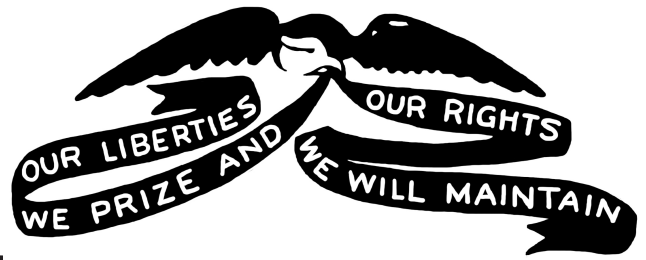


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



April 2014

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A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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## Net Neutrality: *Why It Matters to You*

The January 2014 court decision by the D.C. U.S. Court of Appeals that gutted the Federal Communications Commission's net neutrality rules has given internet service providers (ISPs) the ability to not only slow, but also to legally block websites, content, and applications however they see fit.

Think of it. ISPs can now – legally – slow down or block Daily Kos, Huffingtonpost, and Blog for Iowa. They can make deals to chop it all up and divvy it back out in packages that they own and that you pay extra for, like cable TV. More people see Fox News than MSNBC because Fox is included in everyone's basic cable package, while MSNBC is not. It's not because Fox is so popular on its own. It's the rigged delivery system. Same with talk radio. Clear Channel ensures that every community in Iowa and beyond gets multiple hours every day of conservative talk radio, whether they want it or not. And virtually no progressive programming.

Can you imagine the internet like this? Not having access to everything on the web? It seems unthinkable because we've come to take for granted the free and open nature of the internet where you can go to any

website, anywhere, any time, and so can everyone else. How amazing is that? The free and open internet is truly a wonderful thing.

Since the January court decision, that could go away. ISPs are now in charge. They have been lobbying hard for this moment. They are not going to waste time before they start parsing out the internet to those who can pay.

This issue is important to Iowans, particularly in rural areas, because the telecom giants are already backing away from their promise to provide nationwide broadband service. This makes the loss of a free and open internet a double whammy for Iowa and rural citizens everywhere who will have fewer choices than everyone else, if they have internet at all.

Being blocked from websites that you haven't purchased in your internet package – and other horrors – are a very real possibility if net neutrality is not restored. I'm not worried about myself and my inconveniences. I'm worried about the consequences to democracy when millions of people soon have better, advantaged access to right-wing propaganda online, with less and less access to reality being available anywhere.

The free and open internet is where progressive political activism occurs: Howard Dean's ground-breaking grassroots presidential campaign, the Occupy movement, 360.org, MoveOn.org, The Arab Spring. These are only a few examples of movements that were internet-based.

We need the internet, and we need every last website on the internet to remain equally accessible to everyone.

Marv Ammori, a respected authority on internet issues, said, "The internet is now, and will likely remain for some time, a free-fire zone for AT&T, Verizon, and others to block blogs, superimpose any content (including ads) over the existing content on any webpage, cut deals making Bing or Google the 'exclusive' search provider in our homes, and much more."

This is what can be expected to occur unless informed people get involved and make sure it doesn't.

How do we restore net neutrality?

According to Ammori, "At the time, those of us involved in fighting for net neutrality knew two things when we read the court's decision:

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(1) The FCC needed to adopt rules, rather than accept legal complaints based merely on an Open Internet press statement; and (2) Those rules needed a solid jurisdictional theory that was not Title I. We even knew what that jurisdictional theory was: Title II, or reclassification.”

“Reclassification means that the FCC can put AT&T and Comcast in the same regulatory bucket that landline and mobile phone companies have been in since 1910, that dial-up internet access is in, and that DSL Internet access was in until 2005. This bucket is Title II of the Communications Act, a legal category that has forbidden blocking of phone calls and discriminating amongst users for a century. By classifying the carriers as subject to Title II for internet access, the FCC would have clear jurisdiction to stop blocking and discriminating, instead of merely requiring cable and phone companies to disclose when they are doing so. The FCC has the power to do this.”

In Iowa, Congressmen Dave Loebsack and Bruce Braley both are on record as supporting a free and open internet. That is no longer enough. We all need to ask our representatives, even if we know they already support net neutrality, to go one step further. We need to ask them specifically to go on record in support of directing the FCC to reclassify ISPs (internet service providers) as common carriers, allowing them to be regulated.

If the FCC does this, which is in its power to do, it will save the free and open internet. Contact your member of Congress today! ✨

—Trish Nelson is the editor of Blog for Iowa.

## COUNTING JOBS: *Governor, Here's a Better Look*

It is time for the Branstad administration to get serious about data if they want Iowans to take their goals seriously.

Case in point: the official reports on Iowa jobs.

Numbers can tell us so much — or so little, if we're not careful. Every month, we receive the official numbers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Iowa Workforce Development (IWD). At the Iowa Policy Project, we have been putting out our own analysis of these numbers the day of the monthly release since 2003. See Iowa Job Watch and the State of Working Iowa, both at [www.iowapolicyproject.org](http://www.iowapolicyproject.org).

We try to take good care with the data. We don't overemphasize one-month numbers, which often are revised, and we try to put the reports in historical context, both to identify trends and to understand the significance of those trends.

When political spin enters in, it really makes a mess of things. Folks in power always strive to put a friendly light on statistics. But as long as we're all talking about the same statistics, the governed have an opportunity to sort the spin from the reality.

Now, friendly light on stats is one thing. The invention of totally new and meaningless measures is quite another. For some time now, the Iowa Policy Project and others have noted a bogus statistic that has been inserted into official jobs data provided by IWD.

Imagine creating a number that is virtually guaranteed to look better

every single month. What politician wouldn't want that? And we now receive such a number each month from IWD.

“Gross Over-the-month Employment Gains” is an extra line that has been added to IWD's seasonally adjusted, nonfarm jobs spreadsheet, which provides month-by-month data by job sector, back to January 2008.

Below the standard table of rows and columns is the special line, which tallies the gains-only job count since January 2011, when Governor Branstad took office. Construction up 200 but manufacturing down 400? No problem. Ignore the manufacturing losses and call it a gain of 200. That is how this method counts jobs.

At IPP, we have found IWD staff to be professionals. To their credit, they try not to emphasize the new figure. They don't include it in the official news release, only on the spreadsheet. No doubt they cringe every time that number comes out of the agency — whoever ordered them to compile it.

But surely the Governor is pleased. While the number distorts reality, it shows him close to the pace needed after three years (120,000) to get to his magic goal of 200,000 jobs in five years. Kind of like winning a basketball game by shutting off the opponent's side of the scoreboard, isn't it? But that's not what you expect from a state agency. As a nonpartisan arbiter of such things, we at the Iowa Policy Project would prefer not to even address the Governor's goals. They exist only

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for political purposes. A Governor's tenure gives us little economic perspective; a far better approach is to consider job growth or losses in the context of business cycles, which is what we and our colleagues do around the country.

But when the concocted measure is conflicting with the real and best measure that we have tracked for over a decade, the one that helps Iowans understand what's happening in their economy, we need to call attention to the discrepancy.

So, for what it's worth, the Iowa economy (not the Governor) has produced a net increase of about 61,000 jobs since January 2011. That's

about half of the pace needed for the Governor's goal.

More importantly, the economy is about 55,000 jobs short of where we should be if net new jobs had kept up with Iowa's 4.4 percent population growth since the start of the recession — what we consider the "job deficit," as calculated by the Economic Policy Institute.

So, we are better off in the sheer number of jobs than we were during the recession, but we need more to meet demands of the labor market; we are in recovery, albeit a slow and plodding one.

Furthermore, as IPP's State of Working Iowa analysis by Colin

Gordon has shown, trends of recent years show our job gains have come mostly in service industries that do not pay as well as other job sectors, and our job losses or job stagnation have come in sectors that tend to pay better. In other words, not all jobs are equal. What are we doing to encourage quality jobs, not just any jobs at any price?

Our state leaders should look to those big-picture messages from the real data for the connections to public policy. ✂

—Mike Owen is executive director of the Iowa Policy Project, [www.iowapolicyproject.org](http://www.iowapolicyproject.org). Contact: [mikeowen@iowapolicyproject.org](mailto:mikeowen@iowapolicyproject.org).

## Through the looking glass

I've been puzzled by the bizarre statements and outlandish behavior of conservatives who do not seem to live in the same world that I do. Then I read Chris Mooney's book "The Republican Brain" and learned that right wingers actually do live in an alternate universe. Mooney studied neurological, psychological, and sociological research about political behavior and outlook and found ample evidence that those on the right see and understand the world entirely differently than those on the left.

Conservative minds like order, hierarchy, certainty, and tradition; they fear change and put a high premium on faith. Liberal minds tend to be more open to new ideas and experiences, they question the established order, are comfortable with disorder, uncertainty, and prone to believe in a scientific and factual approach to the world around them. Mooney is careful to say

that such differences do not make conservatives bad people, just not the same as liberals. But he does allow that currently these conservative traits do lead to bad public policy, and I am perfectly happy to say that their way of thinking does make them selfish, greedy, and intolerant people.

Mooney uses the example of a homeless person begging on the street—a liberal sees that person and wonders why there are no government programs to house, care for, and support them. A conservative sees a dirty, shabbily dressed beggar who is too lazy to get a job, but is content to sponge a living from hardworking citizens. In a wry moment, Mooney also notes that conservatives keep their bedrooms tidier, polish their shoes a lot and beat their children more often than liberals!

Mooney's book explains a lot about recent Republican shenanigans. For

example, the seemingly scientifically sophisticated Dr. Marionette Miller-Meeks claimed that Mountain Dew is the most product most frequently bought with food stamps in Iowa. This is manifestly untrue, there is no evidence to support this claim, but Dr. Meeks touted it as a fact that she found somewhere on the Internet. This rightwing chestnut is the current version of Ronald Reagan's welfare queen story.

Look at what our glorious and eternal Governor Branstad has been up to of late. The Toledo State Training School was being mismanaged, and some of the girls housed there were being abused. Did Branstad take responsibility for improving the administration and ensuring proper care for the state's charges? No, the only logical choice for him to make was to close the \$26 million property and dump the remaining girls into

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## Through the looking glass

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homeless shelters. Problem solved! Note the budding and interlocked scandals recently uncovered by the Des Moines Register—Branstad has been “reclassifying” unionized state employees as managers to cut into AFSCME membership, he has paid \$280,000 dollars in hush money to employees fired from non-political positions for being Democrats, he has conducted job searches for top state posts in which only one person, a Republican, has been interviewed and then hired. Lastly, Branstad has packed the Iowa Board of Medicine with right-wing anti-abortion doctors and lay members.

When asked about these misdeeds, what does Branstad reply? He didn't know about the hush money, union jobs are being “updated” out of existence, and – contrary to all scientific evidence – his appointees to the Iowa Medical Board are perfectly correct in ruling to deny rural Iowa women access to reproductive

choice through long distance consultations (yet the state promotes “telemedicine” in all other cases as the solution to the lack of doctors in much of small-town Iowa).

This topsy-turvy Republican world view is the basis for much of the political breakdown in our country. GOP-think allows Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Bobby Jindal, and Nikki Haley, all prominent right-wing politicians, possible GOP presidential candidates, and the children of immigrants, to rail against sensible immigration reform. Likewise, Governor Chris Christie, New Jersey's scandal-ridden governor, is touted as a moderate Republican who can win over Independents and Democrats! Christie is anti-abortion, anti-union, and anti-anything progressive, but he is still too “moderate” to win the Iowa GOP caucuses dominated by Tea Party crazies, home-school fundamentalists, and zany Ron Paul Libertarians.

Why should American progressives confine themselves to what Karl Rove dismissed as the “reality based community?” If the right can create its own facts, bloviate about “global cooling,” and promote tax cuts for billionaires as good for America's working people, why don't we do some creative thinking of our own? We could pretend that single payer health insurance would truly cover all Americans. We could dream of lifting the cap on Social Security earnings, thus eliminating any “threat” to that program forever. If we become completely unhinged, we could propose raising the minimum wage, lifting millions out of poverty! But wait; those ravings are all based on real-world facts. I guess I should just go beat the kids and shine my jackboots. ✂

–Duncan Stewart lives in his own reality, also known as University Heights.

## Five Little Democratic Questions

What to ask if one meets a powerful person:

- What power have you got?
- Where did you get it from?
- Do you exercise it?
- To whom are you accountable?
- And how can we get rid of you?

–Tony Benn (1925-2014)  
longtime British Member of Parliament  
and former Chair of the Labour Party

Recently the Prairie Progressive has printed Articles encouraging Robert Reich and Hillary Clinton to enter the Iowa caucuses as a Democratic candidate for President.

Readers wanting Independent Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont to do the same are encouraged to visit <http://www.credomobilize.com/petitions/encourage-senator-bernie-sanders-to-run-for-president-in-2016-as-a-democrat>.

The Prairie Progressive welcomes articles on all potential candidates.





# Predator Drones and Iowa Caucuses

## April 26

Iowa Democratic Party District Conventions

## May 3

Iowa Federation of Labor Tribute to Tom Harkin

## May 7, 1954

Vietnamese defeated French at Dien Ben Phu

## May 10, 1994

Nelson Mandela became first black president of South Africa

## June 2, 1924

US Congress granted citizenship to Native Americans

## June 3

Iowa Primary Elections

## June 21

Iowa Democratic State Convention

## June 28, 1969

Stonewall Inn uprising in NYC began modern gay rights movement

## June 29, 1954

CIA overthrew Arbenz in Guatemala

Two years ago the Coralville Public Library hosted an exhibit called "Windows and Mirrors," organized by the American Friends Service Committee. The most moving part of the exhibit consisted of paintings by Afghan and Pakistani children about what it's like to be in an area under attack by American drones. The drones hover about target villages while children play outside, afraid to go in because they never know if their house will be bombed.

Despite official denials, the nature of the drone wars in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia has been documented beyond any doubt. This is a guerrilla war in which the combatants are civilian and the military unit the household. In parts of Yemen every young man 21-45 is a designated target. The aptly named Hellfire Missiles, fired from the aptly named Predator Drones, burn little girls alive, mutilate little boys, and crush elderly couples to death as they lie sleeping in their beds. Drones have attacked weddings, engagement parties, and funerals, and they routinely kill first responders attempting to come to the aid of the victims of drones.

No one has the excuse of not knowing what is happening, but

what can we do about it? In 1968 anti-war Democrats, shocked at the carnage in Viet Nam, entered a candidate in the New Hampshire's (first-in-the-nation) primary who received a sufficient number of votes to persuade the President to step down. What about Iowa's (first-in-the-nation) caucuses in 2016?

The nominee apparent is Hillary Clinton. Will a Clinton administration continue the present administration's war policies? It is not merely drone wars that characterize this administration. They have overturned the legal precedent set in 1215 in the famous Magna Carta, in which the King of England was forced to agree never to deport or execute a subject of the Crown without due process of law. The President of the United States now carries with him a "kill list" of American citizens which he has ordered, on his own authority as president, to be assassinated by drone, or other methods.

The widespread violation of the Geneva Conventions continues with the indefinite detention and unlawful abuse of prisoners of war, not only in Guantanamo but in secret prisons in places like Diego Garcia. American

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citizens as well as prisoners of war are subject to unlawful abuse that amounts to torture under the Geneva Conventions.

The case of Chelsea Manning only came to light because it had such a high profile. He (as he was then) was held in solitary confinement, required to sleep naked, deprived of sleep, not allowed to read, and forced to stand in his underwear for hours during the day without touching anything. After wealthy liberal donors began disrupting Democratic Party fundraisers in protest, President Obama began to take a personal interest in the treatment of Manning, and held a press conference in which he declared that the abuse was lawful. A courageous female military judge, a mere Major who refused to defer to the Commander in Chief, declared these actions unlawful, and

reduced Manning's sentence by the six months he was subjected to this treatment.

There is in addition the small matter of the widespread violation of constitutional protections against unlawful surveillance by the NSA and CIA which leave us unsafe from government intrusion into our homes. The pattern of official lies about them was exposed by Edward Snowden, who has very good reasons to avoid falling into American custody, civil or military.

There is every reason to believe that a Clinton Administration will continue or expand endless drone wars and the systematic mistreatment of prisoners of war. American citizens will continue to be under threat of arbitrary presidential assassination, unlawful abuse in military prisons, and secret spying on us in our homes and workplaces.

As informed Democrats and citizens, we should take what steps we can to turn the nation around on these issues. In a democracy, we can vote, and use our vote at the Iowa caucuses for an anti-war candidate. We will be organizing soon a campaign to persuade Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont to challenge Hillary Clinton as a Democrat in the Iowa caucuses, just as Gene McCarthy was persuaded to challenge Lyndon Johnson the New Hampshire primary. Some people will say he can't win, but if an African-American from Chicago whose middle name is Hussein can make it to the White House with the electoral votes of three states of the former Confederacy, so can a Jewish Democratic Socialist from Vermont.✂

-Jeff Cox

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