
THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



a newsletter for Iowa's Democratic Left

Fall 2026

Vote no on enshrining tax cuts for the rich

In November, Iowans will be asked to ratify the crowning piece of the Republican party's long war on progressive taxation. On the ballot will be Constitutional Amendment One, which would lock in the massive cuts in individual and corporate income taxes enacted in recent years. That amendment would require a two-thirds majority of both houses of the legislature to pass any increase in income tax rates or to enact any new tax on income. Just 17 senators could veto any such bill.

As recently as 1998, the top income tax rate in Iowa, levied on income over \$51,660, was nearly 9 percent. Seven years ago, the top bracket rate was still 8.5 percent. But now there is no top bracket; there is just a flat .3.8 percent on all levels of taxable income. The corporate income tax had a top rate of 12 percent just six years ago. It is now 7.1 percent. Republicans hate progressive taxes, and income taxes are about the only way a state can introduce some progressivity in its tax system.

These income tax cuts have shoveled millions in benefits to the richest Iowans while tossing pennies to the rest of us. The most recent cuts promised the average millionaire household about \$23,500 in savings but gave the bottom two-thirds of tax filers an average of only about \$100.

This strategy has led to huge revenue losses. Schools and other services have been forced to retrench. Since 2018,

state support of public schools (annual per pupil state aid) has increased by less than inflation every year but one and is likely to do so again this fiscal year. This has led to public school budget cuts across the state. To make up for the loss of purchasing power over the previous ten years, state school aid for this fiscal year would have needed to increase about 10 percent instead of the 2 percent enacted. And if wages of school employees had kept up with wage growth in Iowa during that period the increase in funding would be closer to 15 percent.

A few years ago, when the tax cutting binge was getting going, I was on Iowa Press with a proponent of the proposed cuts. I pointed to the experience in Kansas, which had passed legislation to phase out the state income tax on the promise of exuberant economic growth that would surely follow. The growth failed to materialize, a massive hole in the budget led to cuts that enraged Kansas taxpayers, and the legislation was largely repealed. The Republican spokesperson's response: "Don't worry, we're not Kansas. Tax cuts will pay for themselves."

Well, here we are in Iowa with a huge budget deficit and a slow-growing economy. Iowa ranked 38th in growth of personal income for the most recent year. The annual budget deficit exceeded \$1.2 billion last year and is projected to do so again this year. That is a big chunk out of a \$9 billion

budget. Even without a recession, large deficits will continue.

From 2021 to 2024 the state accumulated large budget surpluses, thanks to federal pandemic relief and chronic underfunding of our schools and other services. To cover the deficit, we started devouring those surpluses last fiscal year; they will soon be gone.

It is hard to know if Republican policy is driven by the kind of magical thinking that prevailed in Kansas, or if they simply want more deficits. This is an old strategy: If you want to shrink government, cut taxes first; then when you enact huge budget cuts you call them unavoidable -- the only fiscally responsible thing to do.

Constitutional Amendment One would ensure that we can't finance public schools or health care or childcare by any measure that would make the rich pay their fair share of costs. We couldn't restore a higher tax bracket on top incomes or enact a millionaire tax as some states have done or impose a minimum tax on large profitable corporations. Call it "The Millionaire Protection Act."

Other taxes—the sales tax, the gas tax and other excise taxes—are not limited by the amendment. This is not an oversight; it is part of the strategy to make Iowa's tax system more regressive. The lowest income Iowans pay about 6 percent of their income in

RIP Gloria Steinem

The passing of Gloria Steinem has encouraged a national conversation about feminist awakenings. I'm an African American woman who was raised in a patriarchy during the 1950s in New York City. Women in my family and in my community were trailblazers, activists, and leaders.

My mother was a social worker. She received her MSW while I was in high school. My godmother was a principal at the local elementary school, my aunt the only black librarian at the Grand Army Plaza branch of the New York public library in Brooklyn, N.Y. My cousin was the first African American woman to receive tenure at Harvard Law School.

Attending Sarah Lawrence and studying with historian Gerda Lerner and others provided an intellectual framework for addressing gender inequities in the U.S. Gerda helped establish the first graduate program in women's history. Gloria Steinem provided contemporary perspective during those tumultuous years.

While at Sarah Lawrence, many of my women classmates were joining 'consciousness raising' or CR groups. I took a class in Sex Discrimination and the Law in the late 1970s with Shirley Fingerhood. The course used a casebook written by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. It was the first legal casebook addressing gender discrimination in the U.S. It included issues like employment, abortion, divorce, same sex marriage, sexual harassment, funding of women's sports, and violence against women.

It was through the readings of this class while simultaneously reading Ms. Magazine (co-founded by Steinem) that I first understood what is now referred to as intersectionality. I learned that as an African American, I was given the right to vote through the

15th Amendment. Women of color, however, didn't receive the right to vote until the fight for women's suffrage resulted in the passage of the 19th Amendment.

I was fortunate at the time to be friends with Beverly and Barbara Smith who were among the founders. During their time with the NBFO, I learned more about Gloria Steinem and her advocacy

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for women on the national stage while attempting to lift up the voices of women of color. Beverly was a writer for Ms. Magazine at the time.

While complicated and not without setbacks, those readings from Ms. helped me raise my own voice and helped me to choose the law as a route to addressing gender and racial inequities. The overriding theme from these women and from feminism as it was evolving was "the personal is political."

It motivated me to seek an internship as a paralegal at Vladeck Elias, a labor law firm, known then as one of the 'last socialist law firms' in the city. They were involved at the time in major Title VII litigation, *Kyriazi v. Western Electric*. I worked entirely on *Kyriazi* as a paralegal and learned many important lessons prior to going to law school. They prevailed in a landmark class action proving that Western Electric had discriminated against women in hiring, promotion, and termination policies.

During that time, I also volunteered in Yonkers Family Court in the domestic

violence section, accompanying women to court and assisting with their advocacy as they pursued orders of protection against their abusers.

Gloria Steinem and Ms. Magazine presented great women of color writers like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Barbara and Beverly Smith, and others to a wider audience.

I recall reading Alice Walker's article in Ms. Magazine about finding Zora Neale Hurston's grave in Florida. It reminded me how far we had to go to reclaim our place in American history.

I went to hear Alice Walker, a Sarah Lawrence alum, do a reading from one of her short stories. The white women in the room were deeply critical of her work and skeptical of the context she provided.

I went up to Ms. Walker after the reading and said that I found her work incredibly moving and that it resonated with my experiences as a Black woman. I'll never forget her looking at me and saying, "then why didn't you say something!!!"

It was from these experiences that I developed my voice as a Black Feminist and understood the importance of pursuing a law degree to address the inequities around race, gender, and class in the U.S.

For Steinem's willingness to engage with women of color leaders and providing a platform for diverse communities to share their views, I am grateful.

RIP Gloria Steinem. Thanks for being a warrior for justice.

—Camille deJorna is a retired lawyer and legal educator. She lives on a float home on Vancouver Island and divides her time in the U.S. between Iowa City and Chicago.

An apology and a call to action

I owe Jason Glass an apology.

Back in December of 2021, I wrote a scathing critique of Mr. Glass' just-finished campaign for Iowa City Council, sharply critical of a self-funded campaign to the tune of thousands of dollars. At that time, I believed that the \$100 donation limit applied to everyone, including the candidates themselves. I later learned that this is not the case, that candidates are allowed to self-fund over the \$100 limit.

That was my first mistake. My second mistake was that when I did get clarification, I didn't think to go back and correct the record. In fact, I hadn't really thought about it until chance meetings at some graduation parties led to Mr. Glass and I talking. I went back and looked again, and realized that I was wrong.

While Mr. Glass and I still have differences on political ideology, that will never be an excuse for unfair and untrue accusations. While I can't go back and change the past, I hope this sets the record straight.

I apologized to Jason in person and publicly with this article, and I also apologize to the Prairie Progressive editor and readers for my error and delay in correcting it.

We are nearing the end of hugely important – and hugely expensive – campaigns here in Iowa. The fate of the Senate, Congress, Iowa's Governorship, and so much more hangs in the balance.

Think about how big a role money plays in all of these campaigns. Megadonors, PACs, SuperPACS, billionaire tech bros, oil companies, and many other deep pockets destroying our politics, our politicians, and our country.

Now imagine how different that would be if no donor could give more than \$100.

In Iowa City, we don't have to imagine, at least when it comes to our city council. We have a home rule charter that limits contributions in those races to \$100.

As a campaign manager and candidate, I can say it does take work when you are trying to raise a few thousand dollars, and your biggest donors can only give \$100. A candidate for council running a normal campaign with signs and flyers and so on needs \$6,500, ballpark. In practice, that will mean about 150 donors.

It is well worth asking our candidates to do that work for what the community gets in return.

It means you get city council members who simply can't be owned or unduly influenced by one or a few big donors. It means if you have a lot of rich friends, you get little or no advantage over candidates with a lot of working class friends and supporters. It means candidates who want to raise money have to put in some effort because one or two big donors can't just cut you a check for the cost of a campaign. And if someone wants to make decisions for over 75,000 people and can't find at least 150 people who believe in them enough to donate something, that's a pretty big red flag.

But there are two things that threaten the most progressive set of campaign finance laws in the country.

One is the self-funded candidate, who can give their campaign as much as they want. This is a loophole, but maybe not as much of a real threat because of one mitigating factor: if you self-fund your campaign, it's public knowledge and Iowa City voters get to vote on it. You are right there on the

ballot for a thumbs up or down, not hiding out of sight of 99% of voters.

The far bigger threat comes if we legitimize the use of political action committees, or PACs, in our Iowa City Council politics. In a recent special Iowa City council election, a PAC explicitly marketed itself as a way to exceed the limit to support a candidate.

This isn't about that candidate. It's about our community rejecting council candidates in the future who let this be done in their name.

I say this, in part, because it clearly undermines the progressive nature and intent of a city ordinance to reign in the impact of money in local politics. The Iowa City vibe is that we reject attempts to buy our council seats.

But if we voters let it be known that we will support council candidates supported by unlimited PACs, that encourages billionaires and big money folks. That's not hyperbole. It wasn't that long ago when the Koch brothers were spending money on Coralville council races.

I hope we here in Iowa City can protect the country's most progressive campaign finance rules and keep the billionaires at bay.

—Shawn Harmsen represents District B on the Iowa City Council.

A common decency

2026 marks a rare moment in Iowa political history. For the first time in nearly 60 years, both the Iowa governorship and U.S. Senate seat are open with no incumbents running for either job.

When this last happened in 1968, there were similarities to our current age. The United States was fighting an increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam with no obvious end in sight—much like the Iran debacle today. This war spawned intense domestic turmoil, reflective of our current polarized politics. And President Lyndon Johnson, like Donald Trump today, faced plunging popularity.

In 1968, like today, Iowans were given a chance to steer Iowa politics in new directions. And they did when Iowans elected Democrat Harold Hughes senator and Republican Robert Ray governor. While these two men had dramatically different personalities and backgrounds, they shared the common trait of using their offices to chart state and national governments in new—and I would argue, better—directions.

As individuals, Hughes and Ray had little in common. Of working-class origin, Hughes was a college drop-out who grew up in poverty and recovered from years of severe alcoholism. One of the most charismatic politicians in Iowa history, this handsome man captured audiences with a deep commanding baritone voice “borrowed from God.” Growing up middle class in urban Des Moines, Ray was an attorney with a low-key personality. In fact, *Des Moines Register* columnist Donald Kaul often referred to him as “charismatically challenged.”

Their common trait was that they were both moral agents, infused with a common decency reflected in their actions and their policies.

Elected governor in 1962 on the liquor-by-the-drink issue, Hughes initiated a

dramatic reform of Iowa government during his six years in office. Taking advantage of the Democratic landslide of 1964, Hughes and the Democrats abolished the death penalty, passed the Iowa Civil Rights Act, created the community college system, passed eight constitutional amendments and initiated studies on state government reorganization and tax policy resulting in further fundamental reforms in Hughes’ final two-year term.

An outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War, Hughes ran for the Senate seat at the urging of Robert Kennedy (the senior, not junior) who sought anti-war allies. The seat was open with the retirement of long-time conservative Republican Senator Bourke Hickenlooper.

Elected by a narrow margin in 1968, Hughes spent his six years as an unrelenting critic of the Vietnam war. In addition, he exposed illegal covert activities in war actions, including the secret bombing of North Vietnam. He left the Senate after one term to enter the Christian ministry and counsel alcoholics.

After failing to win local elections in Polk County, Robert Ray gained his political wings as chairman of the Iowa Republican party; at age 35, he was the youngest state chairman in more than a century. He established himself as the leader of the moderate wing of the party by unsuccessfully opposing Barry Goldwater’s nomination at the 1964 Republican convention. He ran for governor in 1968 as a moderate Republican against two other conservatives in the Republican primary. With the conservative vote split, Ray won the nomination and went on to win in November, serving for 14 years as governor.

Ray inherited a state bound in the cultural conflicts of the 1960s and ’70s, including campus unrest, protests against the Vietnam War and the

military draft. But the new governor approached them with a thoughtful, measured attitude and resisted confrontations.

The governor’s first two terms were primarily focused on budget challenges, concentrating on better treasury estimates and improved fiscal reporting in state government. Beginning in the mid-1970s, he led efforts to modernize several areas of Iowa government.

But most would say his most significant accomplishment was offering a haven in Iowa to 10,000 Indochinese refugees in 1975 after the Vietnam War ended. This was not without controversy. At one point a Des Moines Register poll showed 51 percent of Iowans opposed the effort. Ray continued anyway, believing it was the right thing to do.

Later, in 1978, the Carter Administration agreed to accept about 60,000 Vietnamese refugees fleeing the country—called the “Boat People” because they were leaving by sea. Moved by media coverage, Ray organized a state and national effort through religious and humanitarian organizations to find homes for these refugees. These actions would, no doubt, drive him out of the modern-day Republican Party.

Both Hughes and Ray, elected together by Iowans in the same year, proved you can govern with both compassion and competence. Let’s hope, in this year, when both jobs are open in Iowa, Iowans make a similar choice. For me, electing Rob Sand governor and Josh Turek senator means choosing leaders who look more toward promising tomorrows rather than failed yesterdays.

—*Jerry Harrington is the author of Thunder from the Prairie: The Life of Harold E. Hughes.*

A party that knows no bottom

You've heard what it's called in American politics—"the silly season." That time of the year when summer fades, elections loom, stump speeches get loose, and ads get bonkers. We are in it. And it isn't silly at all. Not this year, not in this atmosphere, not in this state or nation. It is a season from hell, in large part because we are in Trump's America and the GOP is Trump's party. And they run everything. For the moment.

That locked-down control, however, is slipping just as ballots begin to be cast. Trump is down in polls, and he appears to be pulling his Congressional and statewide candidates down with him, even in what have been reliably red states. A couple of days ago, word emerged that serious consideration is being given by the GOP to pulling funding in North Carolina and Georgia. Instead, they'll try to shore up Iowa, Ohio and Alaska, and eye pickups in Michigan and Maine. While there is of course backlash against such heresy, it's firmly on the table. In other states, warning bells are also a-clangin'.

Eight states have been tipped in the prognostications of Larry Sabato from favoring Republicans to rising Democrat chances—including 4 states formerly labeled "safe Republican." The 4 tippers are districts in: Arkansas, Nevada, New York and Ohio—all 4 districts were "safe Republican" until days ago.

The jitters resulting from such seismic activity have Republicans changing their tunes in political ads. You can almost hear the ideological listing of the ships as they try to maneuver the slippery decks. Nowhere is this as clear as in Iowa, reliably red turning purple in the face as the GOP clutches its pearls and rebrands itself. Sen. Ashley Hinson, facing down Josh

Turek, is now spending the big bucks to tell us all how adept she is at "working across the aisle." Seven votes for the Iran War. Trump supporter all the way from the Smithsonian to the incoming Arch, Reflecting Pool delusions, Greenland and any land grab the Orange One dreams up. She speaks against nothing he conjures up, it seems.

The January 6th insurrection did not draw her ire. International land grabs? No issue there. The Iran War, just fine. The only beef she had was, in the synopsis of a feature article on her in the Sept. 18 *San Francisco Examiner*, with the literal beef (and

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Trump's reduction of tariffs on foreign beef, yet another blow to farmers and ranchers courtesy of his administration's incoherent policies).

Irony alert: Hinson actually went on Fox news to say the following: "I don't live on Fox News, I don't live on Twitter. I live in Iowa."

It isn't just Hinson. Marianette Miller-Meeks, battling Christina Bohannon and sliding in popularity, is also stepping to the side from Trump's agenda. She joined Rep. Zach Nunn as one of seven Republicans voting for the War Powers resolution in the House to limit his powers in Iran. (Hinson, meanwhile, voted in the Senate to uphold his war powers, then came home to walk it back in the face of rising hostility from Iowans on the trail).

Zach Lahn, the Kansas businessman conveniently flying across the border

to run for Iowa governor, has his own fancy jig to dance. He's double-whammied by having to deny his carpetbagger status before skeptical Iowans. He's not helped by the fact that he changed his Kansas voter registration to Iowa just before the deadline to run for governor here. This has left him open to Iowans' distrust, just as that sentiment runs higher among loyal GOP voters than it has in a very long time.

As for the Democrats in these races, they remain solidly focused on those kitchen table issues that matter so much to Iowans. Never do people care more about those issues than when they are hit hard by uninformed policymakers' choices, and gas prices surge along with food and medical costs.

The mess we are in right now is a direct outcome of GOP incumbents' refusal to oppose any of Trump's lunacy, at any level. Iowans see that more clearly than ever against the backdrop of dizzying price hikes, the disastrous ag 'policies' of Trump, and elimination of expanded Medicaid health care.

Look for more massive walk-backs and rebranding efforts in days to come. It's a long way out to November, and Democrats are dealing with a party that knows no bottom and never met a lie they couldn't swallow.

—*Kim Painter is cautiously optimistic.*

Time to pump the brakes on nuclear energy

In January, Governor Reynolds issued an executive order creating a Nuclear Energy Task Force to study the expansion of nuclear power in Iowa. From the very beginning, it was obvious that the task force would enthusiastically support nuclear power. So, it was no surprise when the task force released a rosy report that glosses over concerns about expansion of nuclear energy in Iowa.

Nuclear power is expensive. It is not renewable energy. Nuclear power releases all kinds of radioactive emissions, including tritium, which are harmful to human health.

The uranium fuel is mined from the earth. One method involves digging rocks from the ground, which leaves behind tailings piles that are radioactive. The other method involves pumping liquid chemicals into the ground which absorb uranium; followed by pumping the liquid to the surface where the uranium can be extracted. One can only hope that all of the liquid is brought back to the surface and is not allowed to contaminate ground water.

Mined uranium is processed into fuel pellets and placed in fuel rods that are then loaded into a nuclear reactor. After several years of generating power, the fuel is considered spent, but will remain highly radioactive and dangerous for thousands of years.

Currently spent fuel is being stored in concrete casks outdoors on-site at the nuclear power plants. There is no dump site for spent fuel. The storage area at the Duane Arnold nuclear power plant near Palo, Iowa, is already the size of a football field and will be growing if the plant is restarted.

Further, the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission has certified the casks for 20 years. We all know that concrete deteriorates over time. At some point, the spent fuel will have to be repackaged. This process will put local

communities at risk of exposure to radioactive materials.

Given the large power usage by data centers and advanced manufacturing, some of the companies are expressing interest in building micro reactors or small modular reactors within a data center or manufacturing campus. That means spent fuel will be stored on-site. Should any of those companies go bankrupt or move out of the community, radioactive waste and even the power plant will remain and must be guarded for generations. These are more than simple brownfield sites.

Any accident at a power plant can render acres of land uninhabitable and

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unfarmable for generations. Local communities will need to undertake regular planning for the potential accident, from informing people on how to act to evacuating people from the area to sealing off the area perhaps for generations.

It is obvious that the task force envisions companies getting very rich from investments in nuclear energy. It also expects the state to provide incentives to those companies and to engage in workforce development initiatives that would ensure that workers are trained. Additionally, the task force encourages the state to engage with the federal government in expanding incentives for nuclear projects.

Among the task force recommendations is a process for local communities to raise their hands and offer to be hosts for nuclear power plants. Little is mentioned about the responsibilities and risks.

In order to expand nuclear energy and the supply chain in Iowa, the report recommends that a single-point of contact be hired by the state to facilitate nuclear energy development activities.

Instead of supporting nuclear power, the state should continue its leadership in renewable energy—wind energy, solar energy, and battery storage.

Although the task force report supports a robust nuclear energy presence in Iowa, it is time to pump the brakes and ask serious questions about the risks, costs of nuclear power, dealing with nuclear waste in communities, and health impacts related to living near nuclear power plants and nuclear waste.

This is much more than hitting the jackpot of economic development projects that benefit a few Iowans. If we are not careful, the state could be digging a hole that will be hard to get out of—nuclear waste spread across the state, taxpayer subsidies with limited return benefitting everyday Iowans, putting the most expensive power on the grid and forcing ratepayer bills to climb to unaffordable heights, and backtracking on renewable energy. We can do much better than investing in the nuclear industry.

—Pam Mackey-Taylor is the Director of the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club.

A conspiracy put into action

At the Triple M [Marianette Miller-Meeks] Tailgate fundraiser prior to the Iowa/Iowa State football game, *Bleeding Heartland* journalist Laura Belin reported that Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin “floated some popular conspiracy theories on the right, claiming Democrats are trying to bring people into the country illegally so they can get them registered and ‘cancel out your vote.’”

Preposterous as it sounds, the MAGA crew has numerous conspiracy theories that are just as far-fetched: The stolen election; Obama’s citizenship; the Clintons as pedophiles (Pizzagate); Jim Comey’s seashells spelling 86 47; and so many more, far too numerous to mention.

Lately, I’ve been contemplating the possibility of a conspiracy regarding the tariffs created by President Trump. Hey, if MAGA can have conspiracy theories, why can’t I?

In a message posted on Truth Social, the president bragged that “People that are against Tariffs are FOOLS! We are now the Richest, Most Respected Country In the World, [blah, blah, blah] and will soon begin paying down our ENORMOUS DEBT, \$37 Trillion [which has grown to over \$40 trillion and continues to grow exponentially]. A dividend of at least \$2000 a person (not including high income people!) will be paid to everyone.”

Evidently, a dividend is completely different from a ‘refund.’ In February of this year, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated Trump’s “Liberation Day” tariffs, requiring a refund of “approximately \$166 billion to American businesses.” However, President Trump promised individual ‘dividends’ that are separate from the \$5,000 dividend checks everyone will receive only if Republicans keep control of the U.S. House and Senate after the midterms.

My (conspiracy) theory is based upon the presumption that the tariffs imposed by Trump were the result of a pre-planned schema to increase the revenue of multinational corporations. It was not included in the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025, nor in the Foundation’s 2026 update, “The Golden Age is a choice.” But it mirrors a page out of either book by encouraging the President to create the tariffs in early April of 2025, knowing full well that the tariffs would be declared illegal.

Once the tariffs were in place, the corporations raised prices of tangible goods, realizing instant profits with the argument that the tariffs were the reason for the increases. Once the

The implementation of tariffs was a ruse to line the pockets of the richest multinational corporations and stockholders.

courts declared the tariffs illegal, the Trump administration refunded about \$100 billion of the tariff revenue that was collected, representing about 60% of the roughly \$166 billion the government says it raked in from the sweeping tariffs Trump imposed one year earlier. Did those corporations receiving tariff refunds reduce the price of their products accordingly? Or was part of the plan a substantial windfall for certain multinational corporations?

Ground-shipping conglomerates FedEx, UPS, and DHL have indicated they will return “tariff refunds directly to customers who were explicitly charged import duties.” Amazon has stated that it “will issue refunds in a limited number of cases.” No explanation of what a limited case means.

You will not receive a check from Walmart, Target, Costco, or several other retailers who say customers will benefit indirectly through lower prices or better value rather than receiving checks. Keep your eye on this promise, if you can.

Apple executives are planning to use its refunds for research. Your iPhone maker received \$2.19 billion (over 2% of total refunds thus far) in its fiscal third quarter, which lifted its quarterly earnings by share by \$0.11.

Ford Motor Company (\$1.3 billion) and General Motors (\$500 million) have not expressly indicated what they will do with their newly obtained revenue.

Home Depot, which received about \$730 million; TJX, parent of T.J. Maxx and Marshalls, with about \$331 million; Ross Stores, with about \$253 million; and Lowe’s, with about \$80 million have all expressed offsetting “higher costs or support their businesses.”

It is plain as day that the implementation of tariffs was a ruse to line the pockets of the richest multinational corporations and stockholders. It’s like double-dipping. First comes the profits from raising the price of goods because of the cost of tariffs, then comes the windfall from the refunds to compensate for the phantom losses. It’s a conspiracy put into action by corporate donors to the President after his consistent stance on trade and foreign policy during his first term.

In today’s political world, conspiracy theories are a dime a dozen. The website Snopes will help separate fact from fiction – most of the time. I don’t see how it can keep up with the never-ending absurd foolishness that MAGA constantly creates to keep Americans guessing.

—Marty Ryan waits by his mailbox in Des Moines for checks from Trump.

Fighting the private prison industry

The heated public debate over a new jail in Johnson County has overlooked one player all Iowans should be worried about: the for-profit corporate prison industry.

With privatized prisons already located in more than half of the United States, including Illinois and Indiana, the prison industrial complex is eager to expand to additional states in the Midwest. Funding from Trump's ICE initiatives has companies like The GEO Group and CoreCivic licking their chops, hungry to convert warehouses and shuttered buildings into jails and prisons.

According to the website of the University of Essex, CoreCivic and The GEO Group were major contributors to Trump's first presidential campaign. In his second term, Trump reversed President Biden's 2021 executive order which did not renew federal private prison contracts. Pam Bondi was a lobbyist for a private prison company before her appointment as Attorney General.

As of 2023, 90% of undocumented immigrants were housed in for-profit private prisons.

These private companies have the money and clout to lobby legislators for laws that lead to increased incarceration. They have already wheedled Iowa's Republican lawmakers into

introducing and passing mandatory minimum sentences, strict immigration enforcement, and "three strikes" laws.

Fighting the private prison industry requires a unified front. The jail issue could unite a divided community over an issue we should all agree on—keeping for-profit jails out of Iowa.

A divided community is exactly what the prison industry thrives on.

If the Johnson County Jail referendum fails, the county will still have an aging jail, still have overcrowding, still have safety issues, and still have legal

This referendum matters, but what happens after is equally important.

obligations, with no clear plan. Voters favoring a new jail and voters opposed must become partners in a coordinated effort to stop private correctional facilities from filling the void.

If the referendum passes, both sides will need to stay engaged, ensuring the new jail is safe, humane, and publicly operated. This referendum matters, but what happens after is equally important.

What is currently a heated debate between neighbors may well become a fight between the community and the corporations itching to jump in.

Currently Iowa has no private correctional facilities. According to The Sentencing Project, here are the states that do:

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Colorado
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Kentucky
- Mississippi
- Montana
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Pennsylvania
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Wyoming

— *Prairie Dog*

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sales and excise taxes, the top incomes only 1 or 2 percent.

To balance the budget, future legislatures will have to enact massive cuts in education (which accounts for 57 percent of the state general fund), make further cuts in other services, or adopt a huge increase in the sales tax, adding to the affordability problems facing working families. Just to cover continued revenue shortfalls the sales

tax would have to rise two cents. To restore public school funding and cuts in health care and other services would require at least another penny. That's a 50 percent increase in the sales tax you pay on every taxable item you buy in order to save thousands of dollars for wealthy Iowans.

—*Peter Fisher is the former Research Director of the Iowa Policy Project and Common Good Iowa.*

Rusty Martin, 1960-2026

In 1985 the *Prairie Progressive* showed up in your mailbox as a photocopied handbill stapled together by members of the Iowa City chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America.

It needed someone with the technical skills to format it and make it look like the real newsletter it aspired to be. Enter Rusty Martin. He gave generously of his time and considerable energy to make the PP more attractive and readable. He argued cheerfully with the editors over every incomplete sentence, each misplaced comma, and writing that he insisted be bold, colorful, and relevant.

Rusty grew up in the small town of Newell, Iowa. He refused to register for the draft when he was a student at the University of Northern Iowa. This act was the forerunner for a life of standing up for his beliefs and encouraging others to fight for theirs—always as an advocate for public policies to make people's lives better and fairer.

Working with Rusty on campaigns in the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s was the most fun a hack like me ever had at the local level: Karen Kubby (derided by some as “the socialist pot maker”) for Iowa City Council. Joe Bolkom for

Johnson County Supervisor and State Senator. Jim Throgmorton and Bruno Pigott (derided as “two peas in a pod”). Rusty Martin for Perry City Council. He campaigned without meanness or ego, and he won much more than he lost.

Rusty was ahead of his time with RM News, an interactive email newsletter, before most people even had email. He raised money for Iowa's chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. As Director of Communications for the Iowa Senate Democrats, he combined strategy, creative content, and new technologies for countless legislators and candidates. He was always available when a slide show or video was needed for an event. And for many years he formatted the *Prairie Progressive*, for free.

Rusty died last August, after a long struggle with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. His final campaign was to encourage us all to, in his words, “vote for candidates who believe each of us has the right to the most dignified peaceful death possible.”

In my last conversation with Rusty, I asked if he was listening to any music. He said yes but couldn't remember exactly what. The next day I received an email from him,



Oct 4

Johnson Co Dems Fall BBQ
Keynote: Tom Harkin
Celebration Farm Barn
4:30, Iowa City

Nov 2

Last day to vote early

Nov 7, 1916

Jeanette Rankin became 1st woman elected to Congress

Dec 8, 1941

US entered World War II

Dec 8, 1991

USSR dissolved

Oct 2, 1986

Congress passed So. Africa sanctions over Reagan veto

Oct 7, 1931

Desmond Tutu born

Oct 27, 1841

Slaves revolted, took control of the ship *Creole*, sailed to the Bahamas and were freed

Nov 2, 1976

Carter elected President

Nov 5, 1916

Wobbly strikers massacred in Everett, Washington

Nov 5, 1996

Clinton re-elected President

Nov 23, 1946

France bombed Haiphong to begin Vietnam War

of a screen shot showing his most-played songs on Spotify. Number One on his list was “Higher Ground.” I'd like to think that's where Rusty is.

—*Dave Leshtz*

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