Jr., was the mastermind of the 1963 March on Washington, bringing 250,000 to the Capitol as the world watched to see if 'Negroes' could pull off such a feat.

Rustin did it flawlessly, long before cell phones and social media.

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot.

Race, class, family bonds, faith, medical ethics, somatic cell fusion, bureaucratic politics, and justice — all wrapped up in the most suspenseful cultural/scientific thriller since Anne Fadiman's "The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down."

*K Blows Top* by Peter Carlson.

Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping's recent trip to Iowa got a lot of hype, but it couldn't compare to the media sensation created by Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the US in 1959. At the height of the Cold War, the mercurial leader of America's most feared adversary was eager to see Disneyland, but it was his visit to Roswell Garst's farm in Iowa that created the modern-day media scrum, as dozens of reporters and photographers flocked to Coon Rapids for a discussion of "peace through corn." Carlson captures the zany anxiety of a country still in the grips of hysterical anti-Communism, in a hilarious but scholarly snapshot of the Eisenhower years, five years before the appearance of "Dr. Strangelove."

*How to Do Things with Dance: Performing Change in Postwar America* by

Rebekah Kowal.

Another look at Cold War culture, describing the political tensions of American life as interpreted and reflected by modern dance masters like Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham. Art, integration, sit-ins, immigration, and migration are woven together in University of Iowa Professor Kowal's graceful illumination of "the power of movement."

*By the Iowa Sea* by Joe Blair.

A heating and air conditioning technician lays his life bare as he reveals the terror and beauty of a strong but teetering marriage, the tenderness and pain of raising a child who has autism, and the excruciating self-doubts of growing from a young man with dreams into a middle-aged man with responsibilities — all playing out as a historic flood menaces a very familiar college town.

*The Writer's Almanac*.

Charles Bukowski once wrote of encountering an angry person fuming for no apparent reason. He speculated that such anger must be due to her poems failing to arrive that day. You can avoid that failure and receive your daily poems by signing up at <http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/>

*Prairie Dog's Spring Reading List,*  
Continued on Page 5

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# We Can Do It!

**W**hat should we do about the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, which has opened the floodgates for money from the 1% to corrupt our elections? More broadly, how do we (the People) limit the vast influence of corporate power in our electoral system?

Public opinion is strongly in favor of regulations on corporate campaign spending, but the American people sit helplessly while Democrats and Republicans alike compete with each other to raise as much corporate cash as possible. President Obama, who opposed the Citizens United decision, has set the standard for Democrats by his decision to take unlimited corporate donations, raising the prospect that both political parties will soon be funded by corporate money. Individual voters will be left with a choice between two corporate parties, neither of which will stand up for individual rights, working people, small business, human rights, or the environment.

The most prominent proposals to remedy the corporate threat to democracy focus on a constitutional amendment to overturn the legal doctrine of "corporate personhood". Thirty-four members of Congress (including no Iowans) who have introduced House Joint Resolution 90, which would amend the constitution with this language: "The rights protected by the Constitution of the United States are the rights of natural persons and do not extend to for-profit corporations".

Critics have argued that this would go too far in limiting the rights of corporations, which are ultimately associations of individuals. It is significant that the American Civil Liberties Union not only supported the Supreme Court's Citizen United decision on first amendment grounds, but opposes effort to eliminate all corporate rights from the constitution.

The drive to amend the constitution to eliminate "corporate personhood" is not the only way to manage the flood of corporate money. There are efforts to make legislative changes that are permissible under the Citizens United

standards, including requiring greater transparency in campaign contributions, extending transparency requirements to the so called "Super Pacs" that make independent expenditures for candidates, enforcing the laws on the books against coordinated efforts by campaigns and PACs, extending the existing individual contribution limits that remain in place for contributions to campaign committees to other bodies that act as campaign auxiliaries, and providing some forms of public funding for campaigns in return for agreements to limit campaign expenditures. Finally, there is discussion of a constitutional amendment that will allow the public to place reasonable regulations on corporate campaign expenditure without abolishing altogether their right to act in a corporate capacity.

Most important of all are efforts to elect candidates to office who are not bought by corporate contributions. Around the country there are Democratic candidates and office holders, including some Iowa legislators such as Chuck Isenhardt of Dubuque, who simply refuse to accept corporate campaign contributions. In a recent Democratic primary for the new 13th Congressional District of Illinois, Dr. David Gill narrowly defeated a corporate Democrat who was awash in lavish campaign contributions orchestrated by the Democratic Party's national leadership. Gill refuses to accept corporate campaign contributions.

In Iowa, anti-corporate activists have created a new political committee, the Iowa People's Alliance, to act as a 'party within a party' to support the nomination of populist candidates in party primaries. The IPA will be circulating a "Clean Candidate Pledge" to candidates for legislature in the Iowa primaries who pledge to decline financial support from for-profit corporations, limited liability companies, and affiliated corporate political action committees and who support reforms to allow the public to restrict, regulate or prohibit campaign contributions from for-profit corporations.

Recruiting and supporting anti-corporate candidates in party primaries will be a difficult task. Following President Obama's example, the Democratic party leadership is not only rushing to embrace corporate funding, but using those corporate resources to oppose anti-corporate Democrats in the primaries, as they did recently in the defeat of Dennis Kucinich. Anti-corporate Democrats will face cynical contempt and abuse from supporters of the corporate party elite. When Russ Feingold condemned President Obama for selling out to corporate funding, MSNBC's Ed Schultz called him a "loser". Others condemned Feingold by arguing that "you don't take a knife to a gunfight", as if that mindless slogan could end the conversation.

There is too much at stake, though, to give in to mainstream Democratic Party cynicism and corruption. Corporate-funded Democratic elected officials and candidates claim that "we can take their money and then vote against them," but nobody believes them outside of the partisan echo chamber inhabited by political consultants, campaign staff, and party activists. When Democrats and Republicans alike are funded by corporate power, and voters have no choice but to vote for a corporate-funded candidate, there will be no democratic restraints on the corporate agenda. Americans have an admirable history of using the ballot box to rein in corporate power, and there is every reason to believe we can do it again. ✂

— Jeff Cox

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## The Wheels on the Bus

Republicans and Democrats are natural adversaries. But there are times when Democrats can get in the way of Democrats. It's as if the left foot doesn't know what the left hand is doing.

A prolonged example of inconsistency is the matter of open meetings and public records. For five long years, the Iowa Newspaper Association and the Freedom of Information Council have been trying to get a bill enacted that would create a board with power to enforce Iowa's Public Records/Open Meetings law – Chapters 21 & 22 of the Iowa Code. Currently, if you suspect that a violation of Chapter 21 or 22 has occurred you can rely upon the county attorney or the Attorney General to prosecute the matter. Or, maybe not. You see, the same individual, department, or agency that is required to enforce the law is the same individual, department or agency that is supposed to defend the violator in legal matters. This is why it's necessary to fix the law – it's broken.

Sen. Pam Jochum (D-Dubuque) has been the organizations' champion of moving the bill through the Senate. However, the concept has repeatedly failed to move out of the House. Several of us lobbyists thought the stumbling block was the House Republicans. It appears as though we were wrong. With a lot of help from government subdivisions throughout the state, the enforcement mechanisms have been whittled out of Senate File 430 in the House. Senator Jochum's help in the House is coming from a self-proclaimed Tea Partier, Rep. Walt Rogers (R-Cedar Falls).

Last year, legislation was introduced and moved quickly through the Senate. Once it reached the House things began to get bogged down, again. Subcommittee after subcommittee was held in an attempt to rid the bill of the enforcement board and replace it with an advisory council. The problem with an advisory committee is that it becomes another tentacle of state bureaucracy. The committee is filled with wise people saying

brilliant things, but in the end, it's the staffing that makes all of the decisions. But representatives of cities and counties want the advisory council. You have to ask: why?

There are 940 communities in Iowa. There are 99 counties. Each has its own legal counsel. That means there are potentially 1,039 different opinions on issues involving public records and open meetings. Enforcement, education, compilation of complaints, and compliance with the law need to be centralized in one place. One body, speaking one language, is necessary for the perseverance and equal application of Iowa's dedication to openness in government.

But each little city and large county wants the power to determine for itself whether a record is permissible for you to see, or whether a meeting is okay to conduct in front of people who may criticize the deciders. And then, there is more to it than cities and counties. Public hospitals, school boards, and Regents institutions have to defend their turf.

Let's face it; even some Republicans are having a nightmare. Doesn't this create more government? Why should there be another board when we can anoint a current board with advisory responsibilities? Like the Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board? That is an option being heavily lobbied by those who fear enforcement.

Last year, a representative from the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board (IECDB) attended a subcommittee meeting (or two) and controlled the discussion and effectively killed the bill. He couldn't make up his mind whether the IECDB was appropriate or would be overburdened. This year, his staff is lobbying to attain the duties and responsibilities of the proposed enforcement board. But looking at the history of the IECDB you have to consider that in 2010 it lost its executive director to another state position. The series of events that followed were a transparency boondoggle. The IECDB did not advertise the opening, but went into a closed session to

consider the hiring of its current executive director. A closed meeting is not necessary when there is only one applicant. There was no legal authority for the board to retreat to a closed forum. The best guess you can find is in Iowa Code Section 21.5, subsection 1, paragraph "i." which states that a governmental body may go into a closed session "[t]o evaluate the professional competency of an individual whose appointment, hiring, performance or discharge is being considered when necessary to prevent needless and irreparable injury to that individual's reputation and that individual requests a closed session." This body should be considered to enforce and administer Iowa's Open Meetings/Public Record laws? Probably not the best choice.

Cities, counties, Regents, school boards, public hospitals, all want the status quo, or at least a lax advisory board. They want it housed in a current bureaucracy. They prefer that it be a place where the little people can go to get an explanation – not action. Why not? The apparent conflict-of-interest works so well for them as it is.

The wheels on the bus go 'round and 'round, 'round and 'round... ❀

— Marty Ryan & Stephanie Fawkes-Lee, Fawkes-Lee & Ryan, Inc.,  
[www.iowappa.com](http://www.iowappa.com).

"We promise according to our hopes; we fulfill according to our fears.

— de la Rochefoucauld

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# ALEC Alert

Trayvon Martin, 17, armed with a cell phone, Skittles and iced tea, was slain in Florida after being pursued by a gun-wielding neighborhood watch volunteer. The shooter will likely be protected by Florida's "stand your ground" law, enacted in 2005. This law has tripled the 'justifiable homicide' rate in Florida since its passage.

Iowa Republicans would like us to have a "stand your ground" law, too. Iowa Democrats heroically pulled a disappearing act similar to what their counterparts did to Gov. Walker last year in Wisconsin, but they couldn't prevent the "shoot first" bill from passing the House this session. Fortunately, we have a two-Democrat vote advantage in the Senate that killed the bill, but it's not going to stay dead. Shortly after the Trayvon Martin story hit, the Sioux City Journal reported that Iowa sponsors of "stand your ground" still intend to push the bill here, even in light of the national debate spawned by Trayvon's death.

Incredibly, the essence of the law is that all a shooter needs to pull the trigger is a "feeling" of being threatened. It is not necessary to demonstrate that you were in fact being threatened.

The "stand your ground" law or, as some prefer to call it, the "shoot first" law, is just one of the horrible laws being handed down to state legislatures through a group called ALEC – the American Legislative Exchange Council (LIMITED GOVERNMENT/FREE MARKETS/FEDERALISM, according to its website, [alec.org](http://alec.org)).

ALEC is basically an operation of the Koch Brothers and other huge corporations. It is not a lobbying group. ALEC actually writes legislation in the form of templates or "model" laws, and then pushes these laws (that have nothing to do with the needs of any particular state) through conservative legislators whom it often support through campaign contributions.

In Iowa, House members' ALEC dues are automatically paid for by taxpayers. An Iowa House representative must opt out of ALEC rather than opt in. All of the Iowa House Democrats have opted out except for one, Brian Quirk of New Hampton, but Republican legislators have not followed suit. Gov. Branstad is a founding member of ALEC. In the Iowa Senate, dues are not automatically paid by taxpayers, so there is no way to find out if a senator is a member except by asking.

It is not just gun laws that ALEC has a hand in. Virtually every awful bill being considered in Republican-controlled state legislatures across the country originates with ALEC. Voter ID laws. Union-busting laws. Privatization of prisons. Defunding and dismantling public education. Anti-environment laws. ALEC introduces 1,000 of these bills every year to legislative members; one in every five of them is enacted into law.

ALEC is just now beginning to be reported on in the media. Paul Krugman wrote a column last week, 'Lobbyists, Guns and Money,' about ALEC. Rachel Maddow has done a broadcast or two discussing ALEC. Amazingly, a local TV station in Omaha recently did a 60 Minutes-style expose on ALEC and the voter ID bill in the Nebraska legislature - including an embarrassing confrontation with a legislator. It even mentioned Iowa. Here's where you can find this must-see local reporting: [kmtv.com/news/local/140379323.html](http://kmtv.com/news/local/140379323.html)

But even though ALEC gets occasional attention, you will not hear or see ALEC routinely mentioned in the media's ongoing coverage of the Trayvon Martin shooting, or Voter ID laws, or the gutting of public education.

According to the Center for Media and Democracy in Madison, "The links between ALEC and 'voter ID' legislation have been well-documented, but newspapers in the states impacted most by the

voter suppression legislation have been largely silent on this connection. ALEC began to focus on voter ID shortly after 2008, when the highest general election turnout in nearly 60 years swept America's first black president into office with strong support from college students and African-Americans. Soon, 'Preventing Election Fraud' was the cover story on the Inside ALEC magazine, and ALEC corporations and politicians approved 'model' voter ID legislation in 2009. Around 34 voter ID bills modeled after the ALEC template were introduced in 2011."

Perhaps the media believe that discussing ALEC is too wonky or complicated for the average person. But I believe that if people knew where these laws were coming from, they would less likely be tolerated. People tend to think their own legislator is not a bad guy or gal, and we essentially trust them to make laws that are appropriate for Iowa. I am absolutely convinced that if more people knew that the Koch Brothers and their multi-national corporate cronies are using our legislators for their nefarious purposes, they would not stand for it.

Find out more about ALEC at the Center for Media and Democracy at [prwatch.org/cmd](http://prwatch.org/cmd) and [alecexposed.org/](http://alecexposed.org/) where you can find the "model" bills and compare wording to the bills in your state. ✂

— *Trish Nelson is a native Iowan and editor of Blog For Iowa, [www.blogforiowa.com](http://www.blogforiowa.com)*



April 7, 1917

Billie Holiday born

April 7, 1927

First public demonstration of television

April 15, 1967

First mass draft card burning

April 20

2nd Equal Justice Summit for HELP Legal Assistance

Rogalski Center, Saint Ambrose University

(563) 322-6216

April 27, 1927

Coretta Scott King born

April 28

Workers' Memorial Day/ Anniversary of OSHA

April 28

District Conventions

April 28

ACLU of Iowa Annual Dinner University Club, Iowa City

April 29, 1992

LA riots sparked by Rodney King verdict

April 30, 1967

Muhammad Ali stripped of boxing title for refusing to be drafted

May 5

Cinco de Mayo

June 2, 1952

Steel industry takeover by Truman ruled unconstitutional by Supreme Court

June 29, 1972

Capitol punishment ruled unconstitutional by Supreme Court

June 29-July 1

Mississippi Valley Blues Fest LeClaire Park, Davenport

**Prairie Dog's Spring Reading List, Continued from Page 1**

*Braintrust* by Patricia Churchland.

What is this thing that humans call morality? Why does our species tend to be trusting and trustworthy – most of the time? A new and fascinating attempt by a neuroscientist to comprehend the innate and socially-shaped behaviors that allow society to survive.

*Dreams of Significant Girls* by Cristina Garcia.

Three very different teen-agers – Iranian, German-Canadian, and Cuban-Jewish – become friends in Switzerland in the 70s. The author of "Dreaming in Cuban" proves that some of the best fiction being written today falls in the category of 'Young Adult,' as the girls deal with parents, politics, privilege, boys, rites of passage, and "the poetics of an inexplicable universe."

*Life Sentences* by William Gaddis.

A new book of essays included here simply because it has the best title of all time. ✨

— *Prairie Dog*

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# The Prairie Progressive Endorses Tom Slockett for Auditor

Johnson County Auditor Tom Slockett faces a vigorous primary challenge in the June Democratic Primary. In most democracies around the world, the people have no chance to vote on anyone for a position like our County Auditor, who not only provides an independent check on the power of the County Supervisors to set taxes and write our budget, but is in charge of the heart of American democracy: elections.

The opposition to Slockett comes largely from controversies about personnel issues in his office, which are serious matters. He has admitted to making mistakes, has apologized for them to his staff, and is working to correct them. Our endorsement, though, rests on Slockett's record of making the polls



more accessible to the people in Johnson County than anywhere else in Iowa -- and perhaps in the nation. He has made many enemies in making it easy for us to vote, especially among Republicans and right-wing Democrats who cringe when they see an increasing percentage

of the population actually exercising their constitutional rights.

We have grown accustomed to being able to vote early at Hy-Vee, the Public Library, in the lobby of University Hospital, or even at a West High athletic event. We should not, however, take our rights lightly. We are in the midst of a nationwide attempt to roll back the rights of Americans to vote, especially in Republican-controlled states, where they have been successful in reducing the voter rolls.

Please join the Prairie Progressive in supporting Auditor Tom Slockett, a state and national leader when it comes to the successful, efficient, non-partisan expansion of the democratic rights we all depend on. ✂

## THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945  
Iowa City, IA 52244

"Already they have begun to do to Gandhi what has been done to Jesus – worship him as an unobtainable ideal. That is the sin of men of goodwill – not really to believe in their own power."

— Bayard Rustin