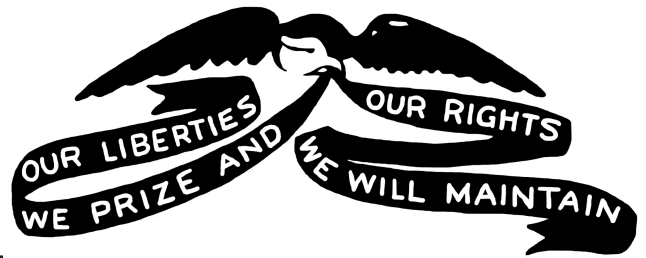


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Spring 2016

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Where and how to fight

The function of freedom is to free someone else. —Toni Morrison

The sizzling energy that has propelled Black Lives Matter, the Democratic presidential race, and anti-Board of Regents protests in Iowa City was on full display at the Englert Theatre in March, as nearly 1000 people came to hear Angela Davis.

Once a member of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List, Professor Davis graciously accepted the University of Iowa's 2016 Distinguished Lecturer award from UI Vice-President Tom Rocklin.

Davis examined her journey from a youthful "black female revolutionary" who scorned the "white bourgeois phenomenon" of feminism, to a veteran activist who embraces the possibility of bringing those factions together. One inspiration was her study of the 1909 Uprising of the 20,000, when shirtwaist workers—most of them young Jewish immigrant women—went on strike for higher pay, shorter hours, and safer working conditions. To Davis, these women acted in the fierce spirit of the black radical tradition.

Davis believes that immigrants and refugees make up the most

important civil rights movement of our time, but her heart is still with her long-time commitment to prison abolition. President Clinton's 'prison reform' in the 1990s dismantled education in correctional facilities; ironically, in the Internet Age, the art of letter-writing is now in the hands of prisoners. Davis recommends sending letters to people in prisons as a way of making them less vulnerable to institutional abuse. She also urged action to "ban the box," so that employers must consider a job candidate's qualifications first, without the immediate stigma of a criminal record. [SF84, a bill to remove the criminal record box from employment applications, passed out of the Iowa Senate Judiciary Committee on a party-line vote, but is dead for this year.]

Davis had some surprising answers to questions, mostly from students, about living the life of an activist. "You must incorporate self-care" in your daily routine, she said, including a healthy diet with locally-grown food. Forty-five years ago, Prairie Dog would not have expected the importance of eating right to be one of Davis's biggest applause lines.

One questioner confessed, "I don't know where to fight, how to fight, or what I want." Davis gently said that we learn as we

go, that these confusions get resolved as we struggle. Freedom is an infinite process of being, not a commodity. We'll never reach it and be able to rest. Fortunately, it's exciting to not know where we're going. More good news for young activists: "You don't have to worry about surveillance by the government like we used to. Everyone is surveilled."

When asked what to do about peers who don't understand or appreciate their heritage, Davis simply said, "Don't worry too much about it." Learn how to formulate questions. Engage those who haven't yet joined you. Learn to be critical of yourself. Be humble.

The final questioner identified herself as a sometimes-frustrated staff member of the UI's Office of Diversity. Davis praised her, but said that "diversity doesn't always do what it ought to be doing. I've never seen an Office of Diversity and Social Justice."

VP Rocklin would do well to listen. ✂

—Prairie Dog

This issue is dedicated to long-time Prairie Progressive supporter Linda Murray (1948-2016).

Patriotism in Polk County

Ben is a seventeen-year-old neighbor. Last January, a “Bernie” sign appeared in his parents’ yard. Knowing his parents, we were stunned that their choice of a presidential candidate would be a Democrat, but Bernie? Ben must have placed the sign in the yard.

After a few days the sign was missing. I emailed his stepfather and asked what happened to the sign. He said: “The sign came down because Ben upset his mother, as he usually does.” As we suspected, we learned from Ben that he upset his mother by putting the sign in the yard.

I sent another email to Ben’s stepfather, the neighborhood president, and told him that suppression of political speech is the most egregious attack on First Amendment rights. Suppression of Free Speech has created uprisings, insurrection, coups, and revolutions (yes, they all mean the same thing, but I was making a point). He should “mount his steed and prepare to draw his sword in noble battle of the neighborhood. Lynner Drive will be red with blood if the sign does not go back up.” He ignored us.

So Stephanie, my Republican partner, walked the three blocks down to Bernie’s headquarters and got a sign. She came back and placed it in our yard. On the way back she received numerous thumbs up, cheers, and one lone thumbs down. This was a serious display of patriotism since neither Stephanie nor I intended to caucus for Bernie. Ben appreciated it when we told him about it. Although Stephanie had the idea, and it was her action that helped nurture a new Democrat, I take pride in fulfilling part of my obligation as a central committee person. Life is good, right? Wrong!

The Polk County Democratic Convention was enough to turn any new Democrat away from politics and the Party.

Because I volunteered to be temporary chair in another precinct, I didn’t get the opportunity to move on as a delegate or alternate. I missed the Polk County Democratic Convention. I have attended more than my share of county conventions, and to be truthful, they began to resemble the movie “Groundhog Day.” Each was more boring than the last; the candidates and other speakers begin to give the same canned rhetoric; and people start to leave after noon. I believe it’s time to give others the chance.

It’s going to be hard to retain the energy and passion that came to Democrats this election cycle if we point fingers at each other.

In hindsight, I wish I had been there. This particular convention had over 1,000 attendees. It wasn’t over until close to 9:00 pm; about 10 hours of that was delegate counting and recounting. According to what I had seen on Twitter the day of the convention, there were several outbursts of anger; unmanaged interruptions; and accusations of cheating, conspiracy theories, and incivility between the Bernie and Hillary camps.

This was not my grandfather’s convention, or was it? I couldn’t believe that Democrats were fighting

furiously among themselves. In any case, I don’t want it to be the pattern of future conventions. It’s going to be hard to retain the energy and passion that came to Democrats this election cycle if we point fingers at each other.

It’s great to debate; it’s great to disagree. However, shouting, interrupting, and laying accusations at each other is an inappropriate way to display our loyalty to any particular candidate. I wasn’t at the convention. I received information only from people who were there, from both camps. I reckon it was ugly. It shouldn’t be.

My hope is for the Party to heal, especially in Polk County. When it does heal, I hope those who came to cheer will stay to participate. At the caucus I chaired, there was no shortage of people who wanted to be delegates to the county convention. But there was absolutely no interest from any of the 35 participants to volunteer to serve on the Committee on Committees, the Platform Committee, or the Central Committee. I was lucky to get a caucus secretary.

I want the Democratic Party to grow up with the likes of Ben. I want Ben and the younger generation to carry the spirited yet civil dispute into the future for our Party. For those who want to yell, attack those who disagree, and disrupt, I ask that you look at the silliness called Trump. Do we really want to look like that? ✘

–Marty Ryan is the Prairie Progressive’s Capitol Correspondent in Des Moines

Why local food will run out

If you love fresh, local food, enjoy it while it lasts. Could be a decade or two, but there's a very good chance that by then our farmers markets will shrink, CSAs will disappear, and New Pioneer will have to reach farther to fill its shelves.

This will happen if we don't quickly acknowledge the greatest threat to our local food movement. It is today's farm crisis and local food consumers are not paying attention.

You love seeing "your" farmer at the market or farm names at the grocery stores. Go to Devotay or Motley Cow and check the menu for a farm you recognize. It feels good to know your dollars are supporting local farmers. But have you ever wondered what happens when that farmer retires? She's loved farming, but she barely made ends meet, much less saved for retirement. That land *is* her retirement fund. She expects to sell it for top dollar to someone who'll plant houses instead. Then the next farmer will have to buy land farther out, pouring his profit into his gas tank every week just to sell you some tomatoes. Eventually it just won't be worth it to try.

Beginning farmers in the Johnson County area face two options: short-term leases that keep them from investing in the soil, and land prices they hope will fall before they give up and move away. Yet Johnson County has a new cluster development ordinance that supports this kind of farming. The county is ready for a developer willing to place a healthy food farm at the center of his next project, and we have a way to protect that farmland for good.

The Sustainable Iowa Land Trust is taking land out of the equation for sustainable food farmers. As a 501c3 nonprofit, we receive land

and easement donations then make affordable land available to farmers. It's an elegant solution that permanently solves multiple problems.

1. Access – farmers don't have to be born into a farmland-owning family or rely on dumb luck to find affordable farmland. Eventually, SILT will have land across the state available to farmers based on their business plan and experience.
2. Affordability – on SILT-owned land, eligible farmers will get long-term, inheritable leases. Farmers can opt to own the house, barns and business, but the land stays with the trust. When they're done farming, they sell that infrastructure to the next farmer. Community Land Trusts have been doing this in cities successfully for decades.
3. Private ownership still possible – Own your land but donate an easement, (a permanent deed restriction), that SILT enforces in perpetuity. Restricting your land to healthy food farming removes developers and conventional row crop farmers from the pool of potential buyers, permanently reducing the cost of land. The one-time drop in value is considered a charitable donation eligible for up to 20 years of tax benefits.
4. Heal the environment while growing food and jobs – SILT farms build soil, improve water quality and bring young people back to rural communities. Our farmers stack the environmental benefits of prairie and timber by moving animals through natural pastures, planting chestnuts we can eat or growing mushrooms

in the woods. We can employ the wisdom of early agriculture and marry it to today's best science and technology to keep our local food stream healthy.

But our greatest challenges are in the assumptions we make every day.

- **Land speculation** – The value of land is what you can get for it on the open market, right? Wrong. We've abandoned the idea that land is worth - at its most basic - what it can grow to sustain life. When we treat land like a commodity, we are no better than stock brokers in our addiction to some abstract "value" that does more harm than good to our communities.
- **Mortgage interest** – Banks help us buy over time. But the annual interest payment three years into a mortgage on 65 acres is \$31,000. The principle is \$21,000. Most beginning farmers (even working a day job) don't make enough to pay the *interest* in a year, much less the principle. How can we expect beginning food farmers to sign up for a deal like that?

Like in the movie War Games, SILT supporters have learned that the only way to win is not to play. Who among you will step forward? Farmers are waiting. Join us in making land accessible to future generations of sustainable food farmers.

Sign up for regular updates, to donate or volunteer, at silt.org or email us at info@silt.org if you know someone who has land we can put to good use for the common good, growing healthy food for Iowa. ✨

–Suzan Erem is President of the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust.

The Rise and Fall of Nations

Novelist Noah Gordon, now near 90 and called 'the most successful writer you've never heard of,' authored a trilogy spanning 1000 years about physician Rob Cole and his descendants. The first book of this trilogy (1986), *THE PHYSICIAN*, became a film directed by Philipp Stolzi ("Young Goethe in Love," "North Face", "Erased"), and has spawned a musical that debuts June in Germany. Neither the novel nor the movie gained a following here but were much appreciated abroad. Now the film is streaming on Netflix for fans of fictional historical drama like "Restoration" (on Netflix) or "Lawrence of Arabia." "The Physician," however, is loaded with political relevance to us because of its war on secularism by radical Islam.

Set in 11th century Persia and England, the adventure-romance pits Islam's great Golden Age of scholarship (8th to 13th centuries) against a dark, crude period in Europe. We meet up with the barbaric state of medicine in England in the jocular person of rogue, con-man "Barber." Stellan Skarsgard attacks the role of tooth extractor, butcher of limbs, and peddler of phony elixirs, with gusto.

The orphan boy Rob Cole (Adam Thomas Wright) watched his mother die of 'side-sickness' -- appendicitis was a death sentence. Homeless at 10, he attaches himself to Barber and learns the tricks of the trade but grows up frustrated. Diseases of the inside were guesswork and dissection of the human body was a crime. Young adult Rob Cole is played by Tom Payne, a good enough actor to hold the center even in the midst of players with more gravitas. Barber's "eye-sickness" leads Rob to seek out a tribe of Jews whose healer removes the offending cataracts and explains his source of knowledge -- Ibn Sina (also called Avicenna), the master of science, philosophy, and medicine of Persia. Rob's road to enlightenment launches from that moment

through ocean and desert travel until at last he becomes a student at the side of Ibn Sina. An historical figure and author of 'The Canon of Medicine,' still greatly revered, Ibn Sina is played by Ben Kingsley. The scientist is said to have authored 450 known works of which 240 have survived including 150 on philosophy, 40 on medicine.

At the time, we are told, Christians were unwelcome at Ibn Sina's Madrasa. Jews were accepted, leading Rob to circumcise himself during his desert journey to Isfahan, becoming Jesse ben Benjamin in the East.

Jesse remains particularly daunted by the religious ban on dissection -- "necromancy" being punishable by death in Persia as well as England. But his entrepreneurial skills make him a problem solver -- useful as an epidemic of plague begins to decimate the population. The Shah at the time (Oliver Martinez) supports Ibn Sina's scientific work but is ripe for overthrow; he is vain and secular, outraging local religious leaders:

"Why did our citizens have to die [of plague]?" shouts the Imam (Makram Khoury). "It is the sins committed each and every day in the university whose Godless philosophy corrupts our city...Isfahan is decaying from vice and apostasy. The Shah's time is over; now there is only God...Allahu Akbar!"

A religious revolution is brewing. The tolerant, decadent Shah will be swept away in the denouement, driving out Jews and scholars and destroying Ibn Sina's university. The militant Seljuk Turks join forces with the mullahs whose fervor mirrors 21st century jihadism. The Turkish period will eventually contribute to the decline of the Islamic Golden Era. (The Seljuks, by the way, were followed by Mongol rule of Persia.)

Criticism doesn't change one's mind about the film being a fairly good and fast-moving tale. There are particular objections to the tampering with history creating inaccuracies about the known life and times of Ibn Sina. Still, all re-imagined history is guilty of the abridging of fact for the purpose of story-telling. Also there's the soap-opera framework including Rob/Jesse's dangerous romance with Rebecca (Emma Rigby), a Spanish Jew who has been sent to Isfahan for an arranged marriage to an old Jewish aristocrat.

But it's still a production that immerses you satisfyingly into ancient Persia through details and customs of daily life. Woven into the tapestry are Muslim calls to prayer and orthodox Jewish ritual (the blowing of the shofar and wearing of prayer phylacteries), the burying alive of a woman adulterer, a medical school that functions with impressive urgency, costuming that feels real in off-whites and rich desert taupes and browns, and lovely effects by Pixomondo (Marco Polo, Game of Thrones) that bring the city-in-the-desert setting to life.

But what enlivens the whole affair are the provocative politics starting with the parallels between 11th and 21st century radical Islam. Second is the contrast between the Golden Age of Islam and the intellectual poverty of the West at the time; and last, is the present-day amazing reversal of fortunes between Middle East and the West. It's enough to make the viewer think twice about the inevitable and cyclical rise and fall of nations and the persisting tension between religious belief and intellectual progress. As for imaginary Rob Cole, following his bout with radical Islam--his trajectory went up. ✨

--Lee Liberman lives and writes in Brooklyn, NY, but would rather be in Brooklyn, Iowa.

The Grand Canyon of Iowa Politics

Bernie Sanders was supported by more than half the caucus attenders in Iowa. When “delegate equivalents” are translated into votes, he carried Johnson County nearly two to one, a landslide. Statewide exit polls showed what was perhaps the largest generation gap in the history of American electoral politics: 83% of those in the 18-29 age range supported Sanders, while a mere 15% supported Clinton. These figures have been repeated in nearly every subsequent election. In Ohio, Sanders received 85% of the votes of those aged 18-29, and 60% of those aged 30-44, but only 27% of those over 65. These figures include African-American voters.

85% of the young, and 27% of the old? What is going on here? When combined with another set of figures, they tell you everything you need to know about the state of the Democratic Party and the reasons why it is becoming a permanent minority party at every level of government. Not one Democrat in the U. S. Senate has endorsed Bernie Sanders, and only five members of the U. S. House of Representatives. Not one Democrat in the Iowa House or Senate endorsed Senator Sanders. Not one member of the Johnson County Democratic delegation, where Sanders won by a landslide, endorsed Senator Sanders. The gap between the leadership of the Democratic Party and young Democrats is not merely a gap, it is a chasm, the Grand Canyon of Iowa politics, and of Johnson County politics.

A year before Senator Sanders announced that he would enter the Democratic caucuses, I joined with members of the Progressive Democrats of America in a campaign to persuade Senator Sanders to run...as a Democrat. The point was not merely to put Senator Sanders in the White House, but to find some leadership for a Democratic Party that stands for nothing but pessimism and partisan hostility to Republicans, who are blamed for all

the failings of the Democratic Party. When Senator Sanders decided to run as a Democrat in the Iowa caucuses, he launched his campaign as a reincarnation of the New Deal and the Great Society, one that offered hope to the American people. Campaigning for a \$15 an hour national living wage, national health insurance for all Americans, tuition free college education, and a trillion dollar jobs program, Senator Sanders was simply offering the American people a New Deal.

And what has been the unanimous response of our Iowa Democratic Party legislators when Senator Sanders offers a Future We Can Believe In? He says “yes we can,” and they say “no we can’t!” It is no wonder that voters are turning to the Republicans, who now control thirty governorships and 70% of state legislative seats. We are on the verge of losing complete control of the state of Iowa to the Republicans, thanks to the negative, lackluster leadership of the Democratic Party in Iowa which is increasingly funded by wealthy interest groups and corporate donors.

Our current Democratic legislators, federal and state, are a lost cause. The argument that we can’t have universal national health insurance in America, or tuition free college, is on the face of it ridiculous, but that is what they believe. They really have lost faith in the New Deal and the Great Society, and believe that nothing can be done but fight rear guard actions against the Republicans. As Iowa Democrats, we need to build on the Sanders campaign and work hard at one of the hardest tasks in politics: candidate recruitment. Legislators don’t live forever (except perhaps Chuck Grassley), and some of them occasionally retire to spend more time with their families. Open seats will appear throughout the state. We need a new generation of Democrats in office, legislators who represent

the young and their hopes for a better America. This will be a long haul, but there is a lot at stake.

What would a “Future We Can Believe in Campaign” look like in future Iowa Democratic Primaries? We need to find candidates who will refuse all corporate campaign contributions, who will campaign for a \$15 an hour living wage in Iowa, who will campaign for tuition free community colleges and Regents Universities funded by a 50% cut in state economic development spending, who will campaign for the abolition of all the Tax Increment Financing schemes that have shredded our local school budgets, who will campaign for a sales tax on the fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides that are poisoning our water supplies, with the proceeds dedicated to cleaning up our rivers, who will campaign for full funding of our educational institutions from pre-school to graduate school, funded by sweeping reductions of state spending on prisons, economic development, and rural roads to nowhere.

You can hear now the chorus of cynical jeers from our Democratic state legislators and party officials. “No We Can’t,” they will say, and furthermore you *have* to vote for us because Republicans are really, really bad. As long as they continue to say that, and nothing more, we are headed for a period of indefinite Republican rule at every level of government. Nothing could be worse for America—nothing. So far Senator Sanders has done exactly what we hoped he would do: run as a Democrat, bring millions of young Americans into the political process, and point the way forward for the Democratic Party, and for America, with a politics of hope. It’s too late for this year, but in the future please consider putting yourself forward as a progressive candidate for the Iowa state legislature...as a Democrat. ✂

—Jeff Cox

How Will We Respond to a Constitutional Crisis?

As Senate Judiciary Committee chairman, Sen. Grassley, R-Iowa, has the duty to hold confirmation hearings on the sitting President's nominees to the US Supreme Court. Justice Antonin Scalia died on Feb. 13 this year and Sen. Grassley, with the support of other Republicans, has insisted that no hearing will be held and no appointment will be allowed. Grassley has been clear that he will not allow this President, President Obama, the opportunity to fill the seat left vacant by Justice Scalia's death.

On March 3, citizens visited Sen. Grassley's offices in Davenport, Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Sioux City, and Waterloo to deliver petitions with more than 7,000 signatures imploring the senator to "do your job."

In Davenport, about two dozen people crammed into the reception room of the senator's downtown office to deliver nine baskets. Eight of them, containing signed petitions, were colorful, representing the current justices on the high court. The ninth was black, representing the vacancy left by Justice Scalia's death, and contained copies of Article II, Section 2, of the Constitution.

Tracy Leone, a member of the Why Courts Matter Iowa coalition, said it was Sen. Grassley's job to "listen to his constituents and value their opinion." She said the president has more than 300 days left in office during which he could appoint a Supreme Court nominee. The last eleven Supreme Court justices have

been appointed and confirmed by the Senate in less than 100 days. Leone said there were many very qualified candidates, including Jane L. Kelly, a federal appellate judge in Iowa. This was a well-organized and effective state-wide action. Two dozen people packed Senator Grassley's office in Davenport, all three local TV stations there, and one of the papers covered the story. Of course, it's not enough.

I believe that less than important than the numbers of days left in President Obama's term, or the average number of days previous appointments have taken, or the qualifications of potential candidates, is this: we are facing, and Senator Grassley and his colleagues are creating, an unprecedented Constitutional crisis in this country.

If we as a people -- as citizens of this country -- don't stand up when one of the branches of government refuses to do what the Constitution mandates, this country is facing a real turning point. You may ask how this is different than the Republican obstruction of the past seven years of this presidency. It is the outright refusal of our elected leaders to do what is mandated by the US Constitution: denying a duly elected President the right to fulfill his obligation under our supreme law to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court.

I am currently helping a young Vietnamese nun prepare to take the US citizenship test. I am back in 7th grade civics, being reminded of the separation of powers and the balance provided by the Founding Fathers in the way they defined how our

government ought to work. They were imperfect men, but they got the basics right. Senator Grassley says he wants to empower the people, that they should vote on who the next Justice should be. Excuse me, Senator Grassley, but the people did make that choice. In fact, they made it twice, in 2008 and again in 2012.

I once had respect for Senator Grassley, We agreed on little, but he once demonstrated some independence: his insistence on tracking waste in the military budget, his tenacity in holding government accountable, his investigation of non-profits who were truly misusing tax-exempt status. I would appeal to his integrity, but I fear we are living in a post-integrity political world.

So, it is up to us, the people of this entire country, to make our voices heard. If we sit by and allow this most critical obstruction to happen, what else is possible? What else will we sit by for? We must stand up. We have to insist that this Senate do its job; that Senator Grassley work with the President to schedule hearings for his nominee.

How bad do things need to get before we take significant action to make our voices heard? Who will take the lead in organizing a march on Washington or Des Moines or marches across the country? What would it take for you to take to the streets? ✨

–Cathy Bolkcom is the founder of Progressive Action for the Common Good, a non-religious chaplain, and a hopeless optimist

CALENDAR

April 17, 1961

US invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs

April 30

Democratic 2nd District Convention, Washington, IA

May 1, 1886

International Workers Day began

May 4, 1961

First Freedom Ride organized by Congress of Racial Equality

May 5

Ret. Colonel and Veterans for Peace activist Ann Wright and Voices for Creative Non-violence co-founder Kathy Kelly speak at University of Iowa Center for Human Rights, Iowa City

May 14, 1961

Freedom Riders bus bombed and burned outside Anniston, AL

May 28, 1851

First Women's Rights Convention convened by Sojourner Truth

June 18

Democratic State Convention, Des Moines

June 25, 1941

FDR signed executive order banning race discrimination in defense industries and government

June 27, 1876

Emma Goldman born

Local government steps up

Back in November, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors raised the minimum wage \$.95 countywide to \$8.20. It goes up another \$.95 on May 1 to \$9.15, and yet another \$.95 to \$10.10 on January 1, 2017. After that, the wage will annually be tied to the CPI unless the Board decides to vote for a different amount.

Other counties are talking about taking similar action. I sincerely hope they do. Far too many of our citizens are in crisis. One out of every six of our kids lives in poverty. Federal and state governments refuse to address this crisis. Local government has to step up.

This is not the first time local government has intervened in the "free market." Local governments pick winners and losers all the time. This is just the first time local government has intervened on behalf of the workers.

We intervened because many of our neighbors are hurting. Families double up because they cannot afford the rents in Johnson County. Families routinely use food banks to get through the week (19,000 Johnson County citizens are food insecure). Cars go unrepaired. Kids go to school with clothes that do not fit. One small anomaly – an illness, something breaks down, etc. – and a family's world comes crashing down. People work 2-3 jobs, yet still cannot get ahead.

Some businesses will fail whether we do anything or not. While some jobs likely will be lost, more will be gained. As low-wage workers have more money to spend, consumer demand will create jobs. Grocery stores, restaurants, bars, auto repair shops, and clothing stores will all have more customers with more money. They will need to hire in order to meet demand. That means jobs (consumer spending makes up 70% of the US economy), and the jobs being created will pay more than the jobs being lost. Other jurisdictions have seen increases in employment follow increases in the minimum wage.

Some claim jobs will move elsewhere. Not minimum wage jobs. These are primarily service sector jobs, which simply follow population. Retail and fast food cannot move jobs to China. Even moving them to Cedar Rapids is unrealistic; no one is going to drive to CR just for fast food. So far, so good – unemployment in Johnson County remains less than 3%, one of the lowest numbers in the whole country!

Others claim that business owners will cut back on hours. But our economy is lacking consumer demand. When workers have more income, they spend it at local businesses. Those businesses will need employees to keep up with demand. While anything

Continued on Page 8

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

\$12 1-year subscription

\$10 1-year gift subscription

\$_____ 2016 sustaining fund gift

Your Name

Gift Name

Your Address

Gift Address

City, State Zip

City, State Zip

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

Local government steps up
Continued from Page 7

can happen at any given business, most employers should see a need to fill more shifts, not less.

I have received several irate calls from people who say prices are going to go up. You are already paying for low wage jobs – through your taxes. What's more, studies do not bear out a huge jump in prices. For example, if McDonald's doubled the salaries of its employees to \$14.50 an hour, not only would many of them go off public benefits, but so would the company-- and a Big Mac would cost just 68 cents more (another study says only 14 cents.) At Walmart, increasing wages to \$12 per hour would cost the company only about one percent, so that made-in-China \$10 item would run you all of \$10.10 (source: Center for Labor Research and Education).

You might have heard about the debate in Tiffin, which focused on a lower wage for teens. But according to the Economic Policy Institute, the average age of workers who would benefit from a higher minimum wage today is thirty-five. Eighty-eight per cent are over the age of twenty.

I have heard concerns expressed for small businesses. But two-thirds of all minimum wage workers are NOT employed by small businesses. Better yet, one survey shows three out of five small business owners favor raising the minimum wage; their profits depend on a strong local economy, which requires more money in local consumers' hands. Most small businesses cannot off-shore jobs, so micro-economics matter. Sad to say, 50-80 percent of most small businesses already fail for various reasons, even with a minimum wage that has not kept up with inflation. Wage costs are

actually lower now than in the past; in 1968 the federal minimum was \$1.60 per hour, approximately \$10.70 in 2013 dollars. Factors other than labor costs seem far more significant to business success.

Even though the Register poll says raising the minimum wage is popular, I do not believe this issue is a political winner. Many of the folks who will benefit from this will not vote. Business owners will mobilize against me. I receive no personal gain from this, only personal headache. But it is not about me. It is about thousands of poor people who are in crisis.

Whenever possible, I like to make decisions based upon data. The data here is clear – raising the minimum wage will be good for our local economy. ✨

–Rod Sullivan is Chair of the Johnson County Board of Supervisors and a member of AFT 716.

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945

Iowa City, IA 52244

