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# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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*a newsletter for Iowa's Democratic Left*

*Spring 2023*

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## Women knew the ways

We were driving home from a women's clinic fundraising event. My mother my was quiet. Then she said, "How times change. We used to not even be able to say the word abortion, and now we have parties for it." She saw a lot of changes.

She was 13 years old when her mom, who had been irritable and upset for several weeks, kept her home from school to watch the younger children. Her mom went out, and went to bed when she came home. She was bleeding, and my mom knew it was not normal bleeding. She had to clean up after her mother and quiet the younger children. She was never told what had happened.

Women have always ended pregnancies. Men didn't always know. The reasons varied. Sometimes the baby was unwanted. Sometimes the mother felt unable to support the child. Sometimes the father was not her husband, or her husband was drunk or violent and she didn't want to perpetuate those habits.

Abortion was a private thing. Some women discussed it with their partner or family members, some didn't. Some families compelled girls to undergo

abortions to prevent embarrassment and stigma. The choices were not discussed in polite society. To the Church, contraception and abortion were sins, but women knew the ways. Men were reluctant to use birth control, but women knew the ways.

When the Pill in was introduced in 1960, people predicted the end of abortions. Women would reliably take their pills and unwanted pregnancies would be a thing of the past. It didn't happen. Better and even permanent contraception for men was introduced. Abortion didn't end. Women died from abortions, often self-induced. The "coat-hanger method" became a cliché.

In the 60s I was living in Massachusetts. The family next door was a young couple with two little boys. One morning the wife asked if I could watch her boys while she left for a couple of hours. She wasn't home at lunch time, so I gave the boys sandwiches and put the younger one down for his nap. The older boy said he was too old for a nap, so I taught him to play Go Fish. When his mom got home, she seemed a little distracted, but she thanked me and apologized for being later than she had told me. I went back to my apartment.

Later, the older son knocked on my door, looking frightened. He tugged my hand and led me into their living room. Toys and spilled food were all over the floor. I saw spots that looked like blood. I asked the boy if one of them had an owie, but he was pulling me into the bedroom. His mom was on the bed and there was blood everywhere – on the sheets and in her hair. She said, "Please help me," and seemed to faint.

When I said I was going to call an ambulance, she roused herself and stopped me. She said we would both be arrested if someone came. She told me she just couldn't deal with another baby. She said to look in her coat pocket for a phone number. When I called the number, it was out of service. She couldn't remember where her husband could be reached. I didn't understand what had happened, but I had heard of abortion and I knew it was illegal.

While she went to the bathroom, I changed the sheets and picked up the bloodied laundry. I made her a cup of tea. She said she thought the bleeding had slowed a little. She fell asleep. I tried to comfort

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# Indentured servitude in Iowa

If you have never had to learn or appreciate what a non-competition agreement, or non-compete is, consider yourself lucky. These documents hold workers hostage to the whims of employers.

The idea that a non-compete is an “agreement” overstates things. Commonly, when a person gets a job, a non-compete is just another document the employer requires the employee to sign. The employer may or may not explain what it is. Whatever explanation an HR representative provides is not binding on the company. Alternatively, at any point an employer may draft a non-compete and present it to the employee, saying, “we need you to sign this if you want to keep working here.” Iowa courts say non-compete agreements made under threat of loss of employment are perfectly valid – after all, the employee did get to keep her job and not lose her ability to feed her family, pay her mortgage, etc. Ironically, the same Iowa courts also say non-competes are banned for lawyers.

So what do these agreements say? One I recently reviewed says the employee agrees he will not be “employed by, consulting for, advising, or rendering services to any person, group, or entity engaged in employer’s business in the territory.” What is the employer’s business? In this case it was the “design, manufacture, marketing and sale” of agricultural equipment and any other business operations employer may venture into. What is the territory? The United States of America. How long does it last? This one was 18 months. The agreement says if you work for this company, and decide to leave, you are not allowed to work for any

company having anything to do with agricultural equipment in the United States for a year and a half.

What if I want to move from working in marketing to go work in sales somewhere else? It doesn’t matter. What if I have worked in agricultural equipment for 30 years and it’s the only business I know? Doesn’t matter. What if they fire me? Surely they can’t stop me from getting a job after they have fired me. No, they think they can, and they might try.

It gets worse. The non-compete usually says something like “employee understands and agrees the nature of damages which would be caused by employee’s violation of this agreement are such that employer shall be entitled to a temporary injunction without the necessity of showing any actual damages and without the necessity of posting any bond... If employee breaches the agreement, employee will be responsible for employer’s reasonable attorney fees.”

Reasonable attorney fees would be a funny term here if the situation were not so awful. In other words, you agree that if you even say out loud you are thinking about getting another job we don’t approve of, we have a right to sue you to get a court order preventing you from taking the job. In terms of evidence we’d put before the court? Well, we’d enter this document you signed where you agreed it is reasonable for us to do this to you. And here is the bill for our tall-building lawyers.

Of course, those lawyers wrote the document you signed. Drafting a non-compete is essentially an exercise in figuring out how big of jerks the lawyer and employer can be, but if a judge ever sees the

document, they will enforce it. Iowa courts do recognize some limits in the draconian terms imposed in a non-compete. However, a judge almost never sees one; it virtually never gets that far.

The employer already has lawyers. They can afford to pay \$350/hour or more for their lawyers. What can you afford? Also remember, when they win you already agreed to pay for their lawyers. Most people are simply bullied into submission.

Surely there are brave individuals who move on to another job even if the old employer thinks it violates a non-compete? Yes, but what often happens in that situation is the old employer sues both the worker who left and their new employer. The new employer initially is shocked and horrified the old employer would do this to you. They are sympathetic. But they don’t want to be dragged into this. We’re sorry, you’re fired.

President Biden in his State of the Union address spoke about a non-compete restricting a fast-food employee from going across town to get a job at a competitor for more money. You might think that is an extreme example; it is not. In Iowa there are janitorial businesses that require janitors to sign non-competes, attempt to enforce them, and justify their actions based on the worker having been provided access to customer lists and trade secrets. Yes, that’s right – janitorial trade secrets. In the letter I sent in response, I suggested to my counterpart that if his clients are asking him to threaten lawsuits against custodians

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# Police funding in Iowa City

The City of Iowa City is poised to spend over 25% of its general fund on police, and to increase police funding.

Are these dollars delivering the safety we expect?

“Safety” requires stable housing, food, clean water, access to jobs and education, physical and mental health, freedom of movement, and opportunities for fun.

In our recent Strategic Plan, the City Council identified values that inform our work: racial and social justice, climate action, and partnerships. Building safety around these values requires investments outside of policing.

The FY2024 police budget is proposed at \$17.3 million, an annual increase of over \$955,000. For comparison, about \$950,000 is what the Iowa City Community School District recently requested of Iowa City to provide wrap-around care for pre-K for four-year-olds.

To understand the scope of \$17.3 million, consider the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Council has been planning how best to use these funds since Spring of 2021. The promise of ARPA is long-term improvement in resilience and well-being, not just pandemic recovery.

How much ARPA money did Iowa City receive to enable such transformative, generational change? \$18.3 million, only slightly more than just one year of the police budget.

In the last ten years, the Iowa City Police Department budget has increased over 40%. During that

same time, Iowa City’s population grew by only 10%. Police funding outpaced growth in public works, neighborhood services, library, and parks and recreation, among other City departments.

The steep rise in police funding is not due to a rise in our department’s emergency response. Calls for service actually decreased over the five-year period of 2017-2021. In 2021, calls totaled 4,000 fewer than the five-year average. Further, about 45% of all calls for service are initiated by officers themselves, not in response to someone calling for help.

Police officers are well-paid. They also receive a generous pension, with the City contributing an additional 24% of officers’ pay.

Iowa City officers are well-trained, including in crisis intervention and de-escalation. However, no matter how well-trained, every officer brings three things to every public interaction:

1. lethal force in the form of a firearm;
2. broad authority to seize people and property; and
3. legal immunity if someone is harmed.

These elements carry the threat of violence, even for the best-intentioned officers.

Luckily, our officers use force in only 0.3-0.4% of all calls for service—which certainly begs the question as to why we are sending guns and tasers to the other 99.7% of calls.

Despite little physical violence by our officers, police can be the agents of devastating change in people’s lives. Charging a crime of any level

sets off a chain of events that often results in reducing a person’s ability to find or keep a job, excel in school, or provide opportunities for their children’s success.

What about preventing calls in the first place? Data shows that investment in prevention leads to better outcomes across the board. The American Public Health Association explicitly supports moving towards the abolition of carceral systems, divesting from police and prisons, and investing in societal determinants of health, like housing and employment.

Prevention is not the focus of ICPD’s budget this year, though. In fact, the police budget line for “crime prevention” is proposed to shrink, while field operations will grow.

We already have some compelling local examples of supporting prevention and care, and should build on these:

- Johnson County refers some adult criminal cases to restorative and transformative justice processes, which deliver accountability to survivors and reduce recidivism.
- Permanent supportive housing programs for chronically homeless individuals have dramatically reduced their emergency room, psychiatric, and jail stays.
- Local law enforcement diverts low-level juvenile delinquency offenses into a supportive program to learn skills to prevent and repair harm in the community.
- Johnson County dispatchers are training o route mental health calls directly to a Mobile Crisis Response team, which sends a

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# Add your light

As the dizzying and demoralizing legislative session wears on in Des Moines, it is clear the majority has no boundaries when it comes to destructive behavior.

Parroting GOP statehouses elsewhere, Iowa is passing a slew of bills. Several aim to undermine government, using popular claims of ‘tax relief.’ Never mind that lower taxes today mean less service for roads, ambulance, and education tomorrow. They’ve restricted the rights of Iowans to access medical care through a ‘fetal heartbeat’ law that’s tied up in court. More recently, new Attorney General Brenna Bird sent a letter threatening Walgreen’s for dispensing fully legal morning-after drugs. Last week, they blasted away at Iowa’s vulnerable population of trans youth with Senate File 538. This bill prohibits doctors from giving puberty blockers, hormone therapy, or gender-affirming surgeries to any transgender person younger than 18.

Iowa has a long history, much-touted and rightly so, of tracking along a line made up of equal parts keen-eyed common sense, good humor, and fierce independence. Today’s GOP is erasing that tradition. Their overlay is one of copycat cowardice and malicious fearmongering. They’re not worthy of being legislators in this state, and clearly don’t know the history they are demeaning. We have never been (or pretended to be) perfect, but we have done historic things in Iowa through our laws and our people. We have made the world better. We’ve educated those who had been barred from the halls of academe; we have

invited and provided protection to those fleeing oppression and threat; we have fed the world and improved the production of food in astonishing ways for the benefit of humanity. That good work is not done, but it may well be finished. Finished by a raft of legislation that will stymie the unique kinds of synergies and accomplishments that have made us so rightly proud and productive in the past.

You see, there are truths to which this gang of thugs operating in Des Moines is unseeing. Chief among them is this simple fact: The best will always seek the best. The best companies seek the best employees, the best universities, the best academics and students, the best governments, the best public servants, and so on. Republicans are actively legislating to limit, across every sphere of endeavor, the freedom of Iowa’s institutions to define “the best” for themselves, and to bring that best here to Iowa.

What self-respecting transgender professor of economics is now going to relocate to Iowa for a position? What young business leader, married to their same-sex spouse and raising children, is going to take a job in our insurance or financial services industry? What doctor of oncology would bring her daughters here to raise them and pursue her research? What corporation, seeing these laws, will pay to lay a single brick in Iowa? I will tell you. None of them. Not one. They can’t afford the foolishness we are currently establishing here.

To lure business here, the GOP is limiting child labor laws and reducing taxes to service-killing

levels. They’re establishing funds for medical education even as they limit the procedures doctors can be taught.

The one major building project for a “business” I’ve recently seen touted tells the sad tale of our future. It’s a new headquarters for The Family Leader, Bob Vander Plaats’ radicalized religious enterprise. Plopped in the middle of a traditional farm area, it is a fake-farm-themed locus of wrong-headed activism from the far right. That’s our future, folks. I can’t wait to see what they do to the Field of Dreams.

While Iowa burns, our governor presents an aw-shucks grin as she crosses the state touting our inherent goodness to one and all. But her time to put on this charade is running out. With every day and every grim new bill, news travels of Iowa’s increasingly toxic environment. The impact will be real and massive. They have let go all pretense to sanity and simply say over and over, “This is what we ran on. We must deliver.” Make no mistake: those words will be etched across the tombstone of the state they are destroying.

Wondering how we can prevail against this tide, my mind goes to words from the film *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Billy Kwan, as he spirals into desperation over the despotic rule of Sukarno in Indonesia, says, “Don’t think about the major issues. You do what you can about the misery in front of you. You add your light to the sum of all light.” We must all seek to do what we can about the misery in front of us as it grows. We must work to add all the light we can. And maybe – just maybe – we will return to letting the best be the best and getting lawmakers out of the way.

—Kim Painter has been the Johnson County Recorder since 1999.



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# The real world

A song came on the radio that I hadn't heard in quite some time. I stopped to listen to *The Way It Is* by Bruce Hornsby and the Range. The song was released in 1986 and it's been a long time since I've heard the lyrics. The song was released only twenty-two years after the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act, also known as the 1964 Poverty Act. Hornsby refers to it in his song, along with mention of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

*Well, they passed a law in '64*

*To give those who ain't got a little more*

*But it only goes so far*

*Because the law don't change another's mind*

*When all it sees at the hiring time*

*Is the line on the color bar*

"Some things will never change." But what happens when they do change, and in the process, things get worse? It's been thirty-seven years since Hornsby wrote this song, and things changed so much that we can't even recognize the past.

Economic justice and civil rights have been targets of Iowa's governor and Republican-led state legislature. However, both believe that they are helping the poor and underserved minorities in Iowa with measures like funding private schools and talking points described as "parental choice."

These so-called Christians in the Iowa Legislature should be aware of the New Testament statement from Jesus that "the poor will always be with us" (Matthew 26:11), but that doesn't mean maintaining their

status. Righteous lawmakers have interpreted that Bible passage to mean that the poor will always be here, so let them eat cake, unless they're receiving SNAP benefits.

The Iowa General Assembly is driving Iowa back to a time where we saw television shows where a man's wife wore a dress, pearls, and perfume waiting to open the front door when the lord and master arrived home from work; to a time when everything was black and white, from the television sets to the sections in restaurants; to a time when it was inappropriate to say the word "homosexual" outside of private whispered gossip; to a time when the good guys shot the bad guys and justice was served; and to the continuous feed of white upper class fictitious family sitcoms illustrating the model American family. We can't, nor should we, pretend that society can replicate the false notion that mid-century Iowa was a landscape of everything good, when actually it was a period of history where unpleasant blemishes were hidden or ignored – scars like poverty, the uneducated, or non-white Iowans.

That's not the nostalgia for which many of us yearn. If Iowa lawmakers want to bring us back to the 1950s and 60s, let them not forget that it was a time when unions were growing; a time when the American Dream was a reality; a time when churches preached the Good Word, not a politically-slanted yarn that fit only their self-serving themes; a time when academic freedom created inquisitive minds that longed to dig deep into new discoveries in medicine, science, and literature without interruptions by politicians

who have never experienced the educational process at a higher level.

Today's Iowa legislators are restricting freedom for the sake of restoring freedom. That's the equivalent of burning the house down to the ground to save it from the fire. Freedom from paying taxes is the mantra that will increase the gap between the rich and the poor and eliminate the middle class as we once knew it. Unfortunately, this cluster of elected officials are successfully achieving "their" freedom by using fear and lies, telling their minions that those of us who seek justice and equality are lying to them. And where is the media to report these transgressions? How can the free press survive when it has been labeled as the liberal press, printing false news, and the enemy of the Republican Party?

Change is good but change for the sake of change can be damaging. And change should be good for everyone, not just the Iowa politburo. Changing back is regression. Changing forward is progression. It's that simple.

I read a column in the Des Moines Register many years ago in which a writer said that "to get to the perfect world, you have to go through the real world." I believe that after walking through the real world there is no getting to the perfect world.

And that's just the way it is.

—Marty Ryan is President of *Iowans Against the Death Penalty*.

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# Fool me once

A couple of weeks ago on Des Moines Press (AKA per its nom de tromperie, Iowa Press), Senate Minority Leader Zach Wahls alerted panelists and audience that the main thing for Iowa Democrats going forward was LISTENING—listening to “everyday hardworking Iowans.”

Perhaps the Senate survey I received by email a week or so before that announcement was a step in that direction. The opening questions were “What is the biggest challenge facing you and your family? What could the Iowa state Senate do to make your life easier?”

If I had to limit my responses to one that the Senate could do to make things easier, I’d venture Medicare for All. Taxes we’d pay to support it could hardly be as much as premiums for private insurance and Medicare for Some.

Next came the list of priorities. Choose just one. This list resembled nothing so much as an outline of talking points, the interpretation of which could support a variety of positions, depending on a user’s ideology and audience. I could not choose just one!

A Senator representing a district in Cedar Rapids noted that at a certain point after the survey was released, some 600 responses had been received. Among them “a number” checked EDUCATION as a top issue; no mention of the exact number, nor even the proportion of such respondents. I asked the Senator for the number. No response.

The survey concludes by asking what other issues are important to me. Temptation was to riff on some of the things in the check list. I resisted and left to others to note additional talking points.

I have received several similar newsletters from legislators. One of them identified an Iowa Democrat “plan.” The “plan” included four elements: lowering costs for Iowans, investing in public schools, protecting reproductive freedom, and legalizing marijuana. I surmised that Iowa Democrats may have already been listening to someone.

For example, lowering costs for Iowans is Biden-ish. While reducing consumer costs is a good thing, making a living wage would be better.

Investing in public schools has been a major, even the main, emphasis of many Democrats in and out of campaign seasons. (No need to recap the manifold mess Republicans continue to make of education in Iowa.) Might investing in education include needed reforms of a system that is bloated, bureaucratized, and opaque? Teachers, for example, having a stronger role in shaping curriculum as well as administrative procedures and approaches seems apt.

The Cedar Rapids School District recently made two hires with scant public participation. An Interim Superintendent’s vita included his theology; religious views suited to Iowa’s Family Values movement were scarcely discussed. The new Superintendent has been advertised as suitably qualified. Most taxpayers are still waiting to know more about her. The district with her leadership may be able to close the longstanding achievement gap which falls along racial lines. Predecessors pledged to do so. The gap remains. Simply pouring more money into a sclerotic system is unlikely to foster desired improvements.

Reproductive freedom is good, and cherished by many women and men, but enough to bring about an electoral majority to see to it? It’s the only issue among the four in the “plan” that echoes identity politics. Not all women are on board with abortion (or its allied reproductive health issues). Not all Iowa women are of childbearing age; concern for reproductive freedom may not loom large among them. At root it is a class issue. The well-off will find a way; for the poor, the way is fraught with danger. The way back after the demise of Roe will be long and hard.

Legalizing marijuana, while long overdue, seems eccentric. This is scarcely a bread-and-butter life-and-death issue. Commercializing hemp as a foundation to legalization has many more economic prospects.

Have Iowa Democrats been listening to other than “everyday hardworking Iowans?” Most likely, their ears have been tuned to national Democrats. These are Democrats who embraced the caucuses, took them over, ruined them, then took them away. These are the caucuses that time after time rejected Joe Biden. But thanks to South Carolina and DNC interventions, these same national Democrats choose Iowa’s Democratic Congressional and Senatorial candidates, fund them generously with coastal dollars, and blame Iowa Democrats for failing to elect them. Fool me once...

A legislator whose newsletter included “the plan” responded to similar comments in an email: “I don’t know where to begin.” Precisely—a great diagnosis. Democrats really don’t seem to know where to begin. But maybe they’re on to something. Listening to “everyday hardworking Iowans” rather than conforming to a national agenda could be where to begin.

—Robin Kash lives in Cedar Rapids.

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# Bikes create community

Recently, I was talking to my therapist and told her I was feeling irritable and pessimistic and felt a touch of despair creeping in. I asked her, “How do I get back to the light-heartedness I’ve felt the past few months?” She said, “I don’t know, but how about going to the Bike Library? You always seem happier after you’ve hung out there.”

I took her advice and went to Women/Trans/Femme Night, or “open-wrenching” hours on Tuesday nights reserved for women-identified, gender non-conforming, and femme folks. A W/T/F mechanic will help coach you through repairs or upgrades on your bike. All the tools, lubes, and new and salvaged parts to do quick fixes or major overhauls are there. If you don’t have a specific bike project, you can just come and hang out, drink a beverage, and be in community.

I left W/T/F Night with a smile on my face and a warm glow in my chest. Thanks to these open-wrenching hours, my 15-year-old bike is running smoother than the year I bought it, and the ride home felt like flying. Talking with folks at W/T/F night and the sense of accomplishment from repairing my steed is guaranteed to lift my mood.

Years ago, my entry point into the Bike Library was FarmCycle, an annual ride to sample delicious food at local farms. I knew the Bike Library as an inclusive hub for people who love bikes. Since becoming a board member last December, I have come to see it as an activist organization having considerable impact in the community around its main values of equity and sustainability.

Located at 1222 S. Gilbert Court in Iowa City, the Bike Library is

a nonprofit community bike shop with the mission of getting more people on bikes. At its inviting, 7,000-square-foot building, donated bikes are repaired and checked out the way a library checks out books, sold at low cost, or donated to community members through voucher programs.

The Bike Library has extensive programming that focuses on education. It hosts beginner-friendly rides that help build confidence on two wheels and workshops focused on bike repair and maintenance. Based on staff estimates, three out of every four people looking to get bikes at the Bike Library don’t know the basics of properly setting seat height, shifting, and braking. Staff or volunteers often work one-on-one to provide this knowledge.

In addition to hosting events at its space, the Bike Library has made a push to get out into the community where bikes are most needed. It hosted 10 Mobile Bike Safety Clinics in low-income neighborhoods and handed out kids’ bikes at the South District’s Diversity Markets at Pepperwood Plaza. During the summer, it teams up with Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County and the Injury Prevention Center at the University of Iowa to host Bike Safety Camp, where kids who participate in a week-long program get their own bike, helmet, and t-shirt. In 2022, 170 repaired bikes were given out to kids, teens, and other folks who couldn’t otherwise afford them.

Who comes to mind when people think about a cyclist? Contrary to stereotypes of LYCRA-clad white people on high-end racing bikes, the largest share of bike rides in the U.S. are taken by lowest-income Americans. Though

bikes are a relatively low-cost form of transportation, buying and maintaining a bike can be prohibitively expensive for families who need them the most. The Bike Library provides a social service by reducing the barriers to bikes and bike skills.

The Bike Library helps people of all backgrounds make bikes a bigger part of their lives, whether it is for recreation or commuting, physical or mental health, human connection or a sense of accomplishment. In this way, it is part of a movement to democratize wellness.

Audrey Wiedemeier, Director of the Bike Library, emphasizes how the organization benefits from the relationships it builds in the community. She says, “Connecting with people and organizations with different perspectives provides the creativity and innovation needed to drive healthy change in our community.”

The Bike Library lifts my spirits because it gives me hope for the future. It’s a place where you might find out you can do something you didn’t think you could do, and that in and of itself is a form of liberation. It has developed a model for keeping bikes out of the landfill and putting them in the hands of people who need them the most. It is helping to foster a stronger, more resilient community.

We accept any and all bikes and financial donations!

—Clarity Guerra is a Climate Action Ambassador for the City of Iowa City.

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**Women knew the ways,  
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her son and amuse the younger boy while I cleaned up the living room. I kept checking to see if she was still breathing. It seemed forever until her husband came home. I never knew if he had known what she was going to do. I lived there for another year, and often talked to the boys and chatted with their mom, but the incident was never mentioned again.

Later I had a job as a dormitory counselor. One of the girls came to me after a weekend at home and said she thought she was pregnant. I went with her to Student Health and she sobbed when the pregnancy was confirmed. The doctor had tears in her eyes as she explained that she couldn't help her. The girl found a doctor in town who gave her the name of someone in Missouri. She went alone. I met the bus when she came back. She was sad and depressed for a long time. The reason for her trip was not discussed.

There aren't many of us left who remember the time before Roe became "settled law." In the 70s, when I needed an abortion, I received counseling from my doctor and a nurse. The nurse explained the alternatives and was non-judgmental when I confirmed that I wanted an abortion. She explained the procedure. We discussed whom I would tell. I showed up at the hospital the next morning for the procedure. They gave me follow-up instructions and a phone number that I knew was valid. I went home that afternoon with no problems afterwards. How different it was.

Now, we're back to coat hangers. It's painful to think about.

—Carol Thompson lives in Coralville, Iowa.

**Indentured servitude in Iowa,  
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for working as custodians, he may want to reevaluate the scope of his legal practice.

The President also stated that 30 million Americans are subject to non-competes. That may be true but many, if not most, are either unaware of them or do not think they are real. Again, it is often just presented as another form you have to sign to work here. In terms of enforceability, I have had dozens of people start a sentence to me with "Well, I know Iowa is a right to work state, so..." Most people do not appreciate the real predicament a non-compete can put them in until they are already in it.

Non-competes are a form of indentured servitude from which the 13th Amendment has not saved us. At the macro level there is no question non-competes hold back wages. At the micro level they cause tremendous financial anxiety and wreck plans.

At the whim of an employer a non-compete causes some unlucky people to live life differently from how they want to live life. Non-competes are designed and used to prevent regular people from pursuing their own happiness.

—Nate Willems lives in Mount Vernon, Iowa.

**Police funding in Iowa City,  
cont'd from Page 3**

pair of trained mental health professionals, in plain clothes and without weapons, to calls for help.

I will not vote to increase police funding. I am asking my City Council colleagues to shift resources away from policing and into other ways of building community safety.

In the coming years, we will face increased political extremism, climate devastation, economic turmoil, and aftershocks from the pandemic. These challenges require focus and intention to build resilience. Let's invest in preventing harm and supporting the work of organizations who know how to empower people. We should invest in emergency response tailored to our residents' needs, and to create accountability, not punishment.

This is not just the government's concern. We must share power with community partners, support experts, and create new leaders. Continuing to invest in the status quo will not help.

*[Editor's note: If you're a Prairie Progressive reader living in Iowa City, tell the City Council how you want your tax dollars spent. Email council@iowa-city.org or attend its budget public hearing tentatively set for April 4, 6 pm, at City Hall.]*

—Laura Bergus is a member of the Iowa City City Council.



“Change never happens at the pace we think it should. It happens over years of people joining together, strategizing, sharing and pulling all the levers they possibly can. Gradually, excruciatingly slowly, things start to happen, and then suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, something will tip.”

—*Judith Heumann, disability rights activist, 1947-2023*

“These students are normal kids who want to remember their high school years as fun and full of good memories, just like every other student that attends high school. They shouldn’t have to fear their own identity and remember how alone and scared they felt throughout their high school career because their state government was against them instead of with them.”

—*Emma Dierking, sophomore, Storm Lake High School*



## CALENDAR

**March 20, 2003**

US war in Iraq began

**March 22**

Johnson Co Dems Legacy Club  
The Ashton House, Iowa City  
Guest speaker: Joe Henry,  
Political Director, LULAC Iowa  
Info: Wm.gerhard@gmail.com

**March 29, 1973**

Last US troops left Vietnam

**April 4, 1968**

Martin Luther King, Jr.  
assassinated in Memphis

**April 12, 1983**

Harold Washington elected  
Mayor of Chicago

**April 19, 1943**

Warsaw Ghetto uprising

**April 25, 1918**

Ella Fitzgerald born

**April 28**

Workers Memorial Day

**May 6**

NAMI Johnson Co Annual Walk

**May 8, 2018**

US abandoned Iranian nuclear deal

**May 13**

Johnson County Dems  
Hall of Fame Awards

**May 15**

Bike to Work Week  
begins in Iowa City

**May 26, 1938**

US House Un-American  
Activities Committee formed

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