

# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Fall 2013

---

*A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT*

---

## Days of Hope, Years of Rage

I'm a backward looking person—I walk through Iowa City and still see the brick buildings that disappeared in the frenzy of urban renewal. The past always seems almost within my grasp, whether I am holding the hob-nailed boots my uncle wore fighting the Nazis or I relive the days of hope and years of rage my parents experienced, when I heard 1960s icons Todd Gitlin and Congressman John Lewis speak this summer. Perhaps this is the curse of a being failed historian or all the dusty books I've read as a librarian. I only know that what I see and think today is always viewed in the rearview mirror of my mind as life zips by on the Eisenhower interstate of my existence.

I'm certain that I was not the only one who thought of the nearly forgotten wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or Obama's "secret" drone strikes when Todd Gitlin, SDS stalwart, journalist and social critic spoke at the UI about the silence of the American corporate media on these events. Nor was I alone when I stood on a chair whooping as John Lewis roused a room of librarians this summer in Chicago, just days after the Bush Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act.

Watching my parents fight segregation in St. Louis and organize faculty against the war in Vietnam kindled in me both fleeting days of promise and a slow burning anger at the years of social injustice and militarism that still foul the American ideal. Now I've seen those same feelings in my 13 year old son Andy—optimism that President Obama's reelection reflects real racial progress,

but also fury about Tea Party crazies who deny global warming and coddle the obscenely rich in the name of working Americans.

My son is blessed, and cursed, with the youthful ability to see issues in clear-cut moral terms—black and white, good and bad—not the shades of gray that cloud my own thoughts. When I told him that Obama's reelection in 2012 might well be as pivotal as Franklin Roosevelt's victory in 1936 because both events prevented radical Republicans from dismantling the social safety net completely, he responded that GOP whackos still hold the balance of power in Washington and are perfectly happy to destroy the federal government to protect their rich masters. When I laugh at the slow-motion suicide of the Republican Party as it slides further and further to the right and closer and closer to irrelevance, my son reminds me that another conservative party will arise to safeguard the interests of the 1%. When I tell him to take comfort in the aphorism that the moral arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice, he wonders why Americans should have to tolerate poverty and racism here and now.

This summer my son and I talked a lot about two books I read for review. The first, "A Freedom Budget for All Americans: Recapturing the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in the Struggle for Economic Justice Today" by Paul LeBlanc and Michael Yates, restates the vital influence of American socialists in the Civil Rights fight and reminds us, in this 50th Anniversary year of the

March for Jobs and Justice, that Martin Luther King and others fought not just for civil rights, but for economic equality at home and an end to American neo-colonialism abroad. Socialist thinkers like Bayard Rustin, the gay Black man who organized the March in 1963, and labor leaders like A. Philip Randolph, who roped in progressive labor support for the march, still appear in the background of film clips from King's "I Have a Dream" speech, but these leftist advisors have been softly airbrushed out of view by the feel good nostalgia that allows even Rand Paul to claim that he would have marched with King, and obscures the fact that JFK, beatified liberal saint, had 4000 paratroopers massed to quell the riots expected when so many Negroes congregated in Washington.

The Freedom Budget proposed in 1965 was meant to eliminate the roots of racism, poverty, economic injustice and social inequality by in 10 years through full employment, healthcare and education for all, and a minimum standard of living for every American. By contrast, LBJ's Great Society and War on Poverty only aimed to mitigate some of the most glaring disparities in American life, and even those efforts fell by the wayside when Johnson escalated the war in Vietnam.

The second book my son and I have talked a lot about is "What Went Wrong? How the 1% Hijacked the American Middle Class and What Other Countries Got Right" by George Tyler. Tyler's book is a

*Days of Hope, Years of Rage,*

*Continued on Page 6*

---

---

# Ten Ways Iowa City Can Do Things Better

**W**ith City Council elections coming up, it's time for citizens to speak up and ask candidates where they stand. Here are ten ideas, most of them inexpensive, which would be popular with many voters.

1. Get rid of the confusing electoral system bequeathed to us by the League of Women Voters. No one understands it. Let's elect our mayor directly, and give her some of the powers now monopolized by the City Manager, who few people can name. Other councilors could then be elected either in single member districts, or at large with a single transferable vote, which helps with minority representation.

2. Let's vote on Tax Increment Financing schemes, just as we vote on bond issues for jails, schools, and libraries. Voters should have a chance to weigh in on the use of public money to fund the new twenty-story tower known as The Shadow.

The City Council has been desperate to block any public vote on using TIF money to subsidize private developers, fearing that they would lose. Let's find out.

3. Free Sunday Bus Service. This will cost money, but don't say it can't be done--look at the Cambus. It might increase church attendance, which should help bring the crime rate down. Sunday bus service will help make up for the City Council's decision to eliminate Sunday SEATS service for the elderly and disabled. As County Supervisor Terrence Neuzil pointed out, SEATS funding could easily come out of Iowa City and Coralville TIF money. Perhaps it could be used for Sunday bus service.

4. Restore the original name of our admirable public library: The Iowa City Free Public Library. When the Hayek Administration, or one of its hapless successors, runs into the same financial constraints as the profligate, TIF addicted

City of Coralville, they will probably try to charge a fee for a library card, claiming that There Is No Alternative (TINA). The city has tried this before, but the Library Board objected. This way, in the future the council will actually have to change the name of the Free Library when they eliminate free library service.

5. Instead of subsidizing private developers in the name of economic

"Restore the original name of our admirable public library: The Iowa City Free Public Library."

development, support consumer-owned, democratic cooperatives whenever possible. Unlike investor owned banks, credit unions have been bastions of stability during the Great Recession. Member owned consumer coops like the New Pioneer put the well-being of the community before private profit. The City could do its banking at the University of Iowa Community Credit Union, and help the New Pioneer find a new downtown location, perhaps on the current City Hall parking lot.

6. Turn the water rates around. The first gallon of water that you use is far and away the most expensive one, especially when the monthly fixed charge is included. That's not right. Other cities have turned the rates around, and we can too.

7. Speaking of other cities doing things better than we do, there is nothing to prevent the City Council, which controls the budget of the police department, from stating that it is the wish of

the council that the police turn a blind eye whenever possible to marijuana offenses--all of them. It is a common myth, entirely untrue, that all police forces all enforce all the laws all the time. Every police force has to set priorities, and it has been a priority of the Iowa City Police Department to conduct a (very expensive) War on Marijuana, which has turned Johnson County into one of the worst counties in the entire nation in racial disparities in marijuana law enforcement.

8. Take down the offensive, racist signs at the bus stop at the end of the Old Capitol Mall. White people for decades shielded themselves from the weather by standing inside the glass doors to wait for the bus. It was only when Black teenagers showed up to take the bus that signs were affixed telling them to stand back ten feet. They remind me of the colored waiting room signs that I grew up with in the segregated south.

9. Undo the teenage curfew. Until recently Iowa City teenagers had the luxury of being able to go out late and watch a meteor shower, or walk down to Dan's Short Stop and get a snack, or jog, without being hassled by the police. That's all over now that we have Black teenagers in town, and the curfew is generating astonishing racial disparities in the criminalization of young people.

10. Ban lawn herbicides and fertilizer, which run off into our creeks and rivers and get tracked into our houses by children and dogs. There's nothing wrong with a few dandelions, and lawn-owners will save money. Perhaps one of our many fine youth programs can recruit volunteers to dig up dandelions--at free or reduced prices for senior citizens--for those Iowa City residents who find the sight of a dandelion truly intolerable. ✨

— Jeff Cox

---

---

# Yes, I bought no bananas

It was in the produce section of the grocery store when I discovered the danger of allowing others to make decisions for me. Usually my toddler son accompanied me to the store, but on this trip his presence was sorely missed. Although his vocabulary was limited, he had become the decision maker on my weekly food purchases. After staring helplessly undecided at the bananas for a solid seven minutes, I walked away fruitless, recognizing my brain's newfound diminished decision function.

So it came as no surprise to me when the Des Moines Register reported that a recent study found that students in schools that require uniforms do not have greater academic success. This contradicted the findings of supporters and implementers of school uniforms who sincerely believe that uniforms lead to less behavioral problems and greater academic success. It is difficult to locate respected studies that support this heartfelt though possibly inaccurate observation.

The viewpoint that uniforms have a positive effect on human behavior should be honestly examined. Looking at the recent actions of adults in organizations with a uniform requirement raises some genuine concerns. For example, the military is currently battling the public relations nightmare of the estimated 26,000 service members who experienced unwanted sexual contact. Stories of law enforcement officers struggling with illegal drug use, acts of brutality, and other unwanted behaviors are regularly reported. A recent article stated that, "the assistant director of the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy received a stern warning instead of a suspension for making numerous comments in the workplace that were sexually inappropriate and, in one case, threatening, according to a disciplinary letter obtained by the Associated Press."

Further, we all know what cassocks, collars, albs, and surplices seem to do to

many priests. And let's not even mention the power suit of an executive business mogul making millions of dollars with no compassion for the peons working in the sweatshops.

It begs to question if clothing really has a positive, negative, or no effect on human behavior.

In the past, Fawkes-Lee and Ryan was probably the only organization to register against a legislative bill in 2011 that passed the Iowa House Education Committee with a vote of 20-2. Marty Ryan was quoted as stating that he's concerned schools might go too far with a new authority to set dress codes.

"We all know what cassocks, collars, albs, and surplices seem to do to many priests."

"Everything from the food they eat now to the clothes they wear, they're making decisions that should be left for the family," Ryan said. "They're just taking over."

But Ryan said the main reason he's spoken out against the bill is because he believes if passed into law it would invite a lengthy and costly legal challenge.

"I predict that this issue will someday find its way to the United States Supreme Court, especially since the lower courts appear to be all over the place on their decisions," Ryan said.

For the moment, let's set aside the legal and constitutional arguments. Isn't it vital in our quest for a democracy to teach young people to make decisions? Granted, in Iowa voters can simply check a box on the ballot for a straight party vote, thereby eliminating any thought of

examining the qualifications of specific candidates. Thoughtful and responsible voters should give some thought to our elected officials instead of allowing a political party to determine leadership. Is conformity a learned value that can be transformed from the classroom to the ballot box?

Another argument given by school uniform supporters is that a financial burden is taken off of poorer students. I did discuss this issue with a few women who headed single parent households whose children attended private schools. While these women did appreciate the cost savings of uniforms, the main

benefit they stated was the ability to do the laundry on Sunday for the entire week. No one had to think about what clothing to wear to school for the upcoming week. Which leads me back to my initial fear: if a wide-spread use of uniforms occurs, will grocery stores be clogged by groups of people in fresh staring helplessly at the bananas? It would be wise to start out with the mindset that life is a series of making decisions. Let's take the

time to talk with our children about the importance of making sound decisions, possibly starting with, "What am I going to wear today?" ❀

— Stephanie Fawkes-Lee is CEO/  
President of Fawkes-Lee & Ryan

---

---

# An Open Letter to Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich

**Y**ou are one of the best columnists around. And I suspect you're an equally good professor of public policy at Cal. But you need to think bigger...as in running for the US presidency in 2016.

I'm convinced -- and I think many other Iowa Democrats could also be persuaded -- that you are that rare Democrat with a progressive vision which fits the specific times we live in.

On the campaign trail, you would have a good life story to share (and being from Pennsylvania doesn't hurt!) You've already published the obligatory pre-campaign book, *Beyond Outrage*, which exhorts citizens to go beyond mere outrage about the nation's increasingly concentrated wealth and corrupt politics and mobilize to reclaim our democracy and rebuild the middle class.

You have a successful record as one of the Top 10 Cabinet Members in US history, and you want to strengthen organized labor, increase the minimum wage, protect Social Security, cap the deductibility of corporate salaries, and the list goes on. It all adds up to a win-

ning coalition of minorities, labor folks, anti-Wall Street populists and a growing group of younger, libertarian-leaning voters due to your commitment to individual privacy rights.

But what about Hillary? Do not -- I repeat -- DO NOT be afraid.

In 2005-06 Clinton dominated all the national polls, as she does now. After having casual conversations with several feminist friends it was clear the 2008 caucuses were not going to be a slam dunk for Hillary, and a long-shot named Barack Obama made a few calls and came to the same conclusion.

On caucus night 2008 two out of every three Iowa Demos voted for someone other than Hillary Clinton, and no more than 29% of Iowa Demos have ever voted for her. The bottom line: I and many other Iowa Demos don't want the head of our party to be a status quo economic and military policy centrist, when these times cry out for so much more.

Writing your occasional columns for the NY Times, impressing smart undergrads at Berkeley, and posting regular missives on your website are nice, but

as a presidential candidate you would literally have the opportunity to shape the public policy debate for the entire country.

Yes, it would be an uphill climb and probably a bit uncomfortable for you personally because of your past relationship with the Clintons. But really, which is more important? A small amount of personal discomfort, or the future of the Democratic Party and our nation?

Our party and our nation needs you at this time. So which will it be, the ivory tower or the grassroots movement for change you desire? Iowa will welcome you with open arms, I promise! ✂

*Sincerely,  
Dennis Harbaugh  
Waterloo*

PS: If you come out and test the waters, I guarantee 40+ Democratic caucus attendees in my back yard will give you a listen. That's how it starts. Real, down-to-earth campaigning.

**"Any American who is prepared to run for president should automatically by definition be disqualified from ever doing so."**

**— Gore Vidal**





Sept 11, 1973

Salvador Allende killed during US-backed coup in Chile

Sept 15, 1963

16th St. Baptist Church bombed in Birmingham, AL

Sept 16, 1838

France abolished slavery in all territories and possessions

Oct 1, 1948

State ban on interracial marriages voided by California Supreme Court

Oct 12, 1998

Matthew Shepard died

Oct 22, 1938

First xerographic image made

Oct 23, 1983

239 US servicemen killed by truck bomb in Beirut

Oct 25, 1983

Grenada invaded by US troops

Remember to vote in your local school board election! For the Iowa City Community School District, The Prairie Progressive endorses Sara Barron.



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

- o \$12 1-year subscription
o \$ \_\_\_ 2013 sustaining fund gift
o \$10 1-year gift subscription

Form with fields for Your Name, Your Address, City, State Zip, Gift Name, Gift Address, City, State Zip

Please return to: The Prairie Progressive, P.O. Box 1945, Iowa City, IA 52244

---

*Days of Hope, Years of Rage*  
*Continued from Page 1*

point-by-point dismantling of the myth that the budget cuts, tax giveaways, and corporate despotism embodied in Reaganomics have made America the economic envy of the world. In every other developed country government policy, trade unions, and corporate cooperation ensure that rising profits and productivity also increase wages and salaries. In the 30 years since Reagan declared war on Labor during the PATCO strike, brought in lobbyists to rewrite economic regulations, and turned a blind eye to corporate crime, income for working people in the US has been stagnant or falling, despite record

profits and productivity gains. Companies like VW-Audi pay non-union American workers 1/3 of the wages that they pay the workers in their very profitable European plants—because European law and social norms demand this.

What really ticks off my son is that 99% of Americans are worse off than they were three decades ago, yet the white working class still falls for the fake populism of Koch Brothers financed Tea Party demagogues, and our complacent press perpetuates the falsehoods about American economic success. We see this right here in Iowa City—local

governments are willing to hand out tax exemptions by the bushel to wealthy developers, thus starving themselves and particularly the schools of cash, and more effort goes into improving our prison-industrial complex than ensuring that every child has enough to eat, a place to live, and a school to walk to.

Maybe Andy is right. We cannot wait for the long moral arc to reach us. We need justice now. ✂

— *Duncan Stewart was turned down for Tax Increment Financing to build a Little Library in his yard.*

## **THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE**

Box 1945

Iowa City, IA 52244

“If it sounds like  
writing, I rewrite it.”  
— *Elmore Leonard*