

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



a newsletter for Iowa's Democratic Left

September 2022

Public Sector Attack: Five Years Later

In the early months and the night hours of 2017, the newly elected Republican majority in the Iowa Legislature assaulted Iowa's public servants by making changes to Chapter 20 of the Iowa Code.

Driven by out-of-state right-wing overlords like the Koch Brothers and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), and acting swiftly on an issue no one campaigned on, they stripped collective bargaining rights for 180,000 public sector employees in Iowa. Relieving public employers from their obligations to bargain with their employees on almost every working condition, they unilaterally changed a system that had served both employers and employees alike for more than 40 years – a system that was created in a bipartisan fashion with a Democratic majority in the statehouse and a Republican governor at the time. In its place, they left a system where local entities like school boards, city councils, and boards of supervisors get to decide if and what they want to bargain. They created a space for union-busting law firms and consultants to manipulate local elected officials, most of whom aren't experts in labor law or the history of collective bargaining and its effects on the people they govern.

This year marks the fifth year since the Iowa legislature destroyed the

rights of our public servants to bargain collectively. For more than four decades, public servants in communities large and small, knew that Iowa had their backs and they could rest easy when they went home after work, knowing they had a say in their own working conditions and benefits. But five years ago,

The attack on public servants has affected every city and small town across Iowa.

corporate-owned politicians decided that snowplow drivers, sanitation workers, school bus drivers, teachers, nurses, and other public servants shouldn't have a voice on the job. The results have been devastating.

Gutless politicians from both parties sitting on school boards, city councils, county boards of supervisors, and the state of Iowa itself, began to voluntarily gut union contracts – not because they had to, but because they could.

Our members have been sharing their stories of how this attack on their union rights has personally affected them. A school bus driver told us that his District took bereavement leave out of his union contract right before his mother passed away and he didn't have as much time off to grieve as he would have had just a month before. A snowplow driver tells us his insurance premiums keep going up, his wife has cystic fibrosis, and they are suffering both physically and financially because of this bad law. A county jailer tells us they lost their longevity pay, and years of public service to the county now mean nothing.

And now our communities are feeling the results. Public service jobs traditionally have had a higher percentage of women in the field than their private sector counterparts, a higher percentage public sector workers have college degrees, and public sector jobs used to be the best jobs in virtually every city and small town across Iowa. But now, we're starting to lose those workers. They're quitting at a higher rate than ever before because legislators took away their right to bargain.

It's our belief that every worker has a right to a union, regardless of where you live and regardless of what

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Field of pipe dreams

Goosy, a friend of mine who is a technological hermit living in California (his technology is limited to a television and landline telephone), knows that I'm a huge Royals baseball fan. He calls me on a regular basis to see how I'm doing. He asked if I was going to watch the big baseball game in Iowa, referring to the Field of Dreams game between the Cincinnati Reds and the Chicago Cubs. He was shocked when I told him I didn't watch last year, and I wouldn't be watching this year.

"I am not a Cubs fan nor a Reds fan," I told him. "And there are so many other problems with this corny promotion that it has literally become a field of 'dreams.'"

In a politically timed effort, two days before the big game, Iowa Governor Reynolds handed \$12.5 million dollars to the city of Dyersville to build a stadium near the original Field of Dreams site. The project has already received \$11 million in state money earlier this year to connect water and sewer infrastructure from the City of Dyersville to the movie site. The money for all projects came from the American Rescue Plan, a federal law intended to "provide emergency grants, lending, and investment to hard-hit small businesses." The intent of the American Rescue Plan was saving small businesses. Building a major league stadium in a rural, isolated area is anything but small.

So, why build a stadium in a corn field where one already exists? The current site has a capacity for 8,000 fans, the proposed permanent stadium will seat 3,000, which can expand to 8,000 if another major

league game is played there. If two major league baseball games have successfully been played there, why build a new one?

The city administrator of Dyersville, Mick Michel, was quoted as saying that the grant "allows for development opportunities like a hotel and a permanent MLB stadium, along with a future convention center and other opportunities to service the needs at that site." That's a pretty big dream he's having about the future. The big question about expansion is: "If they build it, will they come?"

Several opinions from experts say the area cannot support this project. The city of 4,500 is not in a position to provide enough restaurants, hotels, and other support businesses for a project of this magnitude. Considering the low unemployment rate of Dubuque County, Iowa, 2.2% as of May 2022, a common sense check will indicate that area businesses will not have a strong cache of potential employees to work in the low-wage food, hotel, and related businesses.

Another potential problem is future funding. Ninety percent of the funding for the stadium will come from various public funds, aka taxpayer revenue. Michel and other economic development entities in the northwest part of the state believe that if a stadium is built, it will encourage additional private investment in the project. It's just a theory; there is no data to support the enthusiasm. A hotel on the site will surely expect to be built using whatever public funds are available, including the use of TIF (tax increment financing), a heavily abused development option that delays a developer's property

tax responsibility into the future, far beyond the property's prime tax rates, usually ten to twenty years or more.

Travel Dubuque, a tourist information center, estimates the grant proposal will create eighty-one jobs. There is no information on whether those jobs are seasonal or permanent. Baseball is not a year-round business. Will employees be able to collect unemployment benefits from November through March when the ground is too wet, frozen, or snowy to work on? Probably not—this isn't heaven, it's Iowa.

A severe problem with this permanent project is its damage to the environment. Dan Evans, the COO of the group that now owns the Field of Dreams site, said that the group is "deeply committed to preserving the romantic experience of the Field of Dreams, including the views, the baseball diamond, the farmhouse, and the cornfields. Those images will never change." Planting corn on the same ground year after year is not being the best steward of Iowa farmland. In a Des Moines Register article, it was noted that nutrients are necessary to keep the corn tall and green. Nutrients, also known as chemicals, leach into the streams and groundwater that Iowans rely upon for survival. If Ray Kinsella saw ghosts coming out of the cornfield, he would have rotated his corn with hemp.

—Marty Ryan likes to play second base but has trouble going to his right.

Possessed: the Iowa edition

In case you are hiding your weary head from political news (I would not blame you), Steve Bannon made some recently. In a supremely ironic outburst, he referred to John Fetterman, Democratic candidate for US Senate in Pennsylvania, as “satanic.”

To wit, he wrote: “Is Fetterman satanic??... his look, his vibe, his associations... has there ever been anyone in the history of the country that exudes more just pure evil than this guy... the Citizens of the Commonwealth need to ask themselves—do we want someone who hangs with Satanic Groomers to represent us in the US Senate?”

This unfortunate diatribe, coming from the king of right-wing rhetorical bathtub meth, brought gales of opprobrium and howls of laughter raining down. It also caused people to catch their breath, as well it should have. The GOP has gone over the falls in a barrel of rhetoric designed to torch every frayed thread of the social fabric still holding together in this nation. They are quite arguably satanic themselves at this point. Certainly nihilistic, and participating in a robust death cult.

Iowa’s GOP is not immune. Sen. Chuck Grassley has officially dug a grave for his reputation, which has been on life support for some time now. This past week he finished the hole, stood his reputation up beside it, and shot it in the head, causing it to fall in.

Speaking on *Fox & Friends*, our senior Senator attacked Biden Administration plans to beef up the IRS to ease hellish backlogs and restore cuts to audits on those making over \$400,000 a year. The attack was pure demonic GOP: “Are they going to have a strike force that

goes in with AK-15s already loaded, ready to shoot some small business person in Iowa with these, because I think they’re going after middle class and small business people, because they think that anybody that has pass-through income is a crook, and they aren’t paying their fair share, and we’re going to go after them,” he said. What ever happened to “Iowa nice?”

I would first note the fact that Iowa’s man with three mowers in every ad, the man who boasts of visiting “all 99 counties in Iowa” every election cycle, said AK-15 rather than AR-15. It is a sorry reflection on our state that this error may cost him more votes than the actual ramifications of his words, which were astounding. [I say error because the AK-15 was a new Russian military assault rifle in 2016, and I believe is still a banned import, so is not available in the US to the IRS or anyone else. This created a kerfuffle and much comment in the wake of Grassley’s Fox appearance. His opponent in this year’s Senate race, Admiral Mike Franken, tweeted: “AK-15? Somebody needs to gunsplain WTF he’s talking about.”]

But let us stay clear of the weeds of AK v. AR. The man goes on television and evokes IRS agents gunning down Iowans! These comments were QAnon worthy, the words of a zealot utterly deranged. And they came from Dairy Queen-loving, lawn-mowing, 99-county-visiting Chuck Grassley! His lunacy did make some news, but not much and not for long. This tells you how ‘satanic’ the GOP is on a routine basis.

To press the metaphor, Iowa’s GOP boasts a quartet of possessed creatures helming the ship. Grassley, Gov. Kim Reynolds, Sen. Joni

Ernst, and Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks are all little more than Trump lackeys and seditionist wannabes at this point. Their capacity to turn their backs on the necessary role of government in seeing to the cares and concerns of regular Iowans is evil.

Gov. Reynolds fully supports the US Supreme Court ruling that overturned Roe v. Wade. Make no mistake: once this election cycle is over, she will work with the legislature to pass the same blanket bans to obliterate women’s health care privacy and rights that other GOP states have done. She will divert every dollar she can from programs that help the poor, provide rural citizens with local affordable health care, support higher education, and allow the critical flow of immigrants into this state in support of our labor economy. She will funnel these funds into programs that line already rich pockets, subsidize pet projects devoid of oversight, and undermine and privatize state and federal programs that have been in place for decades to the benefit of Iowans. All in a deliberate drive to destabilize government as we have known it, respected it, and relied upon it.

This agenda is no longer hidden. The only question that remains is whether or not Iowans will recoil and recover their sanity in time to prevent its realization.

—Kim Painter is running for reelection as Johnson County Recorder.

And to the republic for which it stands

I like to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

I enjoy speaking the words of fealty to a set of ideas that changed world history, ideas that Europeans borrowed from the indigenous people of North America in the 17th century. I always commit civil disobedience by going straight to “Indivisible” loudly and skipping over “under God.” It’s fun, and not just because half the room gives you the stink eye. I recommend you try it next time you attend a public meeting. There’s no reason we can’t reclaim the words written in 1892 by the Christian socialist minister Francis Bellamy.

But this day, I would not stand for the Pledge. The words of my daughter rang in my head as she explained to her teacher back in North Carolina why she would not stand for the Pledge:

“I cannot pledge allegiance to the flag when the nation does not provide liberty and justice for all. Gays and lesbians cannot marry in the US and until they can, I cannot stand.”

These were brave words for a young woman in the South, even in the early 2000s. Her teacher relented, appropriately and intelligently admonished by a fourteen -year-old. My kid aced all her government classes and never stood for the Pledge.

On this day I too would not stand for the Pledge. A week before, a mob of Proud Boys had attacked a local business called Mojo’s. Yes, it happens even here in liberal California. The owner, on the last day of Pride Month, was hosting a Drag Show to entertain the locals. The show had been canceled due to online threats and intimidation, likely amplified by

bots from the Global Traditionalist Fascist Order (aka GTFO). The Proud Boys showed up anyway and assaulted the owner and others there. The local police were able to contain the mob and only a small amount of bear spray spiced the air with mayhem that day. We avoided a January 6th-scale riot, but the damage to Liberty and Justice for All was done.

So, I could not stand that day. The City Council of Woodland, CA, stood and said the Pledge. The audience, mostly local high schoolers who were being recognized for their participation in a local government outreach program, said the Pledge. The teachers and other adults all said the Pledge. But I did not, and as my face warmed as people turned to look, I held tightly to the words of my daughter, from the days before the Supreme Court’s Obergefell decision. Then the Council opened the Public Comment period.

“Normally, I like to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance,” I began, “but not today.”

“Liberty and Justice were denied to Woodland citizens on June 30 at Mojo’s when a mob of Proud Boys attacked one of our local businesses.” The gist: until the Drag Queens are free, none of us are free.

The mayor, a young Latina who is the only brown face on the Council in a city where the largest ethnic group is Latino, nodded in agreement. The other Council members listened attentively. Only one of them had his face screwed up with that look that tells you something stupid is about to come out of his mouth.

Being new to town and knowing no one there, it was refreshing to see the Council seem receptive to my three-minute jeremiad, the only contribution to public life my work life allows these days.

But it was the audience of high schoolers that made me proudest of all. They stood again, this time to cheer the words of a pissed-off old white guy who let them know, across the generations, we stand together, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Because in their world, there is not even a question that LGBTQIA+ people are equal citizens. Such an idea would be like suggesting the sun rises in the West. Change is generational and the arc of history does in fact bend toward justice.

In a later conversation with the detective in charge of the police response that day, I learned that the reason the cops didn’t just beat down the Proud Boys with truncheons, as I earnestly wished they would have, was to capture them in the act of a federal hate crime. That mission was successfully completed, and the wheels of justice are turning. I get the logic of going for the felony hate crime instead of misdemeanor criminal trespass, but there’s still a part of me that wants revenge for January 6th. There’s a part of me that fears we are entering a time when it’s not enough to sit instead of stand. We need to fight.

And fight we will, in Woodland, CA, on this day in 2022.

—*Craig Perrin grew up reciting the Pledge in Iowa City schools.*

The Prairie Progressive marches on: 2010-2015

Kill the Curfew cried a *Prairie Progressive* headline in late 2009. Prairie Dog outlined America's long and inglorious history of curfews, commonly enforced against immigrants, political dissidents, people of color, and young people. A governmental body even considering a curfew "exacerbates racial tension" while impinging on the fundamental right to First Amendment activities. Fortunately, the Iowa City Council deferred the ordinance, with lifetime resident Matt Hayek on the losing end of a 5-2 vote; then-mayor Ross Wilburn voted to defer the ordinance.

In early 2010, Council member Amy Correia was named the *PP*'s Person of the Year for loudly opposing the curfew, "speaking in positive terms about African-American young people," and standing up for racial equality in the face of public vilification.

University of Iowa archivist Janet Weaver detailed Iowa's "long and richly complicated Latino history," including the solidarity of Latino and Anglo allies after a massive immigration raid in the town of Postville.

Two Iowa City writers contributed excerpts from their new novels: *A Good Man* by Larry Baker and *Sunland* by Don Waters.

Local politics were highlighted in on-the-ground reports from the Iowa towns of Keosauqua, West Branch, Muscatine, and Brooklyn, along with dispatches from London and Oakland, CA.

Trish Nelson alerted us to the insidious influence of ALEC: "If more people knew that the Koch Brothers and their multi-national

cronies are using our legislators for nefarious purposes, they would not stand for it." Nelson, the administrator of www.blogforiowa.com, also raised the alarm on growing threats to net neutrality.

Carol Thompson and Jeff Cox documented the rise of "the new Jim Crow" in Iowa City and the nation. Peter Fisher and Rod Sullivan dissected the damages inflicted by TIF (tax increment financing).

Nate Willems, Marty Ryan, and Stephanie Fawkes-Lee cast keen eyes on the Iowa legislature: "House Republicans intend to pursue their ideological agenda whether anybody else wants it or cares."

Joe Sharpnack, once described by the *PP* as "a cross between Bart Simpson and a Chicago Bears linebacker," graced our pages with a wide range of cartoons: a disgruntled Governor Branstad reading the *PP* in the back seat of a state trooper's car, a prairie dog clinging to the edge of a fiscal cliff, an elephant's Christmas list featuring More Guns, a drone delivering the *PP* to the mailbox of an "Astute Reader."

Death took its toll of *PP* writers and subscribers. Moving obituaries recognized Pam Stewart, Lauren Reece, Bev Rens, Dick Fallow, Bill Basinger, and Mark Smith for their lifetimes of community organizing. This installment of the *Prairie Progressive*'s history is in honor of their passion and their dedication to social and economic justice.

—Prairie Dog

Solidarity forever

The movie *Norma Rae*, starring Sally Field, tells the story of how a factory worker was able to organize a textile factory to gain better pay and working conditions.

The Iowa Labor History Society is sponsoring a free showing on Saturday, September 3, at 7:45 PM in Iowa City. The goal of the showing is to remind us of the meaning of Labor Day and to commemorate the struggle for workers' rights.

Bring a blanket or lawn chair and enjoy the movie and evening at FilmScene's outdoor theatre downtown. Parking is available in the adjacent city ramp.

Sponsors include:

- University of Iowa Labor Center
- Laborers' Local 43
- LIUNA
- IBEW Local 405
- Teamsters Local 238
- Cedar Rapids/Iowa City Building and Construction Trades Council
- Iowa City Federation of Labor
- Plumbers and Fitters Local 125
- Hawkeye Area Labor Council
- Carpenters' Local 1260 ■

Sink or Swim

A proposal that Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department close the rec center pool caught my attention recently. The city says that it would be an equitable course of action to close the downtown pool and expand Mercer Aquatic Center on the east side instead. But I wonder why the city can't invest in both. Iowa City's budget is flush with funds due to both a growing tax base and several rounds of pandemic recovery funding via the federal government. My fear is that the city sees dollar signs in the large downtown parcel occupied by the rec center building and parking lot. Is closing the pool just the first step towards private redevelopment of that land?

The Parks and Rec Department's arguments for closure feel forced (more on that below), and I don't think they will stop with the pool. The city has demonstrated its willingness to enter public-private partnerships with developers via TIF and other financial incentives, and the rec center's location between the city's newest privately owned and operated hotel/bowling alley/coffee shop/movie theater and the developing south-of-Burlington commercial district makes it appealing to speculators. While cities across America engage in this type of planning under the guise of "economic development," it is ultimately an effort to direct taxpayer dollars toward private projects and reduce public oversight and accountability. Nowhere illustrates this way of thinking more so than my adopted city of San Francisco. I blame a lack of public investment for my current home's slow recovery from the pandemic. Our private "partners" got their tax break and fled at the first sign of troubled waters, leaving us with reduced

public transit, tilting towers, no tourism revenue, and one of the highest commercial vacancy rates in the country.

Closing the rec center pool is a disservice to the residents of Iowa City. As resources are reduced, fewer people will utilize the rec center. Eventually we'll see the city say that the building does not serve the community at all. Enter private developers. They'll purchase a 99-year lease for the parcel at an extremely favorable rate, apply for a TIF from the city and an array of state and federal tax credits, demolish the rec center, and build a new mixed-use tower to "save" downtown. Is this what the residents of Iowa City want? Not really. It's simply the current neo-liberal economics course being taught in every urban planning master's program in the country, bolstered by white papers published by Koch-funded think tanks in St. Louis and Atlanta.

To be clear, this path forward is only a hunch on my part. It's where my mind goes whenever I see a city closing public amenities. Even if I'm wrong in this case and the city is genuine in its stated desire to increase access to public resources, withdrawing and relocating such amenities from downtown is always a mistake. The rec center is close to the transit hub, the senior center, the public library, and our commercial center. It's hard to understand how closing the public pool would increase community access, which is the main argument behind Parks and Rec's equity position. They claim the pool is failing due to its age and condition, and that this makes it inaccessible to users and therefore inequitable. They follow that up by saying that repairs and upgrades to

the pool are not financially feasible. In my mind, these issues are separate. As I mentioned earlier, the city isn't broke. Dedicating funding towards making the pool more accessible is a question of priorities.

If the city is serious about ensuring that the rec center serves the community, they should upgrade the facility (including the pool), increase transit to and from downtown, and lower fees. This approach is so unbearably simple that I can only assume interference from those who stand to financially benefit from the closure of the pool. We mustn't let private developers become a silent partner in the management of our city. Saving a public pool may seem like a small stand against this national trend, but it's an important one.

—According to the US Secretary of the Interior, Flossie Cox is an architectural historian.

Thank you!

To the 103 *Prairie Progressive* readers across the US, Canada, Japan, and England who contributed an average of \$27 apiece in Calendar Year 2022 so far. This includes a record 27 gift subscriptions. We appreciate your support.

The Celebrity

The Celebrity, in downtown Moline, Illinois, perched on River Drive in what was formerly a bank building, near what is now the John Deere Commons. In the 1960s, locals called it “the very definition of cool.”

The club was owned & operated by the Sotos Brothers, who were also the foundation of the house band. Tony sang and played sax (sometimes two at once) and Jim played bass. They were backed by many local jazz performers and brought in major well-known jazz performers from out of town to perform at their club: Buddy Rich, Count Basie, Gene Harris and the Three Sounds, and more.

I heard legendary jazz vocalist Johnny Hartman when he performed at The Celebrity around 1966. Hartman was the only singer to have ever recorded with saxophone giant John Coltrane.

In the early 1960s a University of Iowa student originally from the Milwaukee area was studying for his master’s degree at the School of Social Work. He sat in at jazz clubs in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, & at The Celebrity in Moline. His name was Al Jarreau. In 1964 he earned his MA in vocational rehabilitation from the University of Iowa. The young vocalist went on to super-star status in jazz & pop music, not long after the Sotos Brothers produced his first album at their Studio Four recording studio in Rock Island, Illinois.

Studio Four was said to have been tucked away in the basement of the home of one of the Sotos Brothers on 22nd Street near 8th Avenue in Rock Island. The vinyl LP album entitled “1965 - Al Jarreau” is a valued collector’s item among jazz aficionados.

—Michael “Hawkeye” Herman is a son of the Quad Cities.

Public Sector Attack: Five Years Later, cont’d from Page 1

you do. If you dedicate your life to serving the public – you deserve a voice on the job and you deserve a union. Whether working in Des Moines or a rural community far from the closest interstate or airport, our public employees deserve respect, and they deserve a union.

We’re putting elected officials on notice. If you tried to bust our union in the last five years— you’re on our list. If you’ve been elected to office and you think it’s your right to deny workers a union, you’re on our radar. We will be reaching out to local elected officials in the coming months and asking them to restore union rights. If they don’t, we will picket, we will protest, we will stand up, and we will sit in if we must. Public sector union-busters are no longer going to get a free pass.

The attack on public servants has affected every city and small town across Iowa. It’s time to organize and fight back. Unions across Iowa are organizing more protests, pickets, and press conferences to expose the systematic attempts to bust unions and erode the living standards of Iowa’s working families. Please take the time to attend these events when you can. Follow us at <https://www.facebook.com/Teamsters238> to find out when and where.

It’s your fight, too.

—Jesse Case is Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 238 and Vice-President of the Iowa Federation of Labor.



Sept 3

Iowa Labor History Society free outdoor showing of *Norma Rae* 7:45 PM downtown Iowa City

Sept 11, 2012

US embassy attacked in Benghazi

Sept 17

US Constitution Day

Sept 19

Wolf Carbon Solutions virtual meeting on proposed carbon capture pipeline 6:00 PM <https://iub.iowa.gov/>

Sept 21

Navigator Heartland virtual meeting on proposed carbon capture pipeline 6:00 PM <https://iub.iowa.gov/>

Sept 24, 1957

Eisenhower sent federal troops to integrate Little Rock high school

Oct 14, 1962

Cuban missile crisis began

Oct 21, 1967

100,000 marched on the Pentagon to protest the war in Vietnam

Nov 1

Día de Los Muertos

Nov 8, 1932

Socialist Norman Thomas got over 880,000 votes for President

Nov 18, 1797

Sojourner Truth born

Nov 27, 1992

Neo-Nazi Party banned in Germany

Dec 17, 1972

US began bombing Hanoi

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