

JOINT CONVENTION
PIONEER LAWMAKERS
FIFTY-SECOND BIENNIAL SESSION
(House Chamber — 2:00 p.m.)

In accordance with House Concurrent Resolution 9 duly adopted, the joint convention was called to order, President Boswell presiding.

President Boswell announced a quorum present and the joint convention duly organized.

Senator Horn of Linn moved that a committee of four be appointed to escort the Pioneer Lawmakers into the House chamber.

The motion prevailed and the President appointed as such committee Senators Fink of Warren and Rensink of Sioux, on the part of the Senate, and Representatives Kistler of Jefferson and Fogarty of Palo Alto, on the part of the House.

The committee escorted the Pioneer Lawmakers into the House chamber.

President Boswell presented Senator William Palmer of Polk, President pro tempore of the Senate, who welcomed the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the Senate.

President Boswell presented Representative Mary Lundby of Linn, Speaker pro tempore of the House of Representatives, who welcomed the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the House of Representatives.

President Boswell presented the Honorable Adolph Elvers who responded to the welcome.

The Honorable Adolph Elvers announced the 1973 class of legislators who were eligible to become members of the Pioneer Lawmakers.

The Honorable Adolph Elvers presented Geneva Overholser, Vice President and Editor of the Des Moines Register, who addressed the joint convention as follows:

Thank you very much, Senator Elvers. It is a real pleasure indeed for me to be here, and a great honor. In fact, when Minnette Doderer extended this invitation to me, I thought, wow, what a stupendous opportunity. I'm pretty sure it would be just about any newspaper editor's dream to address a joint session of the legislature with eminent pioneer lawmakers on site and even the governor. That's precisely the way I was feeling about it until I ran into our chief political correspondent a few minutes ago. He said, "You know, everybody in the room will be thinking about one of two things, gambling or Marvin Pomerantz, and no one will give a hoot what you say."

So, now that I'm newly humbled, I do very much appreciate this opportunity and I imagine that many of you expected that I would come here and talk about press and political relations. I do want to do a little of that and, if you'll have me back again someday, I'll gladly do more of it. But this is so unusual an opportunity. I want to use it for all it's worth. I want to talk to you about something that binds us together, something that all of us in this room share, something that is increasingly rare: A sense of place. A love of Iowa.

Probably the vast majority of you are native Iowans. I'm not that lucky. I'm a transplant. I came here a dozen years ago, and fell in love with Iowa. But that's the way it works sometimes: It takes a new eye to see really how fine something is. So let me tell you the story of how I fell in love with Iowa, because I think it says something about our state's remarkable place in this country today — and also about how we sometimes sell it short with a — well, I'll call it “a failure of imagination.”

I grew up moving around the South. Our father was a minister, and always vaguely unhappy each place we moved. I went to three different high schools. Our family life was loving and warm and rich in books and spirituality and dinner-table talk. But it left me rootless otherwise. I went to college in one part of the country, graduate school in another, spent three years in Rocky Mountain West, followed my husband's work overseas for five years and ended up in Washington, D.C.

So, you can imagine that, by the time we got to Iowa in 1981, with one child in tow and hopes for another, I was looking for home. Well, I found it. I fell hopelessly in love with this state back then, and I've felt the same way ever since. Right away, Iowa's generous natural abundance, its open-mindedness and decency, its quiet and enduring beauty, its progressive and civic-minded people, its solidity and stability, spoke volumes to me.

Like so many other basic human hopes, the phrase “a wonderful place to raise a family” is easy to take too lightly. But think for a moment: What better compliment can one give a place than to say it is good for children, good for people's daily lives, a good place to learn and grow and love?

The New York Times last week had a piece that you may have seen. It was about Winterset and its sudden national prominence thanks to Robert Waller's novel, The Bridges of Madison County. The Times piece was accompanied by a map. There were only four cities or towns shown on the map. One was Des Moines, naturally enough, but the other three were not so obvious: Sioux City, Winterset and Dyersville.

I assume that these three made the map because of remarkable human dramas that have stolen the nation's attention. Sioux City's drama was real: The crash of flight 232. The other two are fictional: The field of dreams, the love story.

The article bore a sense of incredulity that such a plain sort of a place could produce such romantic notions. As if, somehow, our supposed plainness should limit our imaginations.

I believe that we have been thinking that way too much ourselves, here in Iowa — behaving as if, somehow, our plainness should limit our imaginations. And yet it mustn't. This is a magical place. Just ask those who have come from America's troubled bigger cities. Ask them how they feel about good public schools and crime-free streets. Just ask the young Iowans who went away, and decided to come back and raise their families. Ask them how it feels to talk to neighbors who care about one another.

I want us really to think about the specialness of Iowa, its decency and caring and hard-working and civic-mindedness, because this specialness can lift us from our failure of imagination. A place so extraordinary deserves more from us than complacency, or resignation, halfway measures, or settling for something less than what we could be.

I want to urge all of you to join with me in renewing our sense of the magic, the extraordinariness of Iowa, and in freeing our imaginations to think about how we can pay homage to it through public progress. What is to keep us, in this wonderfully fortunate place, from rooting out racial hatred? From getting rid of drugs? Why can't we make our schools models for all the rest of the nation, our health-care not only high quality but accessible to all?

Well, you're legislators, or former legislators, and I know what your answer will be — at least from some of you: "Because we have to put the state on solid financial footing first." And, since I pay editorial writers to say just that sort of thing, I surely won't disagree.

But my invitation at bottom is simply that we should think larger thoughts, dream less limited dreams. Let ourselves sound naive, allow ourselves some dashed hopes, loose our imaginations. This Pioneer Class of 1973 should know what I'm talking about. That year, when you were entering this legislature, and I was a reporter covering the Colorado legislature, there were high hopes aplenty. Some were foolish. Some prevailed. We were better for having thought them, and so were those we served.

We have a new era now, one that should lend itself to similarly high hopes. A new era in the immediate sense: Across Iowa we have just celebrated Passover and Easter. Soon we'll see our rich earth turn green with promise. And it's a new era in the national sense, too. We have a new and strikingly different administration. Whatever your political stripe, there is the unmistakable feel of new promise.

Now let me acknowledge some things. We in the press contribute to the failure of hope and the failure of imagination in a number of ways. We concentrate on what is wrong. This tendency is born of an important commitment to serve the public as watchdogs. But it means that the mirror we hold up for people is skewed toward the negative. Moreover, in an era when much has seemed wrong and little has seemed right, the press may well have a special responsibility to give people hope and heart by reporting and commenting prominently on successes and solutions, as well as on problems and failures.

Another fault we are working to correct: We report (especially on government) as if all issues came down to two conflicting sides. This oversimplifies. It contributes to conflict. And it tends to exclude the public, who are not brought in early enough on in the process, nor given enough complexity of information, so that they can be instrumental in the decision-making.

A third fault we must work on: In our editorial comment, too, we too often emphasize what is wrong, and the way we do that too often leave lawmakers with no real way out.

I don't intend to imply that we at The Register are now going to behave in ways that will guarantee you'll never be irritated with us. Far from it. For 100 years, there have been tensions and arguments between this institution up here on the Hill and our's downtown: Whether it's getting Iowa out of the mud, regulating big trucks, protecting civil rights or dealing with ethics troubles. We will continue to approach our responsibilities in our differing ways, and continue to have some tensions.

What we share, though, is our joint commitment to making Iowa an even better place. Let me recognize briefly some of the ways in which you all have been working on just that.

1. **The Deficit.** You have recognized the problem and started on a solution. Once the deficit is repaired, Iowa can be proud of having a well-managed state and a government in a better position to attack other problems confronting us. This is a difficult area, a significant accomplishment.

2. **Ethics.** Again, you have recognized the problem and are trying to take steps that will help restore public confidence in government. While we still do not know the shape of the final bill, this is clearly another significant accomplishment.

3. **Welfare Reform.** The work between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats on the issue of trying to help Iowans out of poverty is in the best Iowa traditions of civil debate, hard work, for a compassionate end. I commend you for it.

I want to pay a compliment, too, to your families. Serving in the Legislature often requires the personal sacrifice of being separated from families. I want to recognize those personal and financial sacrifices by members, and by the wives and husbands and children of those who serve in these chambers.

Finally, I want to note a great deal of recent good news in our state: A record number of Iowans are working. Forecasts are for job growth above the national average. People are moving back to Iowa. Our quality of life ranks high on many different scales.

In sum, the aims we hold in common are constructive ones, you have made considerable progress toward them, there is good news to celebrate. And my prodding for more doesn't really have to do specifically with this session, or with next week's newspapers. It has more to do with lifting our sights toward a longer view — and concentrating on all that Iowa could be.

For that, let us turn back to the feelings this Pioneer Class brought into these chambers in 1973. And to the feelings evoked by that New York Times article. Our state IS some kind of romantic notion to many. Its welcoming environment and caring people are rare and beautiful gifts. We could make more out of these gifts if we cast the limits off from our dreams.

Why, this is a state where long-dead ballplayers can walk out of cornfields, and Madison County farm wives can have love affairs that millions thrill to. Surely, you and I could come up with some grander notions of our own. So, here's to the dream, and to our common love for Iowa. And thanks very much for having me here.

On motion by Siegrist of Pottawattamie, the joint convention was dissolved at 2:30 p.m.

The House stood at ease at 2:31 p.m., until the fall of the gavel.

The House resumed session at 3:07 p.m., Speaker Van Maanen in the chair.