

Standard Form For Members of the Legislature

Name of Representative Tapscott, John E. Senator Tapscott, John E.
Represented Polk County, Iowa

1. Birthday and place 23 June 1930 Des Moines, Iowa

2. Marriage (s) date place

Verlene Quail 19 Feb 1950 Des Moines, Iowa

3. Significant events for example:

A. Business He was manager of the Catholic Mirror Newspaper;
assistant to the regional director of the U. S. Post Office Department
in St. Louis, Missouri

B. Civic responsibilities Big Brothers; Shooting Club

C. Profession Insurance agent; real estate; Alcoholism therapist

4. Church membership

Catholic

5. Sessions served

62nd, 63rd General Assembly 1967; 1969-1970. House of Representatives

6. Public Offices

64th General Assembly 1971-1972 - Senate

A. Local

B. State

Director of the Iowa Council on Alcoholism middle 1970's

C. National

Keene an administrator with the United States Postal
Service in St. Louis in 1965

7. Death

8. Children

Kathleen; Mark; Matthew; Luke; Melissa; Patrick
John (d. preceded his father's death); Mary Margaret (preceded her father in death)

9. Names of parents

Ralph and Helen Tapscott

Japsett, John E.

10. Education He attended grade school in Des Moines, Christian Brothers School in San Francisco, California; graduated from Darling High School, Des Moines, Iowa, 1948

11. Degrees He attended the American Institute of Business, Des Moines, Iowa; had Governmental Training in Public, ^{Washington, D.C. 1964-1966} ~~Germany~~ and Industrial Relations, Denver, Colorado and

12. Other applicable information Democrat

- There were 3 factors that provided context for John's life - ethnicity, religion and politics
- As a young man he found a difference in public life and so decided to seek office as had his uncle, Leo Japsett, former Polk County Attorney and his father, Ralph Japsett, former Polk County Supervisor
- He was very concerned about instances in Iowa where people lived in poor conditions with little job which he worked on in the legislature. He found working with Governor Harold Hughes and Governor Robert D. Ray supported his passions.
- He and his wife divorced since she didn't agree on his positions
- He ran for Iowa Governor but was defeated. Missus came next
- He trained as an alcoholic counselor at Brooklands Hospital in Des Moines where he served 3 years

John Tapscott: MARCHING TO A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

Profile

by David Dillon,
Editor and Publisher

When John Tapscott was growing up on the south side of Des Moines toward the tail end of the Depression, the boys of St. Anthony's elementary school held a parade. Observing the class march past, Tapscott's grandmother commented, "Why are all the other kids out of step with John?" As a student who questioned the authority of his teachers and the institutions they represented, as a young legislator who sided with the powerless, as a gubernatorial candidate who sought not so much to win the contest as to raise public awareness, and as Director of the Iowa Council on Alcoholism, John Tapscott has always followed his own drummer, and abided by his deepest inner convictions.

Three forces provided the context for Tapscott's adolescent years. The first was ethnicity. "On the South Side, you were either Irish or Italian, and most certainly you were a Catholic." For religion was the second factor. Not the religion of scholars and philosophers, of a G. K. Chesterton or a Jacques Maritain, but instead the practice of a rigid authoritarian code: "In school, I was taught to accept church dogmas on blind faith. Often I had troubling questions for which I got no answers, such

as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. You were told you simply had to believe." Moral prescription was supported by discipline which included fairly frequent corporal punishment. "I learned the potential of institutions to do harm as well as good to those people they are intended to serve.

In Tapscott's view, a classic example is the church — not one particular denomination, but organized religion in general. Asked what he thought of the person of Jesus Christ, Tapscott reflected, "I have no doubt He existed, no doubt of His ministry. But I think He was a prophet, like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King. People can imitate the qualities and example of Christ according to our own time and circumstances. But I do not define the idea of His being Messiah the same way I was taught in school. We have made Jesus Christ into an institution to the extent to live with it, but the fear stays with. For me, it took forty-one years of my life really to come to terms with it."

Not that the Catholic educational system was entirely negative. "One of the lasting strengths was cultural diversity. Dowling High was probably as integrated as any school in Des Moines at the time I went there. Meeting people from so many differ-



ent backgrounds meant a lot to me then and broadened my perspective."

Politics was the third salient feature of the social landscape. "I remember my grandmother shoving me in the face of Franklin D. Roosevelt when I was only five years old. He had this shiny silver cigarette holder, and his warmth was so magnetic, so very real. My uncle had been lucky enough to ride with FDR on the campaign train." Tapscott further observed, "You have to remember that so many people in our neighborhood were first generation immigrants, and politics was a means of advancement and opportunity for Irish Americans in Des Moines, just as it was in larger cities."

Much of the education and formation of John Tapscott happened outside official channels. "When I was a young man in San Francisco,

I would run across this strapping fellow we knew as Eric. Not long after, I found out who Eric was. As you may now have guessed, he was Eric Hoffer, the longshoreman philosopher. People like this have had a real influence on me."

Much of Tapscott's mature philosophy deals with share of taxes."

He confessed that his passion for politics is not what it once was. "It's not that I'm exactly turned off, but it's just that maybe I'm not as much turned on. I have learned long ago never to say 'never', but for me to get back in would take an issue which would get my adrenalin flowing."

Tapscott expressed more interest in discussing the personal and inner dimensions of his life than the political, but he shared with the writer memories of passions and pitched battles in the public

over years

Hospital, where he served for approximately three years.

"I met so many people who were going through experiences similar to what I had endured, only they had turned to chemicals of one sort or another in their efforts to deal with their problems. Now I was not in a position to judge this, or condemn, or be critical. They simply made different choices. What we hoped to do was intervene at a stage where maybe they wouldn't have to experience these losses and reverses to the fullest, and we could cut short the negative aspects.

"We were of assistance, but you can't really help people except insofar as you help them to help themselves. Otherwise you get into a savior relationship which I think has no basis in the human services professions. You are back into power, fear, guilt, control. That is not where real transformation happens. I learned from my own experience that first you have to accept yourself, come to terms with yourself, then you have the freedom to love others and accept them as they are. This wasn't easy for me, even went against my grain sometimes. I had been taught, for example, that the man had to rule his family, and I sincerely believed this. Really, I was carrying a lot of garbage around. But if you aren't able to treat others the way you want to be treated, then you must not really be happy or think highly of yourself.

"Sometimes it almost seemed I was given the grace to reach someone or say what needed to be said in a counseling situation. One time a client told me how she had given up her children. It might have been easy for me to be judgemental about that. But I was given to answer, 'You must have loved your children very much to do this. In view of what you were facing, you didn't see any way to provide them a good environment, so you were ready even to give them up if this meant they would have a better life.' Again, Tapscott was reluctant to name the communicator of this insight, just as rabbis of old were reluctant to speak

the name of the Holy of Holies. There are some rabbinical scholars even today who refer to this Power as G-D.

When Tapscott assumed the position of Director of the Iowa Council on Alcoholism/Employee Assistance Program in the middle nineteen seventies, he faced the challenge of embodying his own deepest personal insights and counseling experiences into the fabric and structure of an institution. With full knowledge of the tendency of agencies to breed empires, and of how difficult it is to translate an essentially personal vision into the design and daily workings of an organization, Tapscott set about enlarging staff and programs (Recently there was a cutback from 21 employees to 18).

"We serve 225 new clients a month, and make group presentations to 20,000 persons per year. Some ninety companies take part in our Employee Assistance Program, where we can help people stay on the job and be more productive. As for me, I divide my time up about evenly between administration and counseling. This not only helps me keep in touch, but it is in my self-interest as well, because it preserves my sanity and feeling of well-being."

How does one translate personal vision into an organizational structure? "Leadership is basically *attitudinal*. You have to act in such a way to bring out the best in others. Remember the last time you really enjoyed a presidential press conference? Remember when one moved you, or inspired you? For me, that was under John F. Kennedy. It is a matter of bringing out what is already within people, for that is what counts.

"You also have to learn when to let go, in your personal life first, then in your dealings with others. Trust, letting go, living each moment, that is what is important. There needs to be more flexibility in organizations. The absence of it is hurting American industry right now. We try here to develop our people."

Tapscott cited for an example the careers of staff members who had formed an acting troupe which dramatized personal and family interactions. Their purpose was to show how interpersonal communications break down, how hurts are not healed, how relationships suffer, and to help people become aware of and honest about their own feelings. The writer had witnessed the group in 1980, and was impressed. "Every one of them has moved on. One you asked about is in seminary now. Another heads her own agency. I am happy and satisfied with this. It is clear that their work here helped them discover their own gifts, vocations."

"There is such a thing as legitimate power, and as illegitimate authority. Some functional leadership is necessary, but it should be for building others up, not for control or for power.

"Many people define success as having money or prestige in the community. I don't see it that way. Success is accepting yourself and being free to accept others. It is personal, relational."

Toward the end of our encounter, Tapscott indicated that just as his staff were free to move on if their talents so led them, that he was reassessing his own situation. He expressed the belief that in perhaps two more years it would be time to infuse some new vision and leadership at the Council on Alcoholism. "I have had the satisfaction of realizing our hopes, even though we faced a lot of skepticism at first. But I don't want to rest on my laurels."

"As for 1984, I don't know what I will do. I am a spontaneous person. It will depend on what channels and avenues there are at that time."

Now John Tapscott knew his guest had wanted war stories of campaigns and the smoke of political battle. These there were, aplenty. But Tapscott communicated something far more meaningful than the political commentary he offered as a

gracious aside. What John Tapscott shared was his own vision of himself. The self he revealed transcends the hearty Irish voice and Middle Western ease and openness. Not all who belong to the faith of Tapscott's fathers are authoritarians. While there is a tradition of hierarchy in Catholicism, there is also a tradition of mysticism, of *active contemplation or contemplative action*. The *worldly mystic* of Catholic tradition is someone who discovers the reality of God in his own inner being, but knows not how to name or define this reality. The mystic's theology is one of *unknowing*. Instead of knowledge, the mystic seeks a relationship, draws strength from it, imparts that strength into the works and loves of this live. God is not named, not prescribed. God is loved, and *lived*. The mystical tradition in Catholicism is not bound to the institutional framework alone, but its energies and insights have renewed the church — and the world.

So his grandmother asked, "Why are all the other kids out of step with John?" And then came John, following the Drummer, and after him, was the parade.