

IOWA TRANSPARENCY NEWSLETTER



Political Transparency Reveals Flaws

by Doug Stout

The all-too transparent ugliness we have allowed to seep into the heart of our political institutions over the last decade has now become obvious...the question has become will we allow it to become irreversible...or will we stand up and say “enough.” After the years of irresponsible hateful rhetoric aimed at President Bush, some have only now noticed the deterioration of our political system when the anger is focused on the new Administration. It is a bipartisan problem and can only be solved by common decency by all our elected officials and political personalities.

Representative Alan Grayson (D-FL) on the floor of the United States House of Representatives: “If you get sick, America, the Republican health care plan is this: die quickly,” he said. “That’s right. The Republicans want you to die quickly if you get sick.”¹ So, one might have some hope that this is another example where someone got carried away in the heat of the moment? Well, that is not very likely...he brought to the floor of the House, at the heart of our Republic...signs which had the same message on them.²

At the same time, left-wing radical film-maker, Michael Moore was in our nation’s Capital threatening any

Democrat who voted against the so called “public option” being considered as part of health reform:

“I and a lot of other people have every intention of removing you from Congress in the next election if you stand in the way of health-care legislation that the people want,” the beefy filmmaker roared. “We will come to your districts, and we will work against you, first in the primary, and if we have to, in the general election. . . . You think we’re going to go along with you just because you’re Democrats? You should think again!”³

His new film “Capitalism: A Love Story” is currently playing in limited release. The title is purely satire. He believes we have to do away with capitalism. In his comments regarding the movie he said: “...I don’t think you can reform capitalism at this point because it’s become so bastardized to the point where it’s only purpose is to protect the wealthy and legalize our greed.”⁴

This comes on the heels of Congressman Trent Franks (R-AZ) getting caught up in his rhetoric when deploring President Obama’s stance on abortion and ending his remarks by saying of the President “...he has no place in any station of government and

we need to realize that he is an enemy of humanity.”⁵ He later tried to clarify his remarks.

Thomas Friedman, liberal writer for the *New York Times* and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner writes a column which at times is inflammatory where he questions whether we are creating a climate for violence against the President, for which he is promptly labeled “a nut job” by Republican National Chairman Michael Steele.⁶ Mr. Friedman’s column then becomes more insightful and less incendiary, when he correctly points the finger at both sides of the political spectrum and says: “Our leaders, even the president, can no longer utter the word ‘we’ with a straight face. There is no more ‘we’ in American politics at a time when ‘we’ have these huge problems — the deficit, the recession, health care, climate change and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — that ‘we’ can only manage, let alone fix, if there is a collective ‘we’ at work....Sometimes I wonder whether George H.W. Bush, president ‘41,’ will be remembered as our last ‘legitimate’ president... The American political system was, as the saying goes, ‘designed by geniuses so it could be run by idiots.’ But a cocktail of political and

IOWA TRANSPARENCY NEWSLETTER

October 2009

Volume 2, Number 10

Public Interest Institute

Dr. Don Racheter,
President

IOWA TRANSPARENCY NEWSLETTER is a monthly newsletter reporting on government transparency in our state.

IOWA TRANSPARENCY NEWSLETTER is published by Public Interest Institute at Iowa Wesleyan College, a nonpartisan, nonprofit, research and educational institute whose activities are supported by contributions from private individuals, corporations, companies, and foundations.

The Institute does **not** accept government grants.

Contributions are tax-deductible under sections 501(c)(3) and 170 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Permission to reprint or copy in whole or part is granted, provided a version of this credit line is used: "Reprinted by permission from IOWA TRANSPARENCY NEWSLETTER, a monthly newsletter of Public Interest Institute."

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Public Interest Institute.

If you have an article you believe is worth sharing, please send it to us. All or a portion of your article may be used. The articles in this publication are brought to you in the interest of a better-informed citizenry, because IDEAS DO MATTER.

We invite you to:

CALL us at 319-385-3462

FAX to 319-385-3799

E-MAIL to public.interest.institute@limitedgovernment.org

VISIT our Website at

www.iowatransparency.org

WRITE us at our address on page 4

Copyright 2009

technological trends have converged in the last decade that are making it possible for the idiots of all political stripes to overwhelm and paralyze the genius of our system. Those factors are: the wild excess of money in politics; the gerrymandering of political districts, making them permanently Republican or Democratic and erasing the political middle; a 24/7 cable news cycle that makes all politics a daily battle of tactics that overwhelm strategic thinking; and a blogosphere that at its best enriches our debates, adding new checks on the establishment, and at its worst coarsens our debates to a whole new level, giving a new power to anonymous slanderers to send lies around the world. Finally, on top of it all, we now have a permanent presidential campaign that encourages all partisanship, all the time among our leading politicians. I would argue that together these changes add up to a difference of degree that is a difference in kind — a different kind of American political scene that makes me wonder whether we can seriously discuss serious issues any longer and make decisions on the basis of the national interest."⁷

All the while the polarization of the American electorate continues to escalate. While the left is promising to chase from office any Democrat who has the audacity to compromise or agree with any point of view held by Republicans, the conservative organizations continue to do the same with any Republican who does not agree with all of their agenda. A national conservative group has just endorsed a candidate for United States Congress who is running on the "Conservative Party" ticket in the state of New York, who has also been endorsed by some national Republican leaders.⁸ The race is to fill the

seat of Representative John McHugh (R-NY), who resigned to become Secretary of the Army. The district was carried by President Obama in the last Presidential election. The endorsement and funding support, brought about because the Republican winner of the contested primary was too liberal for their tastes, now creates a currently competitive three-way race. The net result of the challenge might very well result in the election of the Democratic candidate, adding yet another vote in the U.S. House of Representatives for Speaker Nancy Pelosi, while the liberal Republican would surely have provided a vote for the Republican candidate for Speaker...perhaps current Minority Leader John Boehner. The Speaker sets the agenda for what legislation is considered by the House of Representatives.

How long can we expect to wait before the 43% of the American public who register to vote, but decline to label themselves as members of either political party say "enough?" How long before the millions of Americans who choose not to register to vote say "enough?" How long before the millions of Americans who are registered as Republicans or Democrats, but who surprisingly don't believe that their spouse, or mother, or father who is a member of the opposing party is inherently evil...say "enough." How long before we can again have a political dialogue without voices being raised in anger or in scorn? Should we put "None of the Above" on ballots, in a desperate effort to force candidates to run positive campaigns rather than surviving to be the "lesser of two evils?"⁹ How much longer do we want our political system to resemble a distasteful episode of "The Jerry Springer Show?"

Most of our elected officials are now products of the ugly partisan spectacles our political system has created over the last two decades, so things will probably not change quickly. However today...not tomorrow...but today, all Americans should demand with the same intensity they have devoted to expressing their support or objections to our leaders' public policy objectives...that they return civility to the process.

This is true whether you opposed President Bush when he made the decision to send our troops into Iraq, or whether you currently oppose President Obama's plans for a government sponsored health-care system. Without respect for the institutions of government, the government cannot long stand against the withering assaults launched on it by voices that seek only to create fame and fortune for themselves, or victory for "their" cause, regardless of the impact on the future of our republic and the values of our democratic traditions. We must once again learn to take principled stands, without demonizing those that see the world another way. A democracy can only stand as long as the citizens seek a common way forward and not their own personal view of utopia, which is likely in direct conflict with that of a neighbor's view.

"Tolerance" and "compromise" have been made into derisive words, by those people who seek to benefit when neither exists. They are both essential elements on which any democracy must stand. Without those pillars, any republic will begin to crumble. They have been the building blocks on which American society has prospered. The only time in our history when our differences proved irreconcilable resulted

in a civil war. What we face today are difficult social, economic, and moral dilemmas on which we must strive to find a common ground. In spite of all our differences, which are exploited on a daily basis, we share much more in common as Americans, than we disagree about our differences.

Ronald Reagan never forgot that lesson. His son, Michael, tried to remind us of that on a recent trip to Iowa. He reminded Iowans of the 80/20 rule, about focusing on the 80% of things you agreed on in politics and not the 20% that you do not. He said his father never made politics personal because he understood that politics was the art of negotiation. He knew you were going to have to go back to those same people later and ask for their help on another objective you agreed needed to be accomplished.¹⁰ What we need is someone to try to unite our country, at a time when all of our politicians seem to be auditioning to be the next great "divider," intent on conquering the enemy in the other political camp, not building bridges to them. Michael Reagan said that a memorable tribute to his father came from a prominent Democrat who told him: "I bleed liberal through and through and disagree with your father on everything. But what I've come to understand about your father is that he had a good soul. What the world and America is missing is that good soul. How I wish we had him back."¹¹

What we desperately need to believe again in America is not that our political opponents are right, but we need the ability to see through our differences and believe in that "good soul" and see our country as being on a shared journey. Transparency of motives has become much more important than the transparency of information can ever be

for the cause of good government.

Given my extreme discomfort with the bitter rhetoric on the national political scene, I must watch my own words when looking at the issue of transparency in Iowa. Fortunately, it is not hard to be civil to our own Governor Chet Culver, but it is just hard to picture him being seen as a successful Governor. His poll numbers continue to spiral downward and multiple sources show that Iowans would prefer to go in a different direction for the next four-year term for Governor. Every day there seems to be new revelations that call into question his ability to manage state government and raise new issues about the competency of his Administration.

Governor Culver seemingly put a large portion of his credibility behind borrowing almost a billion dollars of money from the future to fund his favorite projects, even though the polls at the time showed that Iowans opposed the concept, but it has not seemed to improve his fortunes.

The art of politics, "Politics 101" if you will, is effective communication. In a recent Iowa poll only 47% of Iowans approved of the job the Governor was doing with communicating his priorities and the reasons for his policy choices.¹² *Des Moines Register* reporter Kathie Obradovich wrote a column about how neither the Governor nor his staff seems to return phone calls. Ms. Obradovich says: "I've heard it from some influential Democrats, who shake their heads and wonder with whom the Governor actually talks. Members of various interest groups say they can't get a meeting scheduled. The weekly Governor's news conference is ancient history. We hear occasional grumbling about Culver being a no-show at various events."¹³

**Public Interest Institute
at Iowa Wesleyan College
600 North Jackson Street
Mount Pleasant, IA 52641-1328**

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MAILED FROM ZIP CODE 52761
PERMIT NO. 338

What could be less transparent than a Governor who apparently is developing a “bunker mentality?” I can’t remember an Iowa Governor that was hard to find, most Iowa Governors have usually been hard to avoid. Iowans tend to be more civil than people in some parts of the country and tend to give their Governors the benefit of the doubt, which may explain why they usually re-elect them. But most Governors don’t base their accomplishments on borrowing money, when over 70% of Iowans think it is a bad idea.¹⁴

Chief Executives are expected to “fill big shoes,” and be “the buck stops here,” type of leaders. Governor Culver has not really met those expectations yet. We are all still waiting for the reports from the Iowa Attorney General and State Auditor as to what the details are in “Filmgate.” But it is clear the “horse is out of the barn,” on Iowa tax dollars wasted on questionable film tax

credit expenditures. When the Governor says that “Iowans won’t be taken for suckers,” it appears “that train may have already left the station.” Speaking of trains, the Governor just did a “whistle-stop tour” across southern Iowa promoting “high speed rail.” Is that what Iowans are asking for? Are Iowans across the state really saying, “If only we had a Governor who would build a high speed rail line across the state (with an actual speed of about 45 mph in reality¹⁵) all our problems would be solved?” I must be talking to different people. If the Governor believes his Administration has been remotely transparent, it does not appear his message or the information Iowans are looking for are getting out to the people and isn’t that what transparency is all about?

(Endnotes)

¹Ben Evans, “Democrat says GOP wants sick to just ‘die quickly,’” *Associated Press*, Sept. 30, 2009, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hKv7iDNW3S3mVN7dD8ZVm9rCy0dOD9B1NNFG2> (Sept. 30, 2009).

²Ibid.

³Dana Milbank, “The Latest From Michael Moore: ‘Rocky and Me,’” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 30, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/29/AR2009092903063.html?hpid=topnews> (Sept. 30, 2009).

⁴“Discussing ‘Capitalism’ with Michael Moore,” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 29, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2009/09/28/ST2009092802166.html> (Sept. 30, 2009).

⁵Jake Tapper, “GOP Rep: President Obama is ‘An Enemy of Humanity,’” *ABC News*, Sept. 29, 2009, <http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2009/09/gop-rep-president-obama-is-an-enemy-of-humanity.html> (Sept. 30, 2009).

⁶Alexander Mooney, “Steele calls Tom Friedman a ‘nut job’ over latest column,” *CNN Politics.com*, Sept. 30, 2009, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2009/09/30/steele-calls-tom-friedman-a-nut-job-over-latest-column/> (Sept. 30, 2009).

⁷Thomas L. Friedman, “Where Did ‘We’ Go?” *The New York Times*, Sept. 29, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/30/opinion/30friedman.html> (Sept. 30, 2009).

⁸Naflali Bendavid, “Three-Way Race in New York Could Split GOP Vote,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 29, 2009, <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2009/09/29/three-way-race-in-new-york-could-split-gop-vote/> (Sept. 30, 2009).

⁹Dr. Don Racheter, “Avoiding the ‘Lesser of Two Evils,’” *Public Interest Institute Brief*, Jan. 2009, <http://www.limitedgovernment.org/publications/pubs/briefs/pdfs/brf16-3.pdf> (Oct. 9, 2009).

¹⁰James Q. Lynch, “Reagan’s son speaks at Iowa Republican’s fundraiser,” *Quad-City Times*, Sept. 17, 2009.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Kathie Obradovich, “Obradovich: Iowans call; Culver’s staff should answer,” *Des Moines Register*, Sept. 29, 2009, <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20090929/OPINION01/909290340/1035/archive&theme=OBRADOVICH> (Sept. 30, 2009).

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Thomas Beaumont, “Most Iowans have doubts about federal stimulus plan,” *Des Moines Register*, Apr. 12, 2009, <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2009904120388> (Apr. 14, 2009).

¹⁵William Petroski, “Passenger rail in Iowa: Worth the expense?” *Des Moines Register*, Sept. 23, 2009, <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20090923/NEWS10/909230361> (Sept. 30, 2009).