
THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



a newsletter for Iowa's Democratic Left

Spring 2024

Iowa nutty

We've all heard of "Iowa nice." Agree with it or not, it describes a state where folks are—well, folks. Amiable, helpful, willing to visit and ready to lend a hand as need arises. People have long been proud of this little phrase, but the state may soon have to retire it. Iowa nice has morphed into Iowa nutty. And Iowa's elected version of nutty exhibits both a lack of reason and a very mean edge.

Between the GOP-controlled legislature and our increasingly fervid, pen-wielding governor, the state is considering, passing, and even signing into law bills that serve to increase our children's chances of getting killed, decrease their odds of eating three squares a day, and potentially insure they grow up without both parents. And that's only the bills pertaining to arming teachers, the governor's rejection of \$29 million in federal food funding for kids and replacing it with around \$900,000 in state funds with strings attached, and the attacks on abortion that seem to wait around the corner in red states.

The bill to arm teachers and other school staff, HF2586, would give those who shoot and kill someone more than the guns to do it: they would also enjoy qualified immunity. To be armed, they'd have to pass a one-time training on the legal issues

surrounding qualified immunity plus emergency medical treatment; then quarterly firearms training; and an annual 'live scenario' drill. Well, that should make us all feel better about Mr. Fury, the recently divorced shop teacher having weapons at work. The bill passed the House and passed the Senate but was amended there, so is back in the House. The Governor will sign it in a heartbeat. Perhaps a child's last heartbeat.

Aside from the above, the Area Education Agencies bill and the so-called "illegal re-entry" bill are now laws. The first decimates—or, to use the trendy word for interfering right-wing havoc, "disrupts"—a perfectly solid statewide system providing educational assistance to children with special needs. AEAs are respected and relied upon by everyone from farmers to remote tech workers, parents, and children in all 99 counties. The bill faced massive opposition from voters. They filled committee meetings and flooded legislators with emails and letters stating their outrage, anxiety, and dread over what the bill might do to children's well-being and educational opportunities. The majority party was not having any of it. They voted for the bill and the Governor signed it. The bill takes a system working well and alters its funding model. It gives percentages of various funding streams to school

districts, and the rest to the AEAs—who may or may not be chosen by the school districts to provide the services in a specific funding area. It creates uncertainty. It rolls the dice in an area where the students have great vulnerability and an even greater need for stability and predictability. It meets Gov. Reynolds' model for reaching into a bureaucracy and rearranging it for no good reason, with potential for great harm, simply to say she "fixed" something. Does this remind you of another (former) chief executive?

The illegal re-entry bill, SF2340, is a complete farce, a tour de force of right-wing showmanship signifying nothing. It applies to a tiny group of people. The Des Moines Register described this well in its April 10 outline of the newly signed bill: "The law creates a new crime of illegal reentry into the state, which applies to anyone who has previously been deported, removed, or denied admission to the United States."

Iowa is not a border state. We are assuredly not a revolving door state. The most likely harborers of anyone meeting the law's description are mega-farms that desperately need migrant work to continue raking in profits. Ironically, most of these are owned by GOP cheerleaders who write checks to support this nonsense

cont'd on Page 9

The governor cares little about feeding hungry children

Last December, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds turned down \$29 million of federal funding that would have provided a low-income family \$40 per month “to help with food costs” during the 3-month break in the school year. Her justification for snubbing the federal money was a cruel accusation that Iowa children are fat and that “childhood obesity has become an epidemic.” But let’s not have facts get in the way. Or the lack of facts.

Erica Kenney, an assistant professor at Harvard University’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said “there is no evidence that a program like this has anything to do with childhood obesity. It’s absolutely true that you can have obesity and be struggling to get food on the table for your family. It is not at all true that helping people who are struggling financially means they’re going to eat more and gain weight.”

The governor’s heart may be in the “right” place when she claims that the \$40 per month will not “promote nutrition,” but it’s not like the family receiving the assistance will give the EBT card to the kid so that the child can run down to Candyland and splurge on Mountain Dew and KitKat bars.

For someone who is family-oriented with parental rights at the forefront, the governor’s contradiction of total government control over the food choices of families is beyond flagrant.

Reynolds rejected the \$29 million deal claiming that it would cost the state \$2.2 million in administration fees. However, State Senator Sarah Trone Garriott questions that amount since it costs Iowa \$2.2 million in shared administrative

costs to run the entire Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for the whole state.” Moreover, the \$900,000 for grants is a 15% increase in the already \$6 million of federal money that was used by Iowa last year to fund the Summer Food Service Program. And supposedly, the money is for administrative purposes as well as money for healthy protein, veggies, and fruits.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack estimated Reynold’s rejection last December means “Iowa will take a \$100 million economic hit. The federal assistance ‘rolls around’ in the economy, creating jobs at grocery stores and other businesses.”

Let’s do the math: the program that was rejected by Reynolds would provide \$40 per month per child for three months; that’s \$120 per summer per child. That doesn’t seem like a lot, but with several children at home during the summer, parents can determine which foods to buy with the extended SNAP dollars. Without subtracting administration costs, that would assist 241,666 children in Iowa. Using Gov. Reynold’s Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option, which is nothing more than a continuation of free breakfasts and lunches provided by the federal government, not every child who received free meal in school will be able to participate. There are two reasons for this. First, over one-third of Iowa’s counties had either no meal sites or one meal site per county in 2023. Second, there are three options to the plan.

To operate a congregate meal, federal regulations require that parents and caregivers cannot pick up meals for their children, and “all meals must be consumed on-site.” However, a child may take “one fruit, vegetable,

or grain item from their meal off-site to eat later.” According to the government website, a “typical lunch, for example, could include a [cold] turkey sandwich on wheat bread, milk, an apple, and a salad.”

Another option is that the program is free to all children who attend camp, which is not defined, but most likely includes Vacation Bible School.

The third option is a non-congregate site where meals may be offered “to-go,” where a recipient or parent may pick-up the meal, or possibly delivered. How this differs from the first option is not explained.

All options for new meal sites under the grant “must be located in an area where at least 50 percent or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.”

A huge problem with Reynold’s program is that many adolescents sleep in during the summer. Having to be at a congregate site at a certain time will cause many teens and pre-teens to miss the most important meal of the day – breakfast. The program rejected by Iowa would have provided a breakfast meal at home. No walking in the rain, the sun, and scorching heat.

The Seamless Summer Option is a political response to an apparent uproar over criticism that the governor cares little about feeding hungry children.

This is a program that should be audited in the Fall. However, since this administration has tied the hands of Iowa’s Auditor, duct-taped his mouth shut, and blindfolded his eyes, don’t count on that happening.

—Marty Ryan is angry.

What it feels like to win

In February, I received an unexpected phone call from a union staffer. On an otherwise unassuming Tuesday, he told me that Starbucks had just agreed to work towards a national contract with our union. This was a win that we had not expected to happen so quickly.

The concession came from Starbucks one week after Starbucks Workers United saw twenty-one stores file to unionize in one day, and workers at twenty-five campuses across the United States went public with petitions to have Starbucks kicked off their universities.

The concession came after three brutal years of union busting. During these years, workers tirelessly built a campaign from the ground up for little reward and overwhelming risk. Labor allies across the country stepped in to help, and ignited a spark under the campaign that has propelled us to this moment.

The concession came months after Starbucks filed a trademark lawsuit against the union, claiming that the union had used the Starbucks logo (they did not) in support of terrorism, because union workers had expressed solidarity with Palestine. After this lawsuit was filed – right here in Iowa – and went public, a wave of backlash began that I believe Starbucks could never have predicted.

Calls for a boycott spread across the internet. Here in the United States, the boycott hasn't been as impactful as some supporters hoped it would be. But in the Middle East, Starbucks saw a significant drop in sales.

To be sure, Starbucks shareholders are still making an obscene amount of money. Those at the top will likely never feel the true effect of a boycott.

And they're still scared of it. They offered up change after one measly quarterly earnings report fell short of Wall Street expectations.

Within my generation there has been a persistent feeling of hopelessness. Our growing understanding that, individually, we are unlikely to make a difference in the world has spread throughout our collective consciousness. Many people interpret this to mean that there is no hope left – we are doomed to the future that our leaders pull us towards.

What my peers are just now coming to terms with is that together, we have a power that is yet to be fully understood. As an individual, my support for Gaza can only be felt by those around me. As part of a union, our support for Gaza has reverberated around the world and resulted in a multinational corporation bowing down to international pressure and agreeing to bargain a national contract.

All because a few workers decided to stand in unflinching solidarity with Gaza.

A lot of people took issue with the fact that we stand with an oppressed population halfway across the globe, but what these people don't seem to understand is that many of us put in the work to unionize because we understand that our voices are louder together. As a union, we have the power to work towards a better future for all workers. Why would we unionize if we aren't going to utilize that power?

We see the future we want to build. We've learned from the unions that have come before us that it takes hard work to get there.

Our future is one where every single worker is respected. Our future is one where workers don't have to worry if there's going to be enough food for their families at the end of the night. Our future is one where the greed of those in power is snuffed out for good.

We see this future clearly. We see that it will take work to build. We see it in each other, and we see it in every single worker who has taken the time and effort to help us.

And, I think, some people may see us as naïve for believing that we can make any sort of significant difference in this awful reality we inhabit. But we already know that we have. We'll have the proof at the bargaining table that we'll be sitting at on April 25th.

Starbucks Workers United knows that what comes next is going to take an immense amount of work. Luckily for us, we thrive on hard work. We build unions in these conditions. We understand that solidarity is more important than ever, in these conditions.

We know that to even begin chipping away at a contract is going to be hard. We're taking notes from other unions on what to do if bargaining stalls (or if Starbucks refuses to start at all), we're ready for the possibility that this could be another long and bitter fight, and this time we know what it feels like to win. We're ready to win again.

—Abigail Schepman is a Starbucks barista and union organizer in Iowa City.

Enter the Sisters of Mercy

Author's note: I cribbed much of the historical information for this article from the work of the late Lee Anderson, PhD, a bona fide medical historian and not an imposter like me.

Right down to the signage, the window clings, and the staff IDs, the process is complete: University of Iowa Health Care has finally swallowed Mercy Hospital in Iowa City.

I say “finally” because—even before it bought Mercy for \$28 million in bankruptcy court in 2023—the UI had offered many times that in recent years to effect a merger. But finally also because it seems like the denouement of a drama from the earliest years of both organizations, when the two entered into a marriage of convenience that proved their incompatibility.

That tale began in 1870, when the UI established a medical school pursuant to a new state law engineered for the purpose. There was no medical licensure back then, nor medical specialties; one did not need a diploma to practice medicine, but it helped, and medical schools popped up throughout the growing country. Some were well regarded while many were not. Credit to the early faculty, who pledged that Iowa’s medical school would be one of the good ones. They began enrolling students for the 16-week course of lectures and demonstrations.

All the reputable schools had access to hospital patients. Physician training has always crucially involved supervised work with actual sick people. A hospital would mean access to a variety of patients with a variety of afflictions for students to observe and treat, but there was no hospital in Iowa City. Enter the Sisters of Mercy.

Founded in Ireland in 1831, the Sisters of Mercy Catholic order became, among other things, part of a movement to transform both hospitals and nursing, much in alignment with

the influence of Florence Nightingale. In fact, the Sisters had sent delegations to work with Nightingale during the Crimean War in the 1850s. No longer the pestilent, overcrowded sick house, the hospital would be a place of order, of succor and uplift. Their ideals put nursing at the center of hospital care and gave a bigger role to cleanliness and good diet than to medicine in a patient’s recovery.

The Sisters order spread to the United States and by 1870 had a presence in Davenport. That is where Dr. Washington Peck, a physician and public health officer, had come to know their work providing charity care at the sick house they operated. When Peck went on to become founding head of the UI medical faculty, he drew on this acquaintance to invite the Sisters into an arrangement whereby they would staff a hospital in Iowa City with nurses and attendants, the faculty would provide medical diagnosis and treatment, and students would observe and learn.

Crucially for Peck and the Medical Department, the Sisters of Mercy worked without pay, meaning the department could operate the hospital for the cost of supplies and maintenance, roughly. (To be fair, the medical faculty also worked without pay.) One more thing: The all-male faculty got to be the hospital board.

To review, the Medical Department needed sick people to sustain its teaching enterprise, and that pointed to a hospital. The Sisters aimed to spread their works of mercy and care of the sick, and that pointed to a hospital. But could that hospital serve two missions?

They tried for 25-plus years, but in the end the answer was No. The parties never established boundaries to either’s satisfaction. The Sisters nursed and cared and kept the place clean and everybody fed, and admitted anyone whether they could pay or not. The department regarded the hospital as a venue for rounds and demonstrations and surgery with an audience, and maintained a proprietary attitude toward hospital governance. Even when the Sisters founded an independent Mercy Hospital in a bigger, better place off campus in 1886, the department tagged along to serve as medical staff and board.

The two went their separate ways at last when the first University Hospital opened in 1898. Mercy went on to become what it became, a community hospital with a local patient base and fiscal and regulatory burdens it could not afford. And University Hospital went on to become the sprawling enterprise we know: a modern academic medical center offering the most advanced medical technologies and treatments, training doctors and other health professionals, advancing the frontiers of medical science, knocking down old buildings and putting up new ones, opening stand-alone clinics everywhere, and now, I guess, gobbling up competitors.

Florence Nightingale never had a chance.

—*A long time ago, Derek Maurer co-authored, with Samuel Levey, PhD, Lee Anderson, PhD, and Matthew Schaefer, The Rise of a University Teaching Hospital: A Leadership Perspective (Chicago, Health Administration Press, 1995).*

A dystopian agenda

(This article is excerpted from The Progressive, March 29, 2024).

Over the past eighteen months, in election after election, Americans across political parties have rebuked the Republican appointees on the U.S. Supreme Court for reversing *Roe v. Wade* and overturning Constitutional protections for abortion access. You might think the rightwing faction that dominates the nation's highest court would reconsider their reckless approach to destroying legal precedents that Americans rely on to protect their freedoms and their families.

You would be wrong.

The six-member faction that dominates the court, helmed by George W. Bush appointee John Roberts, seems hell-bent on overturning long-standing legal precedents that protect public health and our planet.

What's at stake? Many things you probably care about, or should, including rules to secure cleaner water and air, protect consumers from fraud, ensure access to more affordable health care, forgive student loan debt, and more. The court's rightwing faction is on the verge of overturning or significantly rolling back *Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, the landmark 1984 case that allows federal agencies to issue reasonable regulations based on their expertise.

Chevron has provided valuable stability to the law and helped safeguard the lives of millions of Americans in innumerable ways. It also strikes the right balance by requiring federal judges, who have little expertise—if any—on the technical matters many regulations cover (like the dangers of a corporation unleashing cancer-causing chemicals, such as benzene), to defer to civil servants who have this expertise. Career public servants can develop deep knowledge about how to protect

the public interest from corporations more devoted to pursuing profits and cutting costs than prioritizing the public health of neighbors, unlike judges who get indoctrinated on hostility to regulations through judicial junkets underwritten by corporate titans and the nonprofits they fund.

If the Supreme Court overturns or weakens *Chevron*, it will unleash a horde of lawyers to attack countless rules designed to protect the American people from corporate predators.

Roberts's chaotic court is poised to do just that in a pair of cases called *Relentless, Inc. v. Department of Commerce* and *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*. On the surface, the cases are about commercial fishing boats and who pays for government inspectors whose job it is to protect marine wildlife from overfishing.

But that narrative is a red herring constructed with cold, hard Koch cash. If you look deeper, what becomes visible is the leviathan Charles Koch, the sixteenth richest person in the United States who runs the second largest private company in the country.

These consolidated cases should really be called *Koch v. America*, because the plaintiffs are being used as fronts for Koch's extreme agenda. Fifty years ago, just a few years after he inherited his father's pipeline and refinery kingdom headquartered in Kansas, Koch was railing against regulations and claiming—absurdly—that, in the United States of 1974, “free enterprise has already been crippled by government intervention.”

Showing his extremism, Koch smeared regulations as “socialistic” and asserted, “We have confiscatory taxation, wage and price controls, commodity allocation programs, trade barriers, restrictions on foreign investments, so-called equal opportunity requirements, safety and health regulations, land use controls, licensing laws, outright government ownership of businesses and industries, and many more interventions. No advocate of free enterprise should confuse all of this with a free, capitalistic economy!”

Safety and health regulations? How dare We the People regulate corporations whose products or practices are unsafe or harm our health. How dare we enforce the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of “equal protection of the laws” through “equal opportunity requirements.” That's just the beginning of the list that Koch's for-profit and nonprofit empire would litigate to death if the *Chevron* precedent requiring judges to defer to reasonable agency rules were to be crushed.

As Maya Angelou famously remarked, “When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time.”

Since 1974, as Koch forecasted, he has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in creating a “cadre” of advocates to attack government regulations, including through what he described as “strategically planned litigation and administrative procedures.” Koch, an engineer by training, has used the vast wealth he inherited and compounded to try to re-engineer the United States to suit his agenda. It's a dystopian agenda that, after years of seeding, he is now harvesting through the court.

—Lisa Graves is the executive director of True North Research. She will be speaking to the Johnson County Democrats Legacy Club in Iowa City on June 20.

A strategy with a long history: Part Two

A friend of mine who caucused for Bernie Sanders in 2016 and then voted for Trump once said to me, when we were talking about some Democratic legislation, “Why can’t we just do things that benefit *everyone*?” In fact, most Democratic policy proposals do benefit everyone (or at least everyone who needs help), but we often do a poor job of selling them.

While Trumpism is identity politics on steroids, it doesn’t follow that Democrats should counter it with an identity politics of their own. Consider how we often sell a policy like the expansion of SNAP benefits (food stamps): that it disproportionately benefits people of color, which is appropriate because they are disproportionately lower income. True enough, and the racial economic injustice that produced those income disparities is a national disgrace. But the majority of those benefiting from food stamps are white. What the white working class hears when we say “disproportionate benefit” is: “This is a program for Black people.” Enter Fox News: The Democrats don’t care about you; they are just trying to buy Black votes.

Americans are enamored with individualism and competition. That makes it easy for the right to feed a narrative that government policies and programs are a zero sum game; more for “those people” means less for you. We need to avoid triggering that competitive mindset. Instead, our messages and our policies should invoke the communitarian impulses that reside in most people. Anyone can fall into hard times; SNAP is there to help them get by and get back on their feet, whoever they may be. We are all in this together.

Consider a guy who has worked hard and played by the rules all his life, who served his country in the military and paid his taxes, who knows what it’s like to be unemployed or behind on rent, and who has seen no improvement in his standard of living for 20 or 30 years. It doesn’t help for college educated liberals, who by and large have continued to prosper and reap the benefits of class privilege, who never had to go to Vietnam or collect an unemployment check, and who can look forward to a comfortable retirement, to scold the white working class for not recognizing how privileged they are. White privilege is real, but the word “privilege” is what they will hear; that is not the message that will pull us closer to the kind of solidarity we need to advance the economic prospects of workers of all stripes.

Much research and writing has focused recently on how to craft messages that move us forward. The “Race Class Narrative Project” and “We Make the Future” make the case that the most effective approach is to focus on race and class inequities at the same time, and to do so in a way that brings people together around their common interests and their common enemy. That isn’t going to happen with messages that implicitly make white workers the villains in the story, because some are racist. We need to think about what we say—“structural racism is the problem”—versus what others will hear—“you think we’re all a basket of deplorable racists.” We need to name the villains—those who use race to divide us so they can preserve their wealth and power. And we need to talk about racist institutions in the language of everyday Americans, stripped of insider jargon that provides more fodder for the right-wing trolls. Consider JD Scholten’s

online newsletter, “You’re Probably Getting Screwed.” It appeals to all those harboring resentments and frustrations and then tells them who their real enemies are. That is brilliant.

It may seem that the white working class has largely drifted out of reach. But Democrats have themselves to blame. As the country became more populist, instead of riding that wave with a progressive populism party leaders embraced the rich to finance campaigns and provided the right with ample evidence to validate their claims that we were elitists, unconcerned with ordinary people. It is not at all helpful to focus our anger on white workers and spread memes on Facebook about how racist or stupid all the MAGA folks are. As Thomas Frank put it in his excellent book *The People, No*, the Democratic Party has largely abandoned its working class populist roots for “a politics of individual righteousness that regards the public not as a force to be organized but as a threat to be scolded.”

It is hard to see how we assemble the coalition we need without drawing some of those folks back into the Democratic fold where they belong. This country has a long history of racism, but the problem is made far more intense and pervasive by those in positions of economic and political power who stoke it and use it to preserve their power and the privileges of wealth. We need to name our common enemy, embrace a politics of unifying universalism, and become what we once were: the party of working people.

—Peter Fisher is the former research director at Common Good Iowa.

Iowa is not a good place to have a disability

(This article also appeared in the Storm Lake Times Pilot).

State Representative Josh Turek’s excellent guest column in the Des Moines Register (February 25, 2024) cited many reasons Iowa is not a good place to have a disability: long waiting lists for in-home and community-based care, severe restrictions on Medicaid eligibility, legislative efforts to dismantle services for special education provided by our Area Education Agencies, and more—yet this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Iowa also lags in the development of community services. Many states have closed their institutions for people with severe disabilities, but thousands of Iowans don’t have the opportunity to become part of the fabric of our society instead of living as segregated outcasts far from their families and communities. In December of 2021, the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice found that Iowa “plans, administers, and funds its public health service system in a manner that unnecessarily segregates people with intellectual disabilities in the Resource Centers (Glenwood and Woodward), rather than providing these services where people live, in their community.”

In April of 2022, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services Director Kelly Garcia announced that Glenwood Resource Center on the

western edge of the state would close its doors. Garcia said, “This notion that you are admitted at age two and you live eighty years there is no longer the way we as a society would want to support a human being.” Governor Reynolds agreed, stating that “our best path forward to achieve

Serving people close to home, where oversight is easier, decreases the chances of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment.

[the standards of the US Department of Justice] is closing Glenwood and reinvesting in a community-based care continuum that offers a broad array of services.”

Advocates for people who have disabilities applauded with hopes that Iowa would finally—after more than a century of neglect—protect the constitutional rights of its most vulnerable citizens and develop opportunities to live as independently as possible. Serving people close to home, where oversight is easier, decreases the chances of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment

documented by the DOJ. It would also save or redirect a good chunk of the nearly \$400,000 in state and federal tax dollars spent annually per resident.

How’s it going, two years later?

A report issued this past October by a state monitoring team found Glenwood to be out of compliance with fifty of sixty-five standards of medical care. It was out of compliance with thirty of thirty-four standards for transition into community settings. The deaths of residents while at the institution have not been adequately reviewed. Eight deaths of residents who died after transitioning have not been reviewed at all. Staff training on transitioning was found to be inadequate. In the last fifteen months eighteen residents were moved to Woodward Resource Center—not a community-based provider. As is typical of the Reynolds administration, little information is available to the public on whatever progress has been made toward the shuttering of Glenwood.

Rep. Turek wrote that Iowa is not a good place to have a disability. It is also not a good place to live if you care about government transparency, more efficient use of tax dollars, and equal citizenship for all Iowans.

—David Leshtz

Governor Kim Reynolds, 515-281-5211

Kelly Garcia, Director, Dept. of Health and Human Services, director@dhs.state.ia.us

Amy Sinclair, Chair, Iowa Senate Oversight Committee, amy.sinclair@legis.iowa.gov

Brooke Boden, Chair, Iowa House Oversight Committee, brooke.boden@legis.iowa.gov

The Prairie Progressive marches on: **Installation #3**

Loyal Prairie Progressive readers have breathtakingly followed our occasional recaps of Iowa's oldest progressive newsletter. Now let us take you back to events in the teen years of the 21st century, as seen and reported by PP regulars and guest columnists.

Angela Davis once described herself as a "Black female revolutionary." Many years later, speaking in 2016 to a packed Englert Theatre in Iowa City, she urged a mostly college-age audience to maintain a daily routine of self-care and a healthy diet while fighting for social justice. It was an unexpected but affirming stance for older audience members striving to maintain the activist zeal of their youth.

The Johnson County Board of Supervisors set a bold precedent in Iowa by passing a county-wide raise of the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. Supervisor Rod Sullivan made the case for the would-be increase, declaring it a rare instance of local government intervention in the so-called free market for the benefit of workers. When two other counties followed suit, Iowa's Republican-led legislature declared such actions illegal, despite its members' professed affection for local government.

Following the Hillary Clinton-Bernie Sanders 50-50 split in the 2016 Iowa caucuses, the PP's resident seer Jeff Cox predicted that "we are headed for a period of indefinite Republican rule at every level of government." Cox outlined how and why the caucuses

were rigged against Sanders: "Iowa should move to a primary even at the risk of losing our treasured status." Eight years later, that treasured status is gone.

Trish Nelson, born and raised in rural Iowa, blamed rural voters and Trump's rising popularity for the destruction of unions and the "daily tsunami of right-wing radio delivering a fictionalized version of reality." Prairie Dog followed up with an expose of the phony "Terrorism Desk in Washington DC" segment of KGAN-TV's nightly news; readers were urged to tell Sinclair stations nation-wide that they don't need fearmongering "to alert you to the nearly non-existent threat of foreign terrorists in your daily life."

Iowa Teamster leader Jesse Case made his PP debut with an article about the difference local elections can make, focusing on the progress made by the then-new Iowa City City Council on solutions to the shortage of affordable housing. Suzan Erem introduced PP readers to SILT (Sustainable Iowa Land Trust). West Branch resident Michael Zmolek ripped holes in the myths that blame low-income immigrants for US job losses. Quad Cities activist Cathy Bolkcom, writing about Senator Grassley's role in preventing President Obama's Supreme Court nomination of Merrick Garland from going forward, said she would appeal to Grassley's integrity "but I fear we are living in a post-integrity political world."

Prairie Dog reported on Iowan Barbara "Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes" Elliott at speaking at the Englert, Bernie Sanders speaking at Hancher, and then-University of Iowa President Bruce Harreld's unsuccessful attempt to shut down the Labor Center. Marty Ryan bravely sent dispatches from the front lines of legislative sessions in Des Moines. Jeff Cox relentlessly prodded the Iowa Democratic Party to honor its legacy as a progressive force. Our Solon Bureau Chief Paul Deaton exposed the many hypocrisies and bullying tactics of State Representative Bobby Kaufmann. State Senator Joe Bolkcom wrote in depth about his ongoing efforts to expand Iowa's limited medical marijuana laws, with an eye toward joining 23 other states and the District of Columbia blessed with legal recreational cannabis.

In 2018 the PP invited Iowa's Democratic gubernatorial campaigns to submit statements prior to the election. All four candidates or their surrogates responded, mostly with standard election pitches; only John Norris offered, in his own words, an electoral strategy for Iowa: "It has clearly been a failure to ignore rural voters...we must show we are willing to fight to bring life back to our rural communities and [offer] them a better economic future."

2018 was also the year the PP began awarding cash honorariums to writers under 30. Connor Wooff, then a first-year University of Iowa student, was the first recipient for his article; he detailed a tense conversation with State Senator Amy Sinclair, a Republican from Wayne County. "Her proposal for college affordability? Don't go."



cont'd on Page 9

**Iowa nutty
cont'd from Page 1**

with one hand, knowing they will be left alone by law enforcement in their counties to sign the paychecks for “illegal” immigrants with the other. It’s ironic. It’s galling. It’s performative yet dehumanizing. It’s Iowa!

Our state is in terrible straits. It appears most Iowans approve of at least some of what our governor is doing (for example, the bill to arm teachers polled at a 60% approval rating, also cited in the Register). But lowest-common-denominator fears and knee-jerk solutions erode a state’s livability factor over time. And it doesn’t take long. Time’s a wasting for us to maintain our “Iowa nice” vibe. Meanwhile, our governor seems almost dreamily enamored of the Field of Dreams storyline. *If you build it, they will come.* She (and all those elected under the banner of her party) need to start asking, If you tear it all down, what will you have left?

—Kim Painter is the Johnson County Recorder.

**The Prairie Progressive marches on: Installment #3
cont'd from Page 8**

Prairie Dog’s Summer Reading List for 2018 included Roxane Gay’s *Difficult Women*, Angie Thomas’s *The Hate You Give*, and *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. Iowa City poet Elizabeth Willis, retired law professor Lois Cox, and New York City writer Shirley Soffer contributed their book recommendations in 2019.

Jeff Cox accused Senators Grassley and Ernst of having blood on their hands for supporting U.S.-Saudi bombing in Yemen, “which has produced one of the greatest humanitarian crises in recent history.” Ryan Hall of the Iowa City Democratic Socialists of America outlined efforts by the Iowa City Tenants Union to build a coalition of renters and advocates to fight for housing justice. Shawn Harmsen followed up with a call to support the Iowa Manufactured Home Residents’ Bill of Rights for rent protection, fair fees, and good cause eviction standards.

Just before Covid hit, *Prairie Progressive* founder and co-editor Jeff Cox died unexpectedly. Our March 2020 issue was dedicated to

tributes to Jeff by colleagues and friends, including Karen Kubby, Zachary Oren Smith, Carol Thompson, Rusty Martin, Caroline Dieterle, *The Nation* editor Don Guttenplan, and Gary Sanders.

In April of 2020, the PP promised to donate \$10 to Iowa Legal Aid for every new subscription and renewal. Readers generously helped contribute \$710; visit www.legalaidfoundation.org.

The next few years spotlighted Black Lives Matter, the coronavirus, immigration reform, attacks on unions and workers’ comp, the launch of www.theprairieprogressive.com, the death of Rush Limbaugh, Gov. Reynolds’ cruel and regressive tax-cutting agenda coupled with a lack of transparency, the dangers of industrial-scale meat processing, sustainable agriculture, federal and state elections, union drives at Starbucks and John Deere...all delivered to your door by a friendly union letter carrier.

Thank you to our readers and subscribers for your continued support, even in the face of our first subscription increase in twenty years.

—*Prairie Dog*



April 29
Workers Memorial Day

May 1
PRIDE movie screening
Sponsored by Iowa
Labor History Society
7:30, FilmScene, Iowa City

May 4
Christina Bohannon meet’n’greet
2:00, American Legion,
Columbus Junction

May 11
Johnson Co Democrats
Hall of Fame reception
6:30, Radisson Hotel, Coralville

May 12, 2023
Starbucks workers in Iowa City
voted unanimously to unionize

May 16
Jo Co Dems Legacy Club
Noon, Coralville Public Library
Sen. Jochum and Rep. Konfrst
Info: wm.gerhard@gmail.com

May 31
Bleeding Heartland reception
5:00, The Sanctuary, Iowa City

June 15
Democratic State Convention
Des Moines

June 20
Jo Co Dems Legacy Club
Coralville Public Library
Speaker: Lisa Graves,
True North Research
Info: wm.gerhard@gmail.com

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE is Iowa's oldest progressive newsletter, founded by Jeff Cox in 1986. It is funded entirely by subscriptions from our readers. Editor: Dave Leshtz. We appreciate your support.

\$15 1-year subscription \$12 1-year gift subscription \$ _____ 2024 sustaining fund gift

Your Name

Gift Name

Your Address

Gift Address

City, State, ZIP

City, State, ZIP

Please return to: The Prairie Progressive, PO Box 1945, Iowa City, IA 52244

www.theprairieprogressive.com

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE
PO Box 1945
Iowa City, IA 52244