

Clips

Iowa State House, Governor

- “GOP breaks off talks with governor”
- “Magic drunken driving number in limbo”
- “Vilsack vetoes dove-hunt bill”

General Elections, 2000

- “Nussle returns to seat in House”
- “Waterloo stop kicks off Gore's crucial last day”
- “Push polling suspected in Witt-Findlay district race”
- “Confident Cheney says voters are tuning in”
- “GOP VP hopeful Dick Cheney talks to Waterloo veterans”

GOP Convention 2000, Philadelphia

- “Caucuses keep first-in-nation spot with GOP”
- “Party politics have Iowa delegates hopping”

Capitol, Washington D.C.

- “Grassley to propose bill to help pay for breast cancer treatment”

Columns

- “Recalling many 'firsts' spent in Iowa”
- “Tricks of the trade from the 'Depths of Hell”
- “English's place in Iowa is secure”
- “Elections in India a time of celebration”

POSTED:
Sunday, August 20, 2000

Grassley to propose bill to help pay for breast cancer treatment

**Evansdale woman with breast cancer
searched for ways to pay bills.**

By MADHUSMITA BORA
Courier/Medill News Service

WASHINGTON

If you can't pay for health insurance, you can't afford to suffer from breast cancer.

That's the lesson 62-year-old Darlene Pitts of Evansdale learned when she was diagnosed with the disease five years ago through a federal early-detection program. For her, the nightmare was two-fold. Besides suffering from a potentially fatal disease, she also had to find ways to pay for her treatment while supporting a family.

"I was scared and wondered where I would be able to get help or whether I would die from it," Pitts said. "The state paid for my surgery through county relief, but I don't have any money to go for my checkup now."

Pitts used to run a motel, but she hasn't been able to work since her surgery.

In March another woman from the Waterloo area, who asked to be unnamed, wrote a letter to Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, describing her experience. After learning of her cancer through the federal early-detection program, she accumulated more than \$70,000 in debt for treatment. Now, the woman said, she pays what she can each month, yet her bills are so high she often wonders if she should quit treatment so she will not saddle herself and her family with further debt. But she says she wants to stay alive to help her daughter take care of her 16-year-old grandson, who has cancer.

Grassley has taken over sponsorship of a bill that would provide \$50 million in the first year and \$250 million over five years to pay for treatment of women with low incomes who are diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer. On June 14, the Senate Finance Committee approved the legislation.

"This legislation is critical to fight against breast and cervical cancer," said Grassley. "It reaches out to the thousands of women who fall through the cracks of the current system and have no way to pay for treatment after receiving the devastating news that they have these cancers. It assures them of the treatment they need to survive."

In 1990, Congress passed the Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality Prevention Act, which authorized the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide screening services through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program for low-income women with no health insurance.

To be eligible, women can have no greater than 250 percent of the federal poverty level. Early detection of cancer helps keep treatment costs down, officials said, but the detection program law doesn't have the critical aspect of funding for treatment.

"If diagnosed in the initial stages treatment would cost roughly between \$10,000 to \$25,000," said Cherry Shogren, case manager for Mercy Center for Breast Health in Mason City. "But at an advanced stage it can cost anywhere from \$75,000 to \$100,000."

But "diagnosis does not save people; treatment does," said Christine Carpenter, a breast cancer survivor and advocate. "I hope our lawmakers realize this soon enough." Carpenter said she could not imagine what she would have done without her health insurance.

According to published reports, the early detection program has screened more than a million women for breast cancer since its inception and has diagnosed almost 6,000 cases of breast cancer in women who are uninsured and under 65.

Four years ago, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, R-N.Y., introduced a bill to fund free treatment for women suffering from breast cancer, but it died in committee. In 1997, Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., took up the issue, but the bill didn't make much progress. After Chafee's death last October, the Iowa Breast Cancer Coalition approached Grassley to take over the bill.

Even though the bill was approved by the Finance Committee on a voice vote, it did not make it to the floor before the Congress went into recess. Grassley said that the Senate leadership has assured him that the bill will come up for a vote before the full Senate this year. But Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's staff could not give any information about when the bill would come to the floor.

"We absolutely need this bill to save women who are dying simply because they cannot afford the cost of treatment," Carpenter said.

As of June, 28 low-income women in Iowa have been diagnosed with cancer, according to Grassley's office. Last year, 533 women in Iowa alone died of the disease.

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POSTED:

Wednesday, January 31, 2001

Vilsack vetoes dove-hunt bill

**Governor rejects bill even
before it hits his desk.**

By MADHUSMITA BORA
Courier Staff Writer

DES MOINES

Dove lovers can stop mourning for mourning doves for another year.

Gov. Tom Vilsack Tuesday night clipped the wings of dove hunters, saying he'll veto a controversial bill allowing dove hunting in Iowa.

"The majority of Iowans do not support changing the current law to legalize dove hunting," Vilsack said in a written statement. "My office received contact from thousands of concerned Iowans regarding this issue, and my conclusion is that this policy is not right for our state at this time."

The bill authorized the Iowa Natural Resources Commission to set a dove-hunting season. Hunters and dove lovers intensely lobbied for and against this bill. Legislators were inundated with phone calls, e-mails and letters from both sides. The bill passed the House and the Senate after emotional debates and was awaiting Vilsack's approval.

"Unfortunately, since the beginning of the 2001 legislative session, the Iowa Legislature has expended a great deal of time and effort on this issue," Vilsack said. "This issue has now been decided and I urge all members of the Legislature to now turn their attention to the important issues."

Eight-year-old Paige Neil from La Porte City was elated when she heard the news.

"I am happy that there won't be any dove hunting because they are beautiful birds and their music is beautiful," Neil said. "I wrote a letter to Gov. Vilsack telling him how my family loved doves and how we like to watch them and feed them."

Paige's grandmother, Vi Paige, also lobbied for the little birds.

"I am really glad that the doves are safe for at least another year," she said. "Why can't they shoot crows instead? Maybe they will get more happiness out of that."

Sportsmen were upset with the governor's decision.

"I am really disappointed," said Dean Payne of Evansdale. Payne said because of restrictions in the state, he went to Kansas to shoot quail and doves.

"I think the governor's action was very political and it has nothing to do with hunting doves," Payne said. "He did the politically correct thing by vetoing the bill."

GOP leaders expressed surprise at Vilsack's decision, which came before the bill arrived at his office.

"I don't know how the governor could veto the bill even before he gets the bill," said Rep. Richard Wiedman, R-Griswold, lead supporter of the measure. "It's a tremendous shame to the state."

Wiedman said there is a possibility the bill might come back in another form soon.

"It was just a way for him to bow to certain group of people," Wiedman said. "It will come back again."

"The governor's veto reflected the view of Iowans," said Rep. Bill Dotzler, D-Waterloo. "It's time we stopped talking about doves and start attending to other serious issues."

"It's too bad that Iowa hunters will still have to continue to go over state lines to hunt doves," said Rep. Bob Brunkhorst, R-Waverly. "It's something that I thought Iowa is ready for, but the governor is not. So I guess we will move forward."

House Majority Leader Christopher Rants proclaimed the bill dead until Iowa gets a new governor.

"I voted for it, but life goes on for now, particularly if you are a dove," Rants said.

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POSTED:
Sunday, October 8, 2000

GOP VP hopeful Dick Cheney talks to Waterloo veterans

By MADHUSMITA BORA

Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO

There were no long speeches on policies; neither was there one of those routine question-and-answer sessions. It was a campaign stop with a difference.

Waterloo Veterans Memorial Hall Saturday morning served as a listening post where veterans could share opinions and discuss issues with Republican vice presidential candidate Dick Cheney. About 80 veterans attended the event.

Retired U.S. Army Gen. Evan "Curly" Hultman, who organized the event, told the gathering Cheney was there to listen, not to debate.

From peacekeeping forces in Bosnia to prescription drug benefits for veterans, Waterloo veterans voiced opinions on a wide range of issues.

The former defense secretary expressed concern about the state of the U.S. military.

Morale is down, he said. And despite Sen. Joseph Lieberman and Vice President Al Gore's claims the armed forces are better off now than eight years ago, Cheney and Texas Gov. George W. Bush believe certain areas need improvement.

Cheney praised former President Reagan, saying he deserves the credit for the present quality of military equipment and personnel. The Clinton-Gore administration merely reaped the benefits of the Reagan legacy, he said.

"It takes time to build quality of military forces as it takes a long time to train them," Cheney said. "I remember when the Gulf War ended I picked up the phone and thanked President Reagan. I wonder if any future defense secretary would call Clinton or Gore to thank them."

Improving the military would be their top priority if he and Gov. Bush are elected, he said.

One Waterloo veteran talked about withdrawing U.S. peacekeeping forces from Yugoslavia. Two days ago, new Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica said Serbians should reconstruct their own country, and peacekeeping forces should withdraw.

"We are in a position to withdraw our ground forces from Yugoslavia, and we need to encourage our European allies to pick up the slack and take over, although I don't know whether we should withdraw from

Kosovo," Cheney said. "My concern is we may have the same problems come up in Kosovo again if we withdraw now."

He said the United States should reduce its peacekeeping commitments because it strains the labor pool at home.

Veterans were also concerned by the lack of incentives to join the armed forces and to stay in the military. Cheney agreed there is major dissatisfaction among the armed forces, and retaining personnel is a bigger challenge than recruiting.

"There are a number of things to be taken care of," he said. "We need to make sure that we provide adequate housing and schools for the families of those in service, along with allocating resources to better train and equip the forces."

Everyone seemed eager to get a word with Cheney.

"It was great, and we would like to have this kind of opportunity again," retired Lt. Col. Doug Miller said. "People should be given a chance to get together and voice their concerns about the government as a part of the larger democratic process."

While Cheney may have won the hearts of some veterans, others were still undecided.

"The session was informative, but there are still issues about which I would like to hear from both sides," said Dave Boyd, a Vietnam veteran.

Boyd was concerned about the implications of a law that shifts the burden of proof onto a soldier who suffers a disability.

"I was satisfied with Cheney's opinions about a few issues, but then he is a politician, and I am not totally convinced," Boyd said.

Apart from addressing veterans, Cheney also met with voters at the East-West football game in Waterloo Friday night. He showed up midway through the second quarter of a scoreless game, accompanied by Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and former Republican Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming.

"We wanted to see some Friday night football, and we could not think of a better place to see it," Cheney said over the stadium's public address system. He urged the exuberant crowd to vote on election day, no matter their political affiliation.

The former secretary spent 40 minutes at the game and signed autographs.

POSTED:

Tuesday, August 1, 2000

Caucuses keep first-in-nation spot with GOP

By MADHUSMITA BORA

Courier/Medill News Service

PHILADELPHIA

The Republican convention started on a good note for the Iowa delegation as fellow delegates from around the country voted to keep the Iowa caucuses first in the nation for the 2004 Republican presidential nominating process.

"Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses is a respected tradition and an important step on the road to the White House," said Kayne Robinson, chairman of the Iowa GOP.

"We fought to retain the tradition," added Ron Herrig from Dubuque. "It is a big deal as it brings lot of money to the state and puts Iowa on the map."

The Delaware Plan to change the Republican nominating system was defeated in the party's rules committee meeting on Friday. The proposed plan would have required states to divide into four "pods." Each pod would have held primaries in an assigned month. Iowa was in the second pod.

"This was one of our primary concerns," said Roger Pease, a delegate from Cedar Falls. "Prior to the convention we were uncertain that we would be able to retain our status, and we are very satisfied with the way things have turned out."

Iowa's caucus system is generally credited with launching President Jimmy Carter's successful campaign in 1976. Supporters say the Iowa caucuses give partisans of both parties an opportunity to put candidates under the microscope in a fairly small state with few media markets, thus allowing candidates with small budgets to compete and attract attention and support.

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POSTED:

Tuesday, August 1, 2000

Party politics have Iowa delegates hopping

By MADHUSMITA BORA

Cocktails, dinners and political hobnobbing are just one part of the Republican National Convention. The Iowa delegates are also getting serious business done this week.

Celebrating their success at retaining Iowa's status for holding the first presidential caucuses in the nation, the delegates on Monday seem pepped-up for the anticipated formal selection of George W. Bush as the GOP presidential nominee Thursday.

"It is a giant pep rally," said Roger Pease, the delegate from Cedar Falls. "The excitement is just building up and as days go by there will be less of sleep and more of excitement."

The Iowans were guests at a barbecue Sunday afternoon, hosted by their convention hotel; Monday night, they went to the Lumber Association's cocktail party and, after the convention, were invited to a reception at the Navy Yard Cruise Ship Terminal sponsored by the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

But Monday morning was all business, as the delegates were addressed by Gov. Jim Gilmore of Virginia, who is also the co-chairman for the Bush Victory 2000 campaign.

Gilmore said education has been an issue more associated with Democrats until recently, but criticized their vision for improving education. He said education is not about pumping money into the system, but about quality and accountability.

"The Democrats have just pumped money to reform the education system, but they lack vision," Gilmore said. "Iowa being the first state to hold the caucus has a very important role to play to steer the nation in the right direction. We need to elect George W. Bush to help give quality education to our kids."

The delegates were shown a documentary outlining Bush's education policy.

"Education tops the priority list as far as issues are concerned," said Ron Herrig, a delegate from Dubuque.

But Pease said defense and taxes are equally important.

In the next few days the delegates are going to discuss various other issues important to the GOP, including the controversial issue of abortion.

"There is difference of opinion about that (abortion) issue, but Gov. Bush has handled it pretty well and I don't think there will be much hue and cry over that one now," Pease said.

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POSTED:

Sunday, October 8, 2000

Confident Cheney says voters are tuning in

By MADHUSMITA BORA

It seems like caucus time all over again for Iowans, thanks to the attention they are receiving from the Republican presidential ticket. In the last week the state played host to both Texas Gov. George W. Bush and his running mate, Dick Cheney.

"We want to win Iowa this time," Cheney said in an interview with the Courier.

"Besides, Chuck gets lonely if we don't visit him often," he said of Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of New Hartford.

The former defense secretary predicted it would be a close election, but seemed confident of winning.

"Recent polls in Arkansas show that we are leading in spite of it being Clinton's home turf, and we are also leading in Tennessee and West Virginia, too," he said.

He said citizens want a change in policies, which is helping Bush gain support in those states.

Asked what the Bush-Cheney ticket offers Iowans, Cheney said their leadership would improve public schools, ensure prescription drug coverage for seniors, increase benefits for military personnel and introduce new tax policies.

With elections knocking at the door, the vice presidential candidate wants to tune in more people to their policies. In an upbeat mood, Cheney said he doesn't mind having to live out of his suitcase the next few weeks.

"I am going to Wyoming tonight, and then after I do my laundry I will continue my tour of Nevada, New Mexico and Illinois," Cheney said.

These last few weeks will be crucial because until a week ago voters were busy with the Olympics, vacations and getting their kids back to school.

"We will see a lot of opinion forming in the next few days, and the strategy will be to campaign across the country and tune in people with our policies," he said.

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POSTED:

Monday, November 6, 2000

Waterloo stop kicks off Gore's crucial last day

By MADHUSMITA BORA

Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO

With Election Day less than 24 hours away, Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, began their last day of campaigning in Waterloo this morning as part of his get-out-to-vote effort.

Gore and his entourage arrived in Waterloo a little after midnight for a big political rally at Livingston Hangar at the Waterloo Municipal Airport.

Hundreds of people turned out at the late hour to cheer on the Democratic candidate for president.

"I just love Iowa," Gore said to the cheering crowd. "This journey we are taking on your behalf really began right here in the state of Iowa and today it's come all the way back to Iowa on the last day of campaigning."

The vice president seemed pleasantly surprised by the turnout. He said he did not have any notion there would be such a good crowd.

"We thought there would be couple of dozen people around here," the vice president said. "What your presence shows me is that we are going to win Iowa."

Terming this race a historic one in terms of how close it is, he told the crowd to save some energy to get out the vote; to take neighbors to the polls and convince undecided voters to vote Democratic.

"This race is the closest at least in 40 years, since John Kennedy beat Richard Nixon," Gore said. "I need you to get me one more vote in your precinct."

Gore said the race may be even closer than the Nixon-Kennedy race.

"This race may be tied," Gore said.

Despite what the pollsters and pundits say, Gore said he has a feeling voters are moving in his direction. He called for changes in the Freedom to Farm law, a higher minimum wage and higher wages for women. It is time to give back medical decisions to doctors, Gore said, treat teachers as professionals and balance the budget so the surplus is not squandered giving tax breaks to the wealthy.

The Democratic presidential candidate also touched upon prescription drugs, Supreme Court appointments and campaign finance reform.

"You can go toward the old Bush-Quayle type of policy or go forward and extend the prosperity," Gore said.

He urged the voters to use both their heads and their hearts to make their decision.

"In a close race like this, your feeling, passion, dedication and commitment will make all the difference," he said.

He said there will be consequences if the voters did not make the right decision.

"You will tell your grandkids about this race," Gore said. "The time when Iowa had the decision in the palm of their hands and you had the ability to affect Iowa's decision. The time when you decided that you will turn Iowa in the right direction and thereby turn America in the right direction."

Earlier the crowd was addressed by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Gov. Tom Vilsack.

"I like Gore's position on education," said Jane Scol, a University of Northern Iowa student. "I want to become a teacher and his stance on teachers has influenced my decision and I am going to vote for him."

"It (Gore's speech) was really inspiring," said Sherri Gabbard. "I am amazed at how alive he is when you always get to hear that he is straight and dead."

Gabbard, a kindergarten teacher, said it was worth losing sleep to see Gore.

Ella Love, a lab assistant at John Deere, agreed.

"I am really excited and I pray and hope that Gore wins," she said. "I have heard him speak before he became the vice president and have never stopped liking him. I have seen more happiness in last eight years than ever before and I will vote for him."

Sean Holzinger, who came from Cedar Rapids to listen to the vice president, quipped, "I think he has hit a home run here tonight."

Others, however, like Beth Reid, a UNI student, were disappointed with the vice president's speech.

"His speech was poor," Reid said. "I had already made up my mind about Bush, but just wanted to see what he had to say."

Reid likes Bush's proposals on education and Social Security better than Gore's.

POSTED:

Wednesday, November 8, 2000

Nussle returns to seat in House

By MADHUSMITA BORA
Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO

Incumbent Jim Nussle won the race for the 2nd District seat in the U.S. House race for the sixth consecutive time, defeating Dubuque Democrat Donna Smith 55-44 percent with 100 percent of the vote counted.

"I am very proud that I have been elected again," Nussle said. "The turnout in the Black Hawk County was very good. We have never done this well in the county in a presidential year. There must have been quite a few Democrats who crossed over and voted for me."

The 2nd District includes most of Northeast Iowa extending from the Mississippi River nearly to Interstate 35

through the center of the state. It includes 21 counties, and Nussle claimed victory in all 21 for the first time.

He topped Smith in Black Hawk County by 50.2 percent to 48.6 percent – a margin of about 900 votes out of more than 53,000 cast.

Now that he has been re-elected, Nussle said his first task will be to help pass the pending congressional budget.

When asked what swung the votes to Nussle, Smith said money was a major factor. The Roll Call Report Syndicate's Campaign Finance Report from Jan. 1, 1999, to Oct. 18 2000, shows Nussle received \$757,394 in campaign contributions and spent \$658,203. Smith received \$56,102 and spent \$19,895 in that time period.

"It was his million dollars to my \$70,000," Smith said.

Nussle refuted her allegations, and said she is going to make a lot of excuses now that she has been defeated.

"She indulged in a lot of personal and negative campaigning," Nussle said "The fact that I won Dubuque County, which is a strong Democratic area, shows that people rejected her negative campaigning."

Smith said she will continue to serve as supervisor, the position she has held for the past 21 years, and will work for issues important to the people of her congressional district.

She believes she carried out a very positive campaign.

"Not too many campaigns addressed issues like the Freedom to Farm Bill, pay equity for women or ending federal funds to big hog industries," Smith said, "Now that Nussle has won, he better work for issues that

hurt people in the district and stop representing the big special interest groups, which he has been doing the last 10 years."

Smith promised to come back again and this time more prepared. This is the second time the two have faced each other. Nussle defeated her in a closer race in 1996. In 1998, Nussle defeated current state Democratic Party Chairman Rob Tully.

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POSTED:
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GOP breaks off talks with governor

By MADHUSMITA BORA
Courier Staff Writer

DES MOINES

Republican leaders outlined their final state budget proposal Tuesday, but the governor says they still haven't gone far enough.

GOP leaders increased spending plans by \$48 million for next fiscal year. They want to pass the budget and go home next week, and said they are ending negotiations with Gov. Tom Vilsack.

"We are going to go ahead and run the budget bills," said Senate Majority Leader Stewart Iverson, R-Dows.

Vilsack says the plan is a good start, but held out the threat of a veto.

"This is obviously a matter of negotiation and compromise. We are willing to sit down with legislative leaders in the course of the next week to look at where additional cuts could be forthcoming."

The governor said he will reject the budget if the numbers are inadequate.

The proposal restores \$10 million to education, including \$4 million for community colleges and \$6 million for existing teacher professional development programs. An additional \$17 million has been allotted to fund public transportation and \$200,000 more has been added to public school transportation costs.

The Republican plan also restores \$8 million to the Department of Human Services budget.

Senate President Mary Kramer, R-West Des Moines, said by releasing the proposal, Republicans met the governor part-way.

"At least we see our plan, we know what we want to do and now we can move ahead," Kramer said. "Don't think we like being accused of having children for lunch or not putting a face on people who are troubled. These things are hard to do, but what we did is the responsible thing."

Vilsack and the Republicans have been squabbling over the budget for weeks after a sluggish growth in state revenues left a \$300 million shortfall. Vilsack wants to dip into the state's rainy day fund, but Republicans have vehemently rejected the proposal.

"We have to cut spending," said House Speaker Brent Siegrist, R-Council Bluffs. "Using the Economic Emergency Fund is the wrong answer. It's a Band-Aid on a wound that won't heal."

The governor Tuesday offered to find an additional \$50 million in spending cuts, but that still leaves a \$100 million gap between the two sides. Republicans said they would not budge from their position.

"There's no more money to give and I don't care how many umbrellas pop up on the front porch of the Capitol, we cannot use the Economic Emergency Fund," said House Majority Leader Christopher Rants, R-Sioux City. Rants referred to protesters who rallied outside the Capitol encouraging increased spending.

"We are going to pass a responsible budget," Siegrist said. "If he vetoes it, we will be back in a special session."

The governor termed Tuesday's developments as positive, but criticized Republicans for reneging on promises to boost teacher pay.

"The GOP proposal still does not fund the teacher compensation and student achievement plan," Vilsack said.

Republicans have set aside \$8 million toward the teacher pay hike. Initially they had promised to make \$40 million available. Vilsack still wants to put \$40 million as a down payment for this year.

"It's a promise that I intend to keep," the governor said.

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POSTED:
Monday, March 12, 2001

Magic drunken driving number in limbo

**Vilsack, MADD push .08 BAC, but
Republican leaders say issue dead.**

By MADHUSMITA BORA

Courier Staff Writer
DES MOINES

Activists Monday turned up the heat on legislators to tighten Iowa's drunken driving laws.

Mothers Against Drunken Driving and Gov. Tom Vilsack lined up behind a bill lowering Iowa's legal blood alcohol content (BAC) to .08. The measure is in danger of being dropped for the session under the funnel rule. National MADD President Millie Web, who is touring the state to garner support for the bill, emphasized "time lost equals lives lost."

"By adopting .08 as the legal limit for drunk driving, the Iowa state Legislature will reduce alcohol-related fatalities by more than 8 percent," Web said. "I urge the Iowa Legislature to join us in our efforts to adopt this life-saving law and to work for its swift passage."

Twenty states along with District of Columbia have the .08 figure as the legal definition of drunken driving. Vilsack said it is a priority issue for him.

"This is about saving lives," he said. "It is a relatively simple bill. All it does is it takes the standard from .1 to .08. It's an easy bill to understand and pass, and there's no reason why it hasn't or can't pass this session."

Vilsack, who talked about the issue in his Condition of the State address, introduced a bill this year to reduce the blood alcohol limit, but it is stalled in a Senate committee. The bill must come out of committee in one chamber and get floor approval in the other in order to survive this session.

"I would ask the Legislature to take necessary steps to ensure that this measure survives the funnel," Vilsack said. "We have seen this Legislature act quickly if it needs to, and this is an issue they ought to act quickly on."

But GOP leaders said the issue wouldn't see any action this session.

"This will not be addressed in the Legislature or floor this year," said House Majority Leader Christopher Rants, R-Sioux City. "We have limited resources to spend in the state, and we ought to spend those resources getting current law breakers off the road and not turning more people into criminals."

Last year President Bill Clinton signed into law a measure requiring all states to comply with the .08 standard. As an incentive, Congress provided revenue to the states adopting the measure. According to the governor's office for drug control policy, Iowa could receive about \$2 million per year for the next three years if it complies. Failure by the Legislature to pass this law by 2003 would cost Iowa \$4.7 million in federal transportation dollars, and the number could go up to \$18.7 million by 2007.

Senate Majority Leader Stewart Iverson, R-Dows, said there is some frustration involved with the federal mandate.

"I certainly do not advocate anyone driving while they have been drinking," Iverson said. "But this is a case where the federal government has said to the states you have to pass .08 by 2003 or we are not going to send your own money back to you. This is very frustrating for the states."

Between 1995 and 1999, there were 35 fatal crashes in Iowa that involved drunken drivers with a blood alcohol content of between .08 and .1, according to state figures. In 1999 alone, 160 people died from alcohol-related traffic crashes, accounting for nearly 33 percent of all traffic fatalities statewide.

"It's time to get this bill off the floor of the House and Senate and make it into a law," said Wanda Farrell, a MADD member from Hudson

"What are we waiting for? Is it going to take one of them (legislators) in our shoes before they get this passed?" said Farrell, who lost her 16-year-old daughter to a drunken driver in 1995.

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POSTED:

Friday, October 13, 2000

Push polling suspected in Witt-Findlay district race

Democrat Bill Witt says voters are being called to swing opinion.

By MADHUSMITA BORA

Courier Staff Writer

CEDAR FALLS

Political mudslinging is often a part of all election games. But this one seems to be making a precedent of sorts.

Incumbent state Rep. William G. Witt, D-Cedar Falls, said his opponent Don. F. Findlay is push polling in the 23rd District to swing voter opinion.

"Eight people told me that they were push polled last week," Witt said, "Mr. Findlay is trying to undermine public perception of my views on issues."

Iowa Democratic Chairman Rob Tully said Wednesday that voters in several Iowa House districts are receiving "push polling" campaign telephone calls.

"They are one of the most deceptive and detrimental tactics either party can utilize," Tully said.

Push polling is a negative campaign tactic disguised as a survey. The caller identifies voters supporting the opposition and "tries to polarize the particular voter against the particular candidate," Tully said.

Bruce Rieks, staff member of University of Northern Iowa who received one such call last week, said, "I thought it was very strange."

"It seemed obvious that they were trying to ask questions related to issues that would confuse the average person and it definitely didn't seem like a poll. I felt like I was being manipulated," Rieks said.

Rieks was asked three questions – If the 2000 general elections for Iowa House was held today and he had to make a choice, would he vote for Don Findlay or Bill Witt ? The next two questions were framed to show the candidates stand on issues: Don Findlay supports making English the official language of Iowa and Witt opposes it. Knowing this, who would you vote for? Would you vote for Witt knowing that he supported giving all teachers a pay raise as opposed to Findlay who supports a plan to pay teachers more based on student performance?

Even though the origin of the poll is unknown, the calls triggered a set of pamphlets from both sides. Witt's supporters distributed pamphlets warning voters not to be fooled "by phony phone calls."

Findlay's camp did not take it lying down, either. To counter his opponent's allegations his supporters distributed pamphlets saying "Just who's trying to fool who?" and went about listing Witt's voting record on a number of education issues.

"It was definitely a poll conducted by Findlay's people," said Joanne White, a teacher, who also received the call. "All the questions were slanted toward Findlay."

Findlay denied his involvement, and said that the poll was conducted by the Republican Party of Iowa without his knowledge. But he said the questions asked did not qualify as "push poll questions."

"When you ask the position of a voter on a certain issue and state a candidate's position on an issue, do you consider that push polling?" Findlay said. "I only know of the poll conducted by the state party and they projected even my stand wrongly on the issue of English as the state's official language, and that shows that I had no connection with it (the poll) whatsoever. "

When contacted, however, a state Republican Party spokeswoman said she was not familiar with any such poll being conducted by the party.

Tully released a letter he sent Wednesday to Iowa Republican Chairman Kayne Robinson, asking him to investigate several reports of push polling.

"The Republican Party of Iowa is not sponsoring any push poll phone calls" said Robinson. "Democrat Chairman Rob Tully is trying to hide the fact that push polling is a tactic Democrats have perfected. Republican polling is based on issues and actual votes of state legislative candidates."

The Republicans in June, three weeks after the primary, accused Senate Minority Leader Mike Gronstal, D-Council Bluffs, of push polling with negative personal attacks.

Tully said he has received calls from people in Perry, Manchester and Fairfield to report calls from a Utah company that they believed used push polling.

"It's not keeping with the tradition of the district," said Witt who is serving his fourth term in the House. "No one has ever been push polled before this for a state race."

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POSTED:

Sunday, December 3, 2000

Elections in India a time of celebration

By MADDIE BORA

Courier Political Writer

No matter what the media polls and the political pundits say, I can never have enough of the presidential election.

I have followed these elections as much as a political junkie as a political reporter. After reading media reports on how readers are getting impatient with the political impasse, I promised myself that I wouldn't write anything remotely associated with the election, but something happened today that threw me back on a nostalgic trip to all the campaigning days with my father.

My father is a politician from the state of Assam in India. As I write this, he is being wheeled away to an operation theater in Delhi for heart by-pass surgery. As my thoughts travel thousands of miles away to be with him, I recall the times we spent together in the roller-coaster world of Indian politics.

Unlike America, India is a young democratic country. After independence in 1947, the country chose to adopt the Westminster model. Therefore, the country has a parliamentary form of government, but it also has a figurehead president who is voted to office by an Electoral College. The prime minister, his cabinet of ministers are required to be members of either one of the houses in the parliament. Mostly they are elected by popular vote but if they are members of the upper house then they are voted to office by an electoral college.

It was a fascinating experience for me to report on the world's greatest democracy going to polls to elect its 43rd president. As I followed candidates on their campaign trail, I saw the stark differences in the way things work in the two countries.

Campaigning doesn't kick off until about four months before the elections in India, unlike here where it is almost a year-long affair. Friends and family members of the candidates jump into the wagon and religiously take part in the whole process. The most important form of campaigning is massive rallies, called "meetings." The size of these gatherings is a good indication of the support the candidates have, a subjective counterpart of the polls in this country.

There is usually a lot of drama and fanfare attached to the whole process. There are no campaign managers or PR people running the show. The candidate and his family manage everything.

I still remember those long, hard days before each election. I would set off with my father in the wee hours of the morning and never get back home until well past midnight. If I even got a grain of rice to eat during the whole day I used to consider myself lucky.

There are no TV advertisements or telephone calls, but a lot of political graffiti, holdings, and the most eye-catching massive cutouts of the candidates. Those four months of campaigning are a festival of colors, sound and intense political discussion, which ends 48 hours before the polling day. The polling day is usually a holiday.

Our campaigning used to take us to all the nooks and corners of his constituency. I would marvel at my dad as he would have to deliver a speech in three different languages on the same day and, no, there are no speechwriters. Most of the speeches were impromptu and without the aid of a teleprompter, which virtually is non-existent in India.

We were always late reaching a "meeting" in time, but still the people would wait for us, sometimes as much as five hours. And after that wait, they would expect a nice, good long juicy speech, entertaining and witty.

I was particularly fond of campaigning in the tea garden areas. Assam produces most of India's tea, which is well known in the tea-drinking world for its strong flavor. The state is peppered with massive tea estates, popularly called gardens, maybe because they are so beautiful to look at.

Since tea is made from small buds of a particular maturity, the plucking cannot be done by machines. We would speak with the leaf pluckers, crying hoarse trying to explain to them where they should stamp on the ballot paper. Every candidate runs on his party symbol or a symbol issued to him by the election commission -- a rule adopted by the original rule makers to make sure the illiterate are not disadvantaged. The challenge is to educate the voters on the symbol and how to fold the ballot paper.

Electric voting machines were first introduced in the nation's capital during the last elections.

The most exciting part is the counting. The votes are, of course, all hand counted. The counting does not stop until it ends and, for bigger constituencies, could run on for a couple of days. The counting area too looks festive, with bright lights and milling people.

Democracy, after all, should be celebrated.

Maddie Bora is the Courier's political writer.

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POSTED:
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Tricks of the trade from the 'Depths of Hell'

MADHUSMITA BORA
Courier Staff Writer

DES MOINES -- Making laws is serious business. The lawmakers know that, and so does the press corps covering the proceedings.

The four months the Legislature works every year are the most hectic and emotionally draining experience one can ever imagine for any reporter. Late night debates, understanding intricate arguments and meeting deadlines sap one's energy.

From the senior reporters, I have learned tricks to survive this grilling experience. The trick is to look out for the occasional humor, colorful speeches, the gaffes of our lawmakers and the comic situations we sometimes get into.

Listed below are a few instances that helped me survive last week. "Depths of Hell" is how Mike Glover from the Associated Press described the night the House debated the power-siting bill. He should know. He has been reporting on the Legislature since 1981.

The issue was too technical, and to top it , the Democrats filibustered the bill with more than 35 amendments. By 9 p.m. the bill was taking its toll on the press bench.

However, there was just one silver lining. As most representatives dealt with the technical mumbo-jumbo, Rep. Bill Dotzler, D-Waterloo, got up and gave us his take on the issue.

"This is like a Trojan horse," he said.

But, in an effort to be more creative, Dotzler flirted with different analogies. From a Trojan horse, the measure became a duck.

"It talks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck," Dotzler said.

It did not end there.

"It's like a snake!" the legislator exclaimed. "It's like a slithering, sneaky snake that will come around and bite Iowa consumers."

By then, it wasn't just the press bench that was in hysterics. The legislator cracked up at his own joke and failed to regain composure to continue a serious debate.

*

After a lot of speculation Gov. Tom Vilsack finally submitted his revised budget for 2002 last week.

He proposed a 6 percent across-the-board spending cut and layoffs of about 600 government employees, the highest in about a decade.

With this grim picture, the GOP leaders are racing against time to come up with their own numbers. In the Senate, the Minority Leader Mike Gronstal, D-Council Bluffs, asked the Majority Leader Stewart Iverson, R-Dows, about the status of the Republican proposal. Just then the tornado alarm went off.

The alarm is part of the tornado drill the Legislature goes through every spring. But for many of us, its timing seemed to come as a harbinger of what is to follow the next few weeks in the budget discussions.

*

Lawmakers often try to be creative to get their colleagues' attention in the chamber. Sen. Mike Sexton, R-Rockwell City, went a step further to make his point. Leading the debate on the cattle feed-lot runoff bill, the senator proudly displayed a jar of liquid manure on his desk. He definitely got his message across and the bill passed. To everyone's relief the jar disappeared soon after.

What an ingenious way of holding the Senate ransom!

*

Lawmakers often put their feet in their mouths when they try to emphasize a point without realizing that everything goes on record unless they specify it before.

Sen. Steve King, R-Kiron, learned a lesson a little too late. While discussing budget problems, King told Kate Thompson, a reporter with the Sioux City Journal, that they should cut down on prison costs.

Kate asked whether that was possible with the growing prison population.

King said there is a way out, if they implement what he called the "Indiana rule" which was suggested to him by two people from Indiana who had visited his office. He said they should line up the prisoners every Monday morning and mow them down.

A little later he told Kate it was off the record, but the cat was already out of the bag by then.

*

The House Judiciary Committee last week shepherded legislation -- to the great discomfort of most lawmakers -- that made bestiality a crime.

Lawmakers said an incident in Waterloo where a man was found with a sheep was what prompted legislative action. It was a very quiet affair, with no discussions.

However, there were a few snickers in the room from the reporters. Kay Henderson, the Capitol reporter for Iowa Radio snorted out loud when she saw the note sent out by Kathie Obradovich from the Quad City Times.

"The voice vote was rather sheepish," the note said.

Madhusmita Bora is the Courier's political writer.

POSTED:
Sunday, February 25, 2001

English's place in Iowa is secure

By MADDIE BORA
Courier Political Writer

Mark Twain once told an Englishman, "I didn't speak English at all, -- I only spoke American."

Though there exists a little tension across the Atlantic about how the language should be used, Twain's idea did not quite take off. The language most spoken in the United States is still called English.

And the language is doing very well indeed. More than 100 years after Twain, Iowa is now poised to make English the official language of the state, joining 26 other states. If one went around the state, one would find it hard to demonstrate that English isn't the official language.

All road signs, and most billboards are in English. One can turn into one of the corners of Des Moines or Waterloo and visit an Asian grocery store, and there too, the lingua franca is English. Needless to say, English is what binds everyone together in Iowa, and verily the entire country. Under the bill, that binding would become official.

"America is a melting pot and we need one language to unite and assimilate all Americans," said Sen. Steve King, R-Kiron, lead supporter of a bill that will make English the language of government and all political subdivisions in the state.

Even though the bill emphasizes the use of English, it makes certain exceptions. Driver's license tests can still be administered in six different languages, including English. Public officials may also use a language other than English if they deem it necessary and interpretations of official documents could be made when the situation arises. But the official language will be English.

One of the many reasons why English succeeds so well as a common language, not just in the United States, but elsewhere in the world is because the language belongs to no one in particular. When the people of the Caribbean speak the language, they speak it as their own, bringing to it their own characteristics and bending it to their own needs.

Mark Twain too saw the language evolve on its own in the United States, and resented being corrected by an Englishman.

Possibly it is a similar resentment that prompts immigrant groups to protest the bill. With the advocacy of an official language, English seems to have become a language that belongs more to some groups of Iowans than to the others.

"Legislative efforts to make English the official language of the state neither pays tribute to our rich heritage nor acknowledges realities of Iowa's future in the global economy," said Alba Bassett-Armijo of the Greater Des Moines Partnership at a press conference held by bill opponents. Ironically, instead of uniting people, the bill seems to be dividing people.

There are a few who fear the hint of intolerance the bill carries will ward off new Iowans.

"The issue of our official language in Iowa shouldn't be under question," said Sen. Pat Harper, D-Waterloo. "It would be impossible for any other language to be the official language. This sends a very unwelcoming message to people and it does not make any sense."

Most Democrats oppose the bill and while discussing their strategy in the caucus one of the Democratic senators came up with an idea. Someone will ask King to yield to questions and then address him in a language other than English. This was to drive in the point that someone who has another language thrust on him will surely resent the language, as would most likely King.

The only snag was that none of the legislators knew any language other than English. Harper expressed frustration and said, "It's embarrassing because we claim to be the educated, cultured leaders of the people and there's not even one among us who can speak a second language."

That English is the official language of the state is undisputed. One of the legislators had said the bill is important because it will give Iowans a sense of comfort that their government will always be conducted in English.

But it seems it is very difficult to use some other language even to make a political point, let alone conduct the government.

Iowa is, therefore, ready to join the other 26 states. English will become the official language of Iowans, unless the governor decides to veto the bill. Being a student of the English language all my life, it is natural to be tremendously entT Tc 0 88 0

POSTED:

Sunday, April 29, 2001

Recalling many 'firsts' spent in Iowa

MADHUSMITA BORA

Courier Staff Writer

DES MOINES -- My first encounter with something remotely related to Iowa must have been the book "The Bridges of Madison County." I read that lyrical story in my last year of high school in India, long before I knew I would come to the United States. And today, as I take leave of Iowa, on what I hope would turn out to be a short holiday, I am trying to renew my attachments to this beautiful state.

Dear readers, please let me indulge in a little personal journey.

Iowa gave me many firsts. It gave me my first real job in this country. I bought my first car in Iowa. It gave me the first apartment in which I lived all alone, entirely to myself. And it nearly did not happen.

Fresh out of journalism school, I was out job hunting. Very soon, I had what appeared to me two very good offers. There was one thing I knew. Having covered Congress in Washington in a special program offered by the Medill School of Journalism, I wanted to cover the Legislature once more.

I talked to many people as I tried to decide which offer to take, only to be befuddled by all the suggestions. Then I decided I wanted to see the real America. I was convinced something else existed beyond the familiar looks of the big cities, beyond the beltway of Washington D.C.

In many ways, Waterloo was much different from Chicago or D.C. Among all the other differences, what mattered to me most was that it had no Lake Michigan.

Having come away from home in India, I used to be frequently homesick at school. After the populous New Delhi, Chicago's beautiful suburb of Evanston was strangely empty. And so when once in a while I got the blues, I would blame Lake Michigan. As I would always say to my friends it was too beautiful and it made me feel very insignificant.

From our classrooms in school, we got a beautiful view of the lake. In the distance would blink lights of downtown Chicago. And on the other side would float a somber horizon. The vastness of it all seemed to make me a little pensive, a little poignant.

I was glad to come to Iowa, far away from the noise of the big cities. In the Courier newsroom, I soon found a family. I tried to tuck in for a long haul. I was so hopelessly helpless, that the whole newsroom chipped in their bit trying to set up a home for me. This, I will never forget.

Soon, Waterloo turned to Des Moines. A very quiet city, with treasures hidden everywhere. When I first

But soon enough, it became painfully clear that it was time for me to leave. I did not realize it was creeping up on me, but it did. It is not very easy to talk about it. One should, at such times, take a few deep breaths, and wait for the urge to go away!

One of my friends suggested we should visit a beautiful place before I left -- the bridges of Madison County. We began the journey, I was aware, with a bruised body -- a few tumbles in a car on an Iowa highway and I had another first in Iowa.

As we walked through the bridges, I read the many names people had scribbled on them. It struck me then that Iowa is not just about hogs and corn as the people told me in D.C., but it's about the beautiful people who live here.

Des Moines is not the golden dome of the Capitol, but the wonderful friends I have made here. I became acutely aware of them. Two of them were walking beside me. I had entered their lives just four months ago. And they have become for ever a part of me.

I decided to come back some other day to write my name on the bridges. It is strange how sometimes the least important thing carries the deepest meaning.

Maddie Bora has resigned as the Courier's political writer.

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