



**Talk given at the Iowa State Fair
on Sunday, 14 August 2016, by
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[The following is the unabridged original script, parts of which were skipped due to time limits. The actual delivery—edited by those who posted it—is at: <http://iowapublicradio.org/post/senate-candidates-take-their-turn-state-fair-soapbox#stream/0>]

None of us—no one, not a single person among us—is an island, off by ourselves, inconsequential and living our lives in vain. Rather, each of us is a part of a rich, complex whole. Together, we form an archipelago, an endless human chain that stretches back into the past farther than any of us can remember and, at the same time, leads into a future farther than any of us can foresee. This condition is both exhilarating and humbling.

My 3-x-great-grandfather, German-born Heinrich Luick, came to what we now call “Iowa” as a young surveyor in the summer of 1846, before our prairie home had become a state. He, together with those who followed him, later built homes, farms, towns, churches, schools, and halls of government. They built their New Canaan.

I, like most of you, became a person in the homes, farms, towns, churches and schools that grew out of those pioneer institutions. I, like most of you, grew up in a different Iowa, a different America—in what presently, some days, might seem like a different planet from the world we witness unraveling now.

I, like most of you, believed what we learned in that other America. I still believe that each of us, every one of us, has an ability to make a difference—IF, that is, we accept, if we embrace that potential, that rich, innate power inside each of us—and use it as a fulcrum to move the world forward.

With each ability comes a responsibility to move the world forward, along that archipelago of life in which each one of us belongs and plays an irreplaceable role. You, too, may recall the adage: “To whom much is given, much is expected.” This calling is what moves me to run to be a US Senator from Iowa.

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This week, almost every day, a gauntlet of candidates will file across the State Fair soapbox stage, telling you why you “should” vote for them. Especially in this turbulent political season, enduring that process can be overwhelming. So, I’m going to do you a favor and tell you why you should NOT vote for me:

For starters, you shouldn't vote for me if you want a "yes" man, someone willing to subvert or suffocate "inconvenient truths." What do I mean? For example, that we've been lied to, repeatedly, for decades: My folks went to hear Earl Butz speak at Clear Lake's Surf Ballroom in the early 1970s, where he cheered them and our neighbors to "rip out the fencerows and the groves, 'cause we're gonna feed the world!" Nixon's Secretary of Ag misled them—all of us—into believing that we "had" to "get big or get out," that economies of scale dictated that Iowa's farms grow ever-bigger, even if rural towns grew ever-smaller.

In reality, our current over-production of corn and beans has provided a vast, exportable commodity while America's industrial output has decreased annually for decades. Our government has used food as a weapon repeatedly, boycotting foes or flooding foreign markets in turns. And, it has used subsidized corn as a pillar of its cheap-food policies, as a pennies-per-pound filler for every foodstuff imaginable—to the point that two-thirds of our people are overweight or even obese. Industrial farming is killing us!

Each of us pays for Iowa's overproduced crops, in so many ways: paying taxes to treat poisoned water, coping with chemical-born toxins and gene-manipulated plant stock that will diminish and disrupt us for generations to come, living amongst fields that half of each year are barren, with dead, flood-prone soil. If we sit on the world's richest soil, why did we "have" to apply so many artificial inputs that we killed it?

And, we suffer from a political culture dominated by industrial-ag interests that dictate policies and law, and grease politicians' grasping hands. Those forces dominate public discourse and support hand-picked candidates who block new voices, new ideas from the political landscape. Most of Iowa stagnates as a necrophilic political culture re-elects political hired guns for decades, who kick problems down the road.

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You should *not* vote for me if you think all is well in Iowa, that current trajectories will lead most of our state's people forward to a better place by 2046, by Iowa's bicentennial. Then vote for the status quo—vote for the incumbent. I, for one, don't believe that mainstream models will lead us to a livable future.

Senator Charles Grassley is a decent man, yet he's been there too long: He first ran for the US Senate when I was a junior in high school. Now, I'm wrinkled and boasting a belly: I literally embody his career—one that's spanned my entire adult life. Thus, he's a poster boy for why we desperately need term limits.

Yes, he's served Iowa faithfully, according to his convictions. And, he's quite competent—but after 35 years in one office and 42 years on Capitol Hill, I'd like to think I'd be at least as, if not more, competent.



And—to borrow a phrase from Grassley’s fellow Republican, Richard Nixon—he’s “not a crook.”

But, he’s still the “senior senator” in all meanings of that phrase: Grassley would be 89 at the end of yet another term, should the majority of Iowans who bother to vote re-elect him yet again. Myself, I find 89 too elderly to execute business at adequate capacities but, moreover, it’s no way to run a “democracy.”

By now, Grassley’s elite friends with deep pockets are so invested in keeping him in-office, to assure that he continues to represent their interests over the people’s, that they’ll do almost anything, they’ll pay almost any price to keep him there—even if that has meant throwing together his current \$5-million-dollar campaign war chest. Do you also find that an obscene betrayal of our nation’s democratic ideals?

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If you don’t wish to vote for the incumbent yet want to preserve the status quo, vote for his vanilla challenger, handpicked by the elite of the Democratic National Committee. Like Grassley, at 73 onetime Lieutenant-Governor Patty Judge is a solid member of the Establishment—a Good Ol’ Boy in a skirt.

Both mainstream candidates are World War II warriors, veterans of the Great Depression, the Second World War, the Big Boom and the Cold War. Problem is, the world that formed them and informed their views no longer exists. If elected, I’d be the first Baby Boomer to fill this Senate seat—and, after six or twelve years in it, I’d be happy to pass it on to a Millennial as part of observing a voluntary term limit.

As members of the Old Guard committed to perpetuating not just their parties but the world as it once was, don’t expect either Charles Grassley or Patty Judge to speak truth about our environmental crises:

When Heinrich Luick arrived in 1846 to survey what became our home on the wide, open prairie, Iowa had virtually no contaminated ground water. And, it had vital, living soil—but Patty Judge won’t be making safeguarding clean water a focus of her campaign: She can’t. She wouldn’t dare, having supported those who have tried to block the Des Moines Water Work’s lawsuit against three up-stream counties it accuses of polluting its Raccoon-River water source. But, what about that vital, living soil?

Neither she nor Charles Grassley will decry the dangers of industrial agriculture, as they are both agri-business’ cheerleaders. All three of us grew up on old-styled Iowa farms but, unlike them, I dare to differ with the myths peddled by the Farm Bureau and Monsanto, and speak about the true-if-hidden costs of modern farming. Petroleum-based, chemical-laced ag is turning Iowa into an enormous toxic dump.

Last year, Iowa produced 33 million hogs—an average of eleven head for every woman, man and child in the state. The amount of fluid and solid waste that quantity of swine produce—let alone the sea of corn they consume—exact long-term damage on our state’s resources, the sum of which will grow as we go.

For short-term gains for a few, we are sacrificing everyone’s long-term health and wealth. Our political leaders perpetuate this by redacting public discourse, purposely keeping the social narrative fake and flat. The mainstream candidates avoid talking about real issues by faithfully avoiding a list of taboos:



Did you know that on New Year's Eve, last December 31st, the North Pole's temperature warmed to above freezing? In my youth, such an event was unimaginable; now, it's set to become a norm. Do you also know that July was the 15th warmest month in a row, worldwide? And that invasive species are moving into a state with increasingly unstable flora and fauna? Or, that Iowa's state tree species, the Bur Oak, is literally crumbling under the ravaging effects of yet another effect of climate change, Bur Oak Blight?

And, let's talk about the "bird and the bees"—about the mass failure of bee colonies upon which we depend to pollinate crops and gardens, and numerous insect species upon which scores of sorts of birds feed. Remember our car grills after driving across Iowa on summer days during our youth? By the time we reached our destinations, our grills were covered with squashed bugs: Today, that's not the case. Why?

Where are all the Red-Wing Blackbirds that populated the Iowa of decades past? What about those ubiquitous pairs of gentle Mourning Doves that used to be found on every overhead wire? Outside of Iowa's towns, they've been decimated by Governor Branstad's declaring them fair game for everyone with a BB gun or more—another symptom of the National Rifle Association's Statehouse takeover.

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You also should *not* vote for me if you believe in voting straight ticket, as I'm not easily labeled: Liberal friends complain that I'm too conservative, while conservative friends accuse me of being "too liberal." I can cite a couple stances that confound all stripes of ideologies trying to shoehorn me into a category:

I believe in restoring a public observance of keeping a "Sabbath"—with Jews free to take a day of rest on Saturday, Muslims on Friday—as just one, but a significant way to slow our culture. As it is, we have a 24-7 society, where too many of us are too busy, rushing about, consuming, working endless shifts. In tandem to that, I'd support legislation to guarantee part-time employees at least two weeks of vacation a year—a month for full-time employees—already in their first year at a new job. Both moves will help restore national mental health, enrich families and partnerships, and reinvigorate Americans' daily lives.

At the same time, while sympathetic to some of Bernie Sanders' ideals, I don't support handing a free college education to all who say they want one. Yes, financially disadvantaged students with proven academic merit who need support to earn a degree deserve our help, but I'd advocate—after a year's notice—actually *cutting* the lowest 10% of state-university undergrad students, based on their academic performance. A Ph.D.-holding historian, I support raising, not eroding academic standards, at *all* levels.



Michael, David, Phyllis, Debra and Luwarren Luick; United Methodist Church, Clear Lake, Iowa; 1968

Having grown up in an era marked by social welfare, I know the limits and dangers of public handouts—yet as a Christian, as a one-time candidate for the Methodist clergy who wanted to work with refugees in Southeast Asia, and now as a Quaker activist, I believe we are morally called to offer others a hand up.

I don't believe government has an answer for all ills, but as a historian I do know that our country has thrived most when it has acted most generously: when it passed the Morrill Land Grant and Homestead Acts, the GI Bill and the Marshall Plan. Too many of our politicians are penny wise and pound foolish.

A radio interviewer recently asked if I “support lower or higher taxes” but he missed the point: It's not how much—or little—tax revenue our government collects, but how efficiently and effectively it invests what it does amass. Waging endless war is an investment of our resources with no real or moral return.

Historically, Americans have resisted taxation and poorly administered too many social programs: If that's the case, then we should stop pursuing half-hearted social programs, especially if we refuse to guarantee them adequate funding in order to reach their goals, over a long-term period.

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You should *not* vote for me if you are a diehard Democrat or Republican, as I strive to undermine both parties. Neither is the party of my maternal grandparents, Elmer and Erma Thrans—fiscally cautious Republicans, who also cared about people—or my paternal grandparents, Donald and Charlotte Luick, who were Old-School Democrats, ready to go to bat for “the little guy” each time. Myself, I was a Young Republican at Clear Lake High who campaigned for Ronald Reagan in 1980 though too young to vote, then a Young Democrat at Iowa State until I saw how both parties function and was forever repulsed. I did campaign enthusiastically for Barack Obama—before I knew Goldman-Sachs owned his political soul.

Both parties are calcified and block movement forward. Instead of solving our most pressing problems, they squander our time and resources as they advance party loyalists, at any cost, to grapple for power. Founded in 1828, the Democratic Party is the world's oldest surviving political party, with the Republican (1854) not much younger. Many cheer the Republican Party's present imploding, yet the defiant folks at WikiLeaks recently exposed some of the latest shenanigans of the almost equally unethical Democratic.

How can two, ideologically compatible parties truly represent the spectrum of values, lifestyles, goals, opinions and wishes of 325 million Americans? They can't—and they shouldn't pretend to: I don't! I seek to overturn their rusty grip over our nation's byzantine political process: Help me foment evolution!

My big-party opponents for Iowa's US Senate seat currently up for grabs represent the past, not the future. Not only are demographics against the Republicans' struggle to stay relevant to the American experience, but both Charles Grassley and Patty Judge play party over our people: Grassley's ironclad insistence to block hearing Merrick Garland's case for being a tie-breaking US Supreme Court justice is infuriating enough, but the Democratic National Committee's anointing Patty Judge to challenge him also shows how both the RNC and the DNC are at their cores fundamentally anti-democratic institutions.

With the RNC's blessing, Karl Rove trekked to Council Bluffs in February 2013 to meet with other "liberal" Republican figures to try to unseat their partisan brother, Steve King, who represents my hometown. Now, I'll be the last person in any room to defend quirky King, but it's simply none of Karl Rove's business to tell us Iowans who to vote among or how to run our state's affairs. *How* patronizing!

I find equally offensive, however, the DNC's endorsing Patty Judge to run for an office that three others already had been pursuing for a year or more. Does it unsettle you, too, that after only a few weeks as a candidate, she not only raised more than a quarter of a million dollars—it wasn't by holding bake sales!—but today has an out-of-state campaign manager who scarcely knows Iowa or our state's soul?

In truth, I'm as much running against Patty Judge as I am against Charles Grassley, who is simply doing what he's always done: holding office for his backers' sakes. Judge, on the other hand, is an "imposter," who has been imposed to do the DNC's bidding—at the expense of three genuine candidates who, in aggregate, invested more than three years to unseat Grassley. On one hand, it's sad how those men, in effect, were asked by the Democratic elite to roll over and simply play dead while Patty stole the show. On the other, it's even sadder that thousands of party faithful say they'll hold their nose and vote for her simply because she isn't "that Republican Devil." Such a level of cynicism astounds and disheartens me.

The DNC's state-level meddling—as well as the RNC's—*must* be countered. In a country of 330 million and counting, is there really no more than a handful of families fit to lead us? We need ordinary citizens to steer the political process, not solely an aristocracy of money. Princess Chelsea and Chuck's grandson Patrick Grassley already wait in the wings to assume their respective dynasties' reins of power, but we don't need any more ruling families—be they Kennedys or Bushes, Clintons or Grassleys. Our people didn't leave feudal Europe only to replace a gentry based on land with one determined by portfolios.

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You should *not* vote for me if you wish to preserve our current system intact—or the sub-systems which form the larger whole. Once, the United States—two centuries ago the first democracy of the modern era—was a guiding light for the entire world. Today, though, ours is only one of over a hundred self-proclaimed “democracies” and, I would argue, less democratic than a score of other lands.

Historically having been copied by reformers around the globe, today we are mocked and discounted for our outdated institutions and political habits: We are, for example, the sole industrialized nation that does not hold elections on a weekend; we still vote on a weekday, as set by the rhythm of an agrarian America that is long gone, yet we no longer need to avoid elections being on a market day. And, our cloaked Electoral College is a leftover of human bondage, an archaic compromise between free and slave states stingy over power.



More recently, covert, entrenched evils like the “Citizens United” ruling dictate our political fortunes. That contemptuous farce would be the first I’d help overturn, but it would *not* be the last: I am doing everything I can to oppose now and, at some unforeseeable future, depose the two-party system, as I see it as inherently anti-democratic—as did a weighty early political figure, George Washington. I know this, because I paid attention back at Clear Lake’s Central School—where I also learned by rote Iowa’s state motto: “Our liberties we prize, and our rights we will maintain.” How true is our motto, today?

How “democratic” is our republican system? Only six out of over three million Iowans are authorized to speak at the Federal level on our people’s behalf: The Des Moines city council—governing some 203,000 people—seats more representatives than that! This imbalance is why I seek to establish an intermediate governing body—an envisioned regional council or even “parliament”—so that Iowans are not reduced to appealing to either Des Moines or Washington, DC: We need *more* political access, at *more* levels!

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You also should *not* vote for me if you don't believe that the fate of rural Iowa is a matter of intense importance to all Iowans, everywhere. It was Iowa's family farms and small towns that generated the dynamism now found in our handful of urban areas—not the other way around. It worries me greatly that 71 of our 99 counties have lost population in Iowa's most recent census, for I believe that there is inherent value in growing up on the land, near or in small towns, with all that such a background entails.

Also, in a world wracked by a roster of environmental stresses, those living closest to the land will be able to most effectively address those ills and help rectify them. While Iowa's conversion to being fueled mostly by wind, solar, methane and other renewable energy sources will have to include urban areas, it will be rural areas where most of that energy production will take place: Those with the most immediate stake in how and how much Earth-born energy is generated should gain from its generation.

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Energy is only one of myriad issues and challenges facing us as we move into a new era, with shifting resources and possibilities. It's not a given how the Iowa of 2046 will be, but the journey *will* be exciting.



I am—like you, like each one of us—a living link to people, to things and moments both past and future. Each of us is a torch bearer for those who came before us, as well as a stepping stone for lives yet to come. As a cultural historian, I am constantly keenly aware of my place in that endless chain. So, I'm doing all I can to make sure it continues, ever forward, in the best condition possible, on behalf of us all.

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Please pass this on to anyone you think "should" read it. And, see ya at the voting booth in November!