
THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



a newsletter for Iowa's Democratic Left

November 2024

Countering the consequences of the Corn Cartel

In the heart of America's farmland, a few powerful corporations dominate the market for one of our most essential crops—corn. This “Corn Cartel,” consisting of companies like Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Tate and Lyle and Ingredion, controls everything from prices to labor conditions and environmental impact. It's time to address the consequences of this concentrated power and demand a fairer approach.

Corn is critical to our agricultural system, feeding livestock, fueling cars, and appearing in countless processed foods. Yet, the corn market is far from competitive. These agribusiness giants control the supply chain, setting prices that leave farmers with little choice but to comply. As a result, farmers and workers in these plants bear the brunt of fluctuating prices while corporate profits remain steady.

The environmental impact is equally concerning. Industrial corn farming is a major contributor to water pollution due to heavy fertilizer and pesticide use. Chemical runoff contaminates waterways, fueling toxic algae blooms and creating “dead zones” like the one in the Gulf of Mexico. Locally, communities experience polluted lakes and streams, depriving children of the outdoor experiences many of us

once took for granted. Meanwhile, corporations continue polluting with minimal accountability.

The issue hits close to home in Iowa. In Cedar Rapids, Cargill's 2019 expansion in the Rompot neighborhood, approved by the City Council, prioritized supply chain stability over community health. The land was sold to Cargill for just \$3,000 per acre, while similar properties were valued at up to \$30,000 per acre. Meanwhile, neighborhoods near these plants face lower life expectancy and higher pollution levels. We are paying the price for Cargill's expansion—literally and figuratively.

Cargill, Ingredion, and ADM are also some of the largest contributors to carbon emissions locally. Policy-makers and elected officials have often cited the “good-paying Union jobs” as being essential to our local economy and a big reason to keep these industries in business. However, the failure of Cargill to provide a reasonable contract to its workers and the resulting strike, as well as that of the Ingredion strike only two years ago in 2022 suggests that maybe good Union jobs are no longer a priority for these companies.

The Corn Cartel's influence extends into the political sphere, too. These companies spend millions

lobbying for policies that entrench their dominance, resulting in billions of dollars in federal subsidies that prioritize large-scale monoculture farming over sustainable practices. Small farmers and communities pay the price for a system that prioritizes corporate profits over the true costs of industrial agriculture.

So, what can be done to counter the Corn Cartel's outsized power? We must make labor practices and water quality a priority in agricultural policy, with stricter regulations on fertilizer use and investment in sustainable practices like cover cropping. Additionally, we need to protect workers' rights, ensuring they have fair wages and the freedom to advocate for better conditions.

It's time to break up the Corn Cartel's grip on our food system, for the sake of our farmers, workers, and environment. By challenging these powerful corporations, we can build a more resilient, just food system that prioritizes people and the planet over profits. Our future—and the rights and well-being of our communities—depend on it.

—Jesse Case is Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 238. To donate to the strike fund to support Cargill workers and future strikes, send checks to: Local 238 Strike Fund, 5000 J Street SW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404.

Iowa Press plays proxy for no-show Republican

Good on *Iowa Press* for telling viewers at the start of its October 4th show that Republican Congressman Randy Feenstra declined an invitation to appear with his opponent, Democrat Ryan Melton. And good that it spent the entire program with Melton. Too bad it failed to mention that Feenstra also chose not to show up to debate when Melton first challenged him in 2022.

You would think that a congressman refusing to debate a challenger on Iowa's only statewide broadcast would be politically risky, but you would be wrong. It actually worked to his benefit because the *Iowa Press* panel helped him out by acting as his proxy.

The panelists did their usual thing, speaking for the absent Republican, repeating for the audience what his best issues are and reminding us of his popularity. They could have expressed disappointment that he declined their invitation, or they could have pointed out that elected officials owe voters accountability by a public debate. That was never going to happen and Feenstra knew it. Avoiding the media is popular among Republicans now. I have yet to see a shred of pushback or negative consequences for it.

I hope Melton's solid performance on the program helps his campaign. The *Iowa Press* panel in its usual fashion basically called him a sure loser. It gives this same treatment to every Democrat who appears on the program.

Watch regularly, and you can see how Democrats make the *Iowa Press* panel bristle. In this episode, moderator Kay Henderson couldn't help interjecting points of emphasis during other panelists' questioning. She did this as Erin Murphy was launching the first of several "resistance is futile" questions.

Murphy: "What do you consider a successful campaign, knowing that victory is a long shot? In 2022 your competitor, Congressman Feenstra, won by more than 102,000 votes, 36 percentage points."

Henderson: "Ahead of you."

Why didn't they just say, "Hey loser, what is the point of running, you can't win?" Voters may as well turn off the TV. Defeat has been declared.

As for that add-in by the moderator, I believe Melton knew Murphy meant Feenstra was ahead of him in votes and percentage points, not behind. Not sure what Henderson was trying to do there, other than driving the point home, as if anyone could possibly have missed the point.

Another example, after Melton's thoughtful, nuanced answer to a question about the Middle East:

Murphy: "Whenever people give an opinion like that, you hear the pushback that anything less than a full-throated endorsement of Israel and full backing of Israel—"

Henderson: "And its right to exist."

Murphy: "—and its right to exist—is unacceptable and a betrayal of an ally of the U.S."

Henderson apparently doesn't think Murphy asks questions good enough.

Every time a Democrat is on the program without a Republican, which is hardly ever, the panel relies on Republican talking points as their primary (or only) source for questions. They seem unable to think outside of the Republican box.

A positive note: "greedflation" made its way into the dialogue thanks to Melton, who did a fantastic job in a hostile environment. But Henderson

was swift to correct the Democrat, explaining that the term is "inflation," not "greedflation," and that the Republican candidate who was not present on the program is also the winner on that issue.

Henderson: "You mentioned greedflation...inflation has been something that your opponent, Congressman Feenstra, has been talking about. He's an advocate of a balanced federal budget. Do you think the federal budget should be balanced?"

Another example:

Henderson: "Speaking of questions—"

Murphy: "Yeah, so *The Register's* Iowa Poll found that Iowans consider immigration a top issue in this election. Your opponent, Congressman Feenstra, says immigration is his top issue. What conversations are you having with voters about immigration? What do you think needs to be done?"

They may as well have chanted, "na-na-na-na, Iowa likes our guy better than you, what d'ya say about that, loser?"

The *Iowa Press* panel never fails to rub it in to Democrats how futile it is to take on the overwhelmingly popular, eternally powerful Republicans in Iowa. Steven Gruber-Miller even admitted that it was the second time they made this point.

Gruber-Miller: "As we mentioned, it's a conservative district. There are about 107,000 more registered Republicans in the district than there are Democrats. How do you talk to those voters and earn their support? And how do you make the case that you would be a better candidate to represent their values than the Republican you're running against?"

Because they, as members of the media, couldn't possibly be the ones to inform voters. So don't expect any help from the press. You're on your own.

—Trish Nelson watches *Iowa Press* so you don't have to.

Don't be fooled by talk of higher prices

Campaign strategist James Carville coined the phrase "It's the economy, stupid" in 1992 when he worked on Bill Clinton's presidential campaign. His phrase was directed at the campaign's workers and intended as one of three messages for them to focus on.

Evidently, the intent, if not the quote, has come back to the 2024 campaign. A plethora of Facebook posts has compared prices from the past with current prices, specifically the price of an item on Election Day, 2020, compared to today's price. Congressperson Miller-Meeks has appeared in an ad insisting that "we gotta bring these prices down." Good luck!

President Biden's administration has claimed that inflation is under control and the economy is growing. Don't confuse inflation with the economy. Inflation is a part of the economy. The economy is the management of a government's resources, such as money, prices of merchandise, services, and transportation.

Republicans are attempting to blame "the economy" on Democrats, and Democrats are charging that the Republicans started it while Trump was President.

Economic experts have placed the origin of the country's current crisis with inflation at the beginning of 2020, when COVID-19 was beginning to affect markets, supplies, labor, services, and other aspects of the economy while President Trump was in office. At least one meme shows that the price of a 128 fl. oz. bottle of orange juice in January of 2020 was \$2.99. In January of 2024, the price had increased to \$4.29 for the same bottle. Likewise, during that same period, 12 oz. of coffee increased from \$6.99 to \$8.99.

The Biden Administration had very little to do with the surge in the price of orange juice or coffee, chocolate, or many other consumer goods. Orange juice is a commodity that, in its frozen concentrate state, is "traded at the Intercontinental Commodity Exchange (ICE) Futures," and "ICE is the exclusive global market for FCOJ (frozen concentrate orange juice) futures and options." Like the stock market, orange juice is not controlled by government involvement. The President, nor Congress, has nothing to do with the price of orange juice, gasoline, or all the tea in China.

Florida's orange production has dropped by an estimated 92% in 20 years, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, attributing the loss to natural disasters, such as freezing and hurricanes, and disease such as citrus greening. The price of orange juice will likely rise in the near future since Hurricane Milton crossed the bulk of Florida's orange tree orchards prior to harvest and created premature dropping of fruit on the ground.

It's not just orange juice over which the President or Congress has no control. The stock market is closing at record highs, and gasoline prices are under \$3 per gallon across much of the nation. Give Biden credit for those successes, but he had no direct influence on any of those efforts. If you believe a president, Congress, or any governmental agency can control the price of gasoline, you probably believe Congressperson Marjorie Taylor Greene when she claims the government controls the weather.

As the cost of groceries, insurance, and energy continue to rise, think about the last time the cost of those items fell. If your grocery

bill decreased, you most likely have less mouths to feed, or you altered your diet. If your insurance rates decreased, you changed your policy for one reason or another. And if your energy costs dropped, it's almost certain that you moved, installed new windows, or decided to conserve. The cost of all three of those necessities can be manipulated by the weather. Drought, hurricanes, tornadoes, excessive rainfall, freezing weather here and anywhere in the world, and disease play a major role in what we pay for essentials.

Sales tax and property tax can be controlled and manipulated by a government, and those two issues are hot-button campaign concerns, but you'll never see what you pay for either of them reduced. By now, we all know that "property tax relief" means that you won't see a huge increase, just an increase. And sales tax is often misstated as "just a penny." The price of goods and services may come down as soon as a sales tax is cut by a penny or more. Wait with me!

So why did Carville instruct campaign staff to focus on "the economy, stupid?" For the same reason Republicans are using the mantra today: because of the hit you take in the pocketbook. It affects everyone. Most of all, it works in an election year.

Don't be fooled by talk of higher prices. Republicans are not going to bring down the price of orange juice. Prices are controlled by an economic model of price determination in a market called supply and demand. It's economics, stupid!

—Marty Ryan got a "C" in *Economics in high school.*

Alarm bells in farm country

With less than two weeks until the November 5 election, I offer a series of reasons Iowans need to turn away from the GOP as it exists in the state today, and why it just might happen.

For starters, the GOP is as centralized here as Stalin's Soviet apparatus in its heyday. Not a popular comparison among R's, I know, but Trump now has his federal politburo with Mike Johnson and the House. In many states he has legislatures like Iowa's, tightly in lockstep with him. These bodies are willing to ignore the will of the people to enact voting laws that are utterly unconstitutional and anti-American, abortion bans beyond what anyone could have imagined even a few years ago, and legislation prohibiting local government from functioning for the benefit of local citizens.

Governor Kim Reynolds has steadily promoted this bizarre GOP agenda of diminishing rural Iowa. Think how far you now have to drive to see your primary care provider from your small town. There used to be a solid hospital up the street – now you're hunched over your steering wheel for 45 minutes or an hour to get checked out at an overcrowded clinic. Thanks to the Republican push to undermine the Affordable Care Act, many local hospitals had to close after early years of receiving a boost from ACA dollars. You can still get affordable insurance, but your local landscape has changed for the worse because of choices Republicans deliberately made at the state and federal levels.

The same is true with education. I need not remind anyone of recent moves to undercut local public education and special needs assistance, moves zealously undertaken by the Iowa legislative

majority and governor. These efforts, along with earlier ones, have led to the diminishment of what was once a gem of a public educational system. They've stolen from that sector to make huge gifts to unregulated, private, and pricey schools that promote religious and cultural agendas over learning. Local public schools are facing consolidation and closure as a result, while the private school voucher plan has fattened those ideological factory farms, making them so brazen they hike tuition, leaving the very families who were supposed to benefit from "school choice" out in the cold.

If this strikes you as the most dire, dismal picture one could paint – it is. And it's been painted and brought to life by Iowa's GOP. Today, Iowans who supported this party and its elected leadership are living in the landscape they created. And it isn't going well. Some are blaming Democrats because – well, because they're being told to, and they're reeling and not thinking it through.

The master plan wrought by the GOP overlords – Koch Brothers and ALEC come to mind, along with individuals like Leonard Leo – is humming along exactly as intended. Local school consolidation, hospital closure, local government hobbled by restrictions from the state – all represent a massive loss of identity and control, leaving local citizens demoralized and fuming. Republicans take this anger, which they've created, and focus it on issues far from home – immigration, racial tensions, and amorphous claims like "this country is being destroyed, it's being ruined from within."

Donald Trump whines these and other hypnotic tropes from the stages where he sways, sweats, and slurs

his words, keeping people charmed in a daze of disillusionment and dismay. How he continues to do it I don't know, but Iowa's GOP leaders follow him without fail. Ashley Hinson, Marianette Miller-Meeks, Joni Ernst, Chuck Grassley, and Kim Reynolds never rebuke him for his traitorous declarations or his illegal actions. In today's GOP-led Iowa, there is no backstop of any kind to stand against lawlessness, incapacity, and flat-out lunacy. It seems incomprehensible, but there it is. Clear as day.

There is, however, an emerging upside to this unfolding disaster. All of Iowa can see it now, and Iowa's presidential race has come down to under five points.

Trump's ham-handedness with everything from taxes to tariffs has set off alarm bells in farm country. If you don't believe it, take a drive and look around. Red counties are sporting plenty of blue, possibly just enough to tip this election. Farmers hear Trump saying his "favorite word in the dictionary is tariffs," and they see another steep hike in fertilizer and other ag-related prices coming. They are plenty worried about this prospect. But do they worry enough to do the one thing that matters? It remains to be seen.

Those whose eyes are opened to Trump and what he has done to the GOP must turn out and vote. I hope they will. A rural Iowa with clear eyes and grim determination is no longer an impossibility. It has become the emerging, essential ingredient in putting together a win for our state and our nation.

—Kim Painter is the
Johnson County Recorder.

Thunder from the prairie

On the day Harold Everett Hughes was born – February 10, 1922 – a fire destroyed the farm rented by his family outside Ida Grove, Iowa. Recent arrivals in western Iowa from the hills of Kentucky via Illinois, the Hughes family of four survived with only the clothes on their backs. With little money before the blaze and now totally destitute, they relied on the kindness of kin, their religious faith, and their indomitable will.

Born into poverty, Harold Hughes had a special perspective on how life's burdens can affect individuals through no fault of their own. As a young man, he faced additional hardships—the violent death of a beloved brother, brutal conflict on the battle fields of Europe, and the severe alcoholism that nearly destroyed him. Overcoming these hurdles, Hughes used his unique leadership talent to become governor of his state in the 1960s and a US senator from 1969 to 1974.

But political office is not Hughes's only legacy. It is what he did and how he did it. As Iowa governor, he led a reform of state government with a dynamism not seen in decades, modernizing it to accommodate mid-twentieth-century needs...

As a single-term senator, Hughes vigorously raised the issue of alcoholism as a disease to the national level, spearheading the first federal programs to aid sufferers. He was a relentless critic of the Vietnam War and American military deception. As a politician, Hughes was an inspirational leader who fearlessly addressed controversial issues. His captivating presence on the national stage compelled supports to initiate a presidential campaign on his behalf, only to have

Hughes himself end it...

Hughes was a man of unusual candor and directness. But it was how he expressed himself that so impressed people. He was a large (six-foot-three, 230 pounds), handsome man gifted with a deep, booming voice, and his speeches could bring vast crowds to tears as he expressed empathetic compassion for those less fortunate. He spoke eloquently about the suffering of others, applying, in one writer's words, "the compassion of one who has known and overcome despair."

“...a sincere Christian
who swore like a vulgar
stable hand...”

According to Nick Kotz and James Risser of the Des Moines Register, who covered Hughes in both Iowa and Washington, DC, “the trademark of the Hughes political style has been an outspoken forthrightness on issues, presented with all the charismatic advantages of rugged good looks, imposing physique, deep bass voice and compelling personal intensity.” This is the man Iowans saw year after year and rewarded with five statewide election victories over a decade...

Residing within this individual was an uneasy soul of immense contradictions. Hughes was a recovered alcoholic who fought to expand legal liquor sales in Iowa, a college dropout who could easily discourse with intellectuals, a sincere Christian who swore like a vulgar stable hand, and an ambitious politician who walked away from political power to follow his own inner calling. Compounding those contradictions was a man willing to learn and change as his

political career advanced, reflecting not opportunism but a capacity for growth...

This is the individual born on that day of flames in western Iowa in 1922. But this may not be the best image to mark this man. Perhaps a better one is thunder, a deep, rumbling sound heralding the passion of an Old Testament God. This metaphor—thunder from the prairie—illustrates Harold Hughes, a man of weight and depth who dramatically impacted countless lives, moved others to take productive action, and made a positive difference in the way we live today.

—Jerry Harrington is the author of *Thunder from the Prairie: The Life of Harold Hughes*. This excerpt is from the book's introduction. Harrington will be the featured speaker at the *Johnson County Democrats' Legacy Club* on January 16, 2025, at the *Coralville Public Library*.

Leftists contemplating voting for a third party in protest of Harris's shortcomings—or out of discontent with our two-party system—need to ask themselves why their particular cause or their personal discomfort is more important than making sure that Trump, Vance, and their clique of congressional collaborators are defeated decisively...especially since we can already see Trump preparing another attack on the legitimacy of our elections.

—*The Nation*, October 2024

The state capitol building is not a church

(This article first appeared at www.bleedingheartland.com).

It was a beautiful day for a drive, with big clouds billowing in a vast Iowa sky. My destination was the town of Toledo, where an “Iowa 99 County Bible Reading Marathon” was taking place.

Iowa’s past two governors have signed annual proclamations encouraging Iowans to read the entire Bible at the state capitol building and at all of Iowa’s county courthouses.

When I arrived at the Tama County Courthouse, a balding man in overalls and a white t-shirt stood at a podium in the center of a large concrete platform about five feet off the ground. He was reading from a bible: *God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved.*

But the man in overalls was not the only one reading.

Only a few feet from the platform was a stand of fir trees. Behind the trees was a tall concrete monument with the letters GETTYSBURG chiseled near the bottom. Nestled between the trees and the monument was a large table with a microphone and two speakers. The table was draped with a large black sign with white letters: The Satanic Temple of Iowa.

Behind the table sat a bearded man who was reading from *Paradise Lost*, John Milton’s epic poem from the 17th century: *Better to reign in Hell, than to serve in Heaven.*

How did these side-by-side readings come to pass in a town of 2,388 people?

The Satanic Temple of Iowa (TST) gained statewide notoriety during the

last Iowa legislative session when a defeated legislative candidate from Mississippi flew into Des Moines and vandalized the temple’s display at the state capitol. The display featured a statue of Baphomet, a pagan deity popularized by British writer Aleister Crowley (you can see Crowley’s picture on the album cover of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*).

The statue of Baphomet, damaged beyond repair by the Mississippi loser, had been permitted in the Capitol rotunda as part of an annual holiday event. The perpetrator of the damage was immediately charged with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor. Soon after, the Polk County Attorney’s Office raised the charge to felony third-degree criminal mischief – and a hate crime. (Prior to coming to trial, the vandal pled guilty to reduced charges and received a deferred judgment with two years’ probation.)

This alleged hate crime didn’t prevent TST from marching in Pride parades over the summer, sponsoring a book club, and planning a two-day public reading of *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem that the temple considers foundational to a contemporary understanding of Satan. Milton’s blank verse masterpiece, according to TST’s Facebook page, “imbued Satan with enlightenment-era values in Romantic literature, the religion of Satanism, and popular culture.”

The marathon reading was planned for the Capitol rotunda, but a strange coincidence occurred. The same day the temple’s event appeared on the Capitol Building Complex’s calendar, Iowa’s Department of Administrative Services changed its policy on multi-day events, no longer allowing them on the Capitol grounds.

That’s why two marathon readings took place on this fall day in Iowa. The Satanic Temple of Iowa had followed the lead of the Iowa 99 County Bible Reading Marathon and scheduled its reading of *Paradise Lost* on the grounds of the Tama County Courthouse.

Milling near TST’s table were four temple members dressed in black. As I approached, one smiled at me and asked, “We’re on our lunch break. Would you like a slice of pizza?” That’s how I met Adramelech, a thirtyish man with a goatee and sideburns. (Adramelech, roughly translated as “magnificent king,” appears in the Hebrew bible as well as in Assyrian demonology.)

Adramelech and his colleagues, all Iowans, started The Satanic Temple of Iowa five years ago. One of the women is from Waterloo; her brother-in-law taught in the Tama school district. Adramelech’s grandfather worked at the nearby Meskwaki Casino.

Adramelech and the other church members laughed often as we talked, occasionally exclaiming “Hail, Satan!” in response to something from *Paradise Lost* being read aloud at their table. They turned serious when explaining why their multi-day reading was at the Tama County Courthouse rather than at the state capitol in Des Moines, as originally planned. They were concerned that the state’s abrupt policy change also affects a three-day resource fair for homeless veterans held annually on the Capitol grounds.

As the dual readings continued, I walked into the courthouse and said hello to some administrative staff

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The state capitol building is not a church cont'd from Page 6

members in their offices. "Thank you for hosting these events," I said to a clerk at her desk. She responded in a friendly but firm tone, "We are not hosting anything. The Board of Supervisors had it on the agenda. We have nothing to do with what goes on out there."

TST received no pushback from the supervisors regarding approval to hold its reading on the courthouse lawn. Some county residents later questioned the decision, but all was peaceful during the side-by-side events.

TST is waiting to see if Governor Reynolds makes an exception for the veterans' event or for the Iowa Congressional Prayer Caucus, which still has events listed on the Capitol Building Complex's Calendar.

The governor's proclamation suggests state favoritism toward Christianity, one of many religions practiced by Iowans. It is the kind of proclamation usually issued by the leaders of theocracies.

Anyone who feels strongly about the separation of church should remind Gov. Reynolds that neither the state of Iowa nor the United States has an official religion, that all religions are equally welcome, and that the state capitol building is not a church.

—Dave Leshtz

Vote NO on both Iowa Constitutional Amendments

One is a Republican scare tactic designed to make Iowans think that non-citizens are voting in federal elections. The premise is false and only serves to stir up anti-immigrant emotions and conspiracy theories.

The other allows the governor, when a lieutenant-governor vacancy occurs, to appoint a replacement without Senate confirmation. The replacement could potentially serve for more than three years in the state's second-highest capacity—and potentially serve as governor in the event of resignation or death—without any citizens or legislators voting for him or her.

Prairie Progressive readers are urged to vote NO!



Oct 26

Iowans Against the
Death Penalty
Annual meeting, 2:00, DSM
Info: mrtynr@gmail.com

Nov 4

Last day to vote early

Nov 11

Armistice Day Observance
10:45 AM, Ped Mall, Iowa City
Followed by free lunch at ICPL

Nov 21

Johnson Co Dems Legacy Club
Prof. David Cwiertny, Director,
Center for Health Effects of
Environmental Contamination
Info: wm.gerhard@gmail.com

Dec 10

UI Center for Human Rights
Commemoration of the
Universal Declaration of
Human Rights
5 PM, Old Capitol, Iowa City

Dec 15

Bill of Rights Day

Dec 25

Federal Holiday

Jan 13, 2025

First Day of Iowa
General Assembly

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