

The House resumed session at 1:55 p.m., Speaker Corbett in the chair.

COMMITTEE TO NOTIFY THE SENATE

Tyrrell of Iowa moved that a committee of three be appointed to notify the Senate that the House was ready to receive it in joint convention.

The motion prevailed and the Speaker appointed as such committee, Tyrrell of Iowa, Holmes of Scott and Falck of Fayette.

Tyrrell, chair of the committee appointed to notify the Senate that the House was ready to receive it in joint convention, reported the committee had performed its duty. The report was received and the committee discharged.

The Sergeant-at-Arms announced the arrival of the President of the Senate, the Secretary of the Senate and the honorable body of the Senate.

The President was escorted to the Speaker's station; the Secretary to the Chief Clerk's desk and the members of the Senate were seated in the House chamber.

JOINT CONVENTION PIONEER LAWMAKERS FIFTY-FOURTH BIENNIAL SESSION

In accordance with House Concurrent Resolution 11 duly adopted, the joint convention was called to order, President Kramer presiding.

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

Senator Iverson of Wright 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 Rensink of Sioux and Senator McCoy of Polk on the part of the Senate, and Representative Weidman of Cass and Representative Connors of Polk, on the part of the House.

The committee escorted the Pioneer Lawmakers into the House chamber.

President Kramer presented Senator Donald Redfern of Black Hawk, President pro tempore of the Senate, who welcomed the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the Senate.

President Kramer presented Representative Ron Corbett, Speaker of the House, who welcomed the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the House of Representatives.

President Kramer presented the Honorable John P. Kibbie, member of the Senate who responded to the welcome.

The Honorable John P. Kibbie announced the 1997 class of legislators who were eligible to become members of the Pioneer Lawmakers.

Honorary members of the 1997 class were the following lobbyists: Bob Boyken, John Lewis, Bill Smith and F. Richard Thornton.

The Honorable John P. Kibbie presented James P. Flansburg, Retired Des Moines Register Columnist, who addressed the joint convention as follows:

I first walked into these chambers in search of a news story about 40 years ago.

What I remember best was a speech in the Senate. An old family friend, a senator from the Cedar County town of Clarence, Earl Elijah, was talking about a bill rewriting the probate code. The bill was six inches thick, an impenetrable forest of paper for most people, and that grand old man hefted it above his head and gave his speech. "I just hope you lawyers know what you're doing," he said and sat down.

I guess they did. The bill passed and remains the basic law yet today. Some members here might not approve of this standard but I use it yet. The bill must have been a good one when you consider the absence of scandal, great lawsuits and public indignation.

I've thought of old Earl Elijah - I think his family and my family settled in Cedar County about the same time in the late 1840s - dozens of times as I've tried to make sense of this place and the way it has changed through my career as a reporter, editor and opinion columnist.

His speech hinted at the bonds of trust that ran this place, held it together, then. The continued existence of the committee system still implies that you concentrate your efforts on this endeavor and I'll concentrate on that one - but from what I've seen and read, anyone who believes in a bond of trust today is begging for disappointment.

Sometimes nowadays I get the impression that everyone is trying to put something over on everyone else, with no consideration for what it might do to the commonwealth as a whole.

For the players, those little games can provide moments of fun. But for those of us who don't have the time or inclination or ability to keep track of it all and still have to live with the haphazard public policy that might result, it's bewildering.

What stopped first, I wonder: The honor and respect that we almost automatically paid to a state legislator? Or the behavior, the demeanor, that commanded that honor and respect? Do I have a cure? An antidote? A reform? Lord, no. I'm having enough trouble just describing the condition.

We live in a time when the only constant is change. The legislature is caught by that as surely as the rest of us. It may be a reflection of my age but what bothers me greatly is change for the sake of change, people changing a law without bothering to find out what the law's purpose was, what led to its passage in the first place.

Almost every day in this place, many make a dreadful and dangerous assumption: That those who were here in the past were dummies and do not need to be heeded. Let me assure you, they were not dummies. Let me also assure you that, as the wise man said, those who do not read history are doomed to repeat its mistakes.

There is no doubt in my mind that today's Iowa Legislature is more representative of the people of Iowa than yesterday's legislature was. The legislature's work and play, unfortunately, is not bathed in the high, good humor that marked it 20, 30 or 40 years ago.

The passions back then were just as strong, I think, but the respect for decorum and the legislative traditions of good behavior were dominant. That resulted in the kind of class, for instance, that Minnette Doderer showed about 30 years ago when she went up on a point of personal privilege to talk about Richard Radl of Lisbon. "When he goes home this weekend, I hope his mother comes out from under the porch and bites him," she said.

In 1973, Charles City's Ralph McCartney filed a motion to censure Lucas DeKoster of Hull. "He used a fact in debate and that's a dangerous precedent," said McCartney.

The same year Algona's Berl Priebe began to have doubts about the committee system: "Ever since my baby pig bill went to Education, I've been a little skeptical of committees," he said.

In 1977, I asked the wife of a legislator if she thought it was right to serve as her husband's clerk even though she didn't have some secretarial skills such as shorthand. "I can write faster in longhand than he can think," she said. Case closed.

The old reporter title came about because I didn't know how to write in the first person when I first began writing a column in 1971. My style was the newspaper style. I had to quote people. So I quoted me and called me "the old reporter." "How does the Iowa Legislature break down by sex?" I asked the old reporter in 1977. "I'd say that alcohol is a bigger problem," he said.

A few years before that, some of us got bored with the lack of news at Governors' Days in Clear Lake and began running Muscatine's Richard Drake for lieutenant governor. The job was very powerful then, being sought by Art Neu and Bill Harbor, and poor Drake squirmed, worrying about making those two angry. At a reception, I caught up with Shirley and Dick Drake and stormed at him for giving the story to the Associated Press instead of me. "It's on the wire?" he asked. "Yes," I said. He did some shouting, and I said, "Dick, have I ever lied to you." "No," said Drake. "Well, I am now," I said. "Furthermore," yelled Drake, "I told that damn Bill Eberline." "Dick, Dick, Dick," said Shirley. "He said he's lying. Don't you ever listen to anyone?"

And I remember Jack Schroeder, a talented Davenport legislator from a long time ago. His motto: "Never leave a party until you're asked to leave."

My favorite story involves an anonymous legislator who was flying off to an eastern convention with a girlfriend when his party put a call on the Senate. The

lady went east, he came back to the Senate, very angry, and voted against his party at every turn.

I am leaving out a lot of names, and for that I'm sorry. With a couple of exceptions whom I've written about, I'm proud to have met and known a host of Iowa legislators. And, God, I hate to say this, but I have to include some lobbyists in that. I should name them. It would ruin their day. In any event, I feel blessed that I had a chance to know and watch the work of so many decent, caring people in and around Iowa government.

Focus on this for a moment: This place, Iowa, is a better place than it was 20 years ago, 40 years ago, 100 years ago. In that, I include the Legislature itself, the counties and cities, our institutions. They need minding, some herding, some correcting, but they're better than their predecessors because your predecessors exercised political courage and made them so.

That's a glorious but a demanding legacy. In the main, Iowa has had the luck to elect good people. We've had very few scoundrels. Many members today are not as well-schooled, formally and informally, and as experienced in real life as their counterparts of yesterday. Changes in politics and in business have made it all but impossible for some people who've been successful in private endeavors to serve in today's legislature. So some then and now comparisons are not appropriate.

Whenever you get to talking with old-timers in the legislative or lobbying or reporting stables, you get barraged about how bigger-than-life the members were way back when. I don't know why that is, because it's nonsense. Forty years from now, I tell you today, some of the members, the lobbyists, staffers and reporters here will be telling people about the giants that served here back in '97. I knew and liked and respected some of the giants of 40 years ago. I cherish some friendships that came from my days here. But I don't think most of yesterday's people were any different than today's members. Most of them would fit in quite easily today. They would have to learn how to deal with some changes just as today's members would have to learn to deal with yesterday's system.

Despite my warnings about old-timers with giant stories, I do want to mention what I regard as the most extraordinary session in the state's history. The 1965 session. It came as a result of the 1964 Johnson landslide over Goldwater, the first time in 30 years that the Democrats were in control. There was a lot of fun, a lot of hell-raising, a lot of tipping over of tradition, but the hard fact was that there was not an issue that the general assembly refused to deal with. From both parties, it seemed to me, the members were there to do a job, get the state in order, not to get re-elected or prepare for some bigger office. It was an enormously creative session. Almost all of the legislative work in Iowa since has amounted to fine-tuning what was done in 1965. Someone like Bob Fulton or Minnette Doderer or Jack Kibbie or Bill Palmer should write a book.

When I first came to the Iowa Legislature as a reporter, the committee meetings were closed. No one except members and the committee clerk was allowed in. It was not uncommon, you'd learn sometimes years after the fact, for a member to argue one way in committee and in another way in public. Leadership control was icy and ruthless. Issues weren't let out of committee for debate until they manifested substantial public support.

As a kind of show, for example, two bills were debated at the same time on the same day in 1959: Reapportionment in one house and liquor by the drink in the other. There was no chance of either passing. The purpose was to let the debate be a safety valve to let off some public pressure.

Bit by bit, there was change. It probably would shock some people today to learn that we thought it was reform about 35 years ago when they required an explanation on the bill and required the bill to be printed so that you could see what it did to the law. Fiscal notes? We thought that was just short of the Second Coming.

Through 1965, as I recall it, Senate deliberations on gubernatorial appointments and confirmation votes took place in executive session. The Senate would go into executive session, throw everyone out of the chamber, and then go about its business. That rattled one senator in 1965 because it meant his wife, who was his secretary, had to leave the chamber and he relied on her to tell him what to do. Some of us would make our way to the attic, and listen to the debate through the air vents around the chandeliers. The acoustics are perfect up there.

Some years later, I once found myself locked inside a Senate Republican caucus. It was my single worst experience in the reporters' trade. It was an accident. I didn't want to be there. But I couldn't step out without being denounced as a sneak. So I stayed, in grave jeopardy of wetting my pants, as the senators got into a long, nasty fight over their parking places on the east side of the capitol building. Courtesy of experiences like that, I've never been as great an exponent of open meetings as some of my colleagues in the Fourth Estate.

Opening the committee meetings to the public and the procedural changes governing the drafting of bills, the advent of the computer and the cell phone, the coming of almost instant mass communications, high-speed highways and travel – all those things and more have combined to make this a different place than it was.

When I started in the reporters' trade at the Des Moines Register and Tribune in 1957, we had to have an editor's permission to make a long-distance telephone call. It was an expensive and complicated endeavor, so an operator handled it and called you when the connection was made. In 1967, as I remember it, one of the most effective lobbyists in the place, Ed Jones, began spending about half his time in an office downtown, using his telephone WATTS line to energize lobbying efforts whose need was spotted by a young associate who'd joined him, F. Richard Thornton.

These kinds of changes in technology make it very difficult for a member of today's legislature to handle the most important aspect of the job: Seek and forge compromise.

We live in an exceedingly diverse place of competitive and conflicting interests. The country would fall apart, Alistair Cooke wrote years ago, if we did not have three secrets: "Compromise, compromise and compromise." You have to have trade-offs or those competing and conflicting interests will be at each other's throats.

It's there, I think, that most of today's legislators have failed. Perhaps because of the changes in technology, they've forgotten or neglected a duty, as leaders, to teach their constituents about the possibilities and the impossibilities of government. In many places, what should be an exalted word – compromise – has become a dirty word. Too many politicians play to the gallery and talk about seeking victory rather than accommodation. They may not quite mean what they say but they always have listeners who believe. The result is a dissemination of anger, hate, distrust and suspicion, and ultimately a lack of comprehension that in fact, in the end, we all want and are seeking the same goals.

Thank you and good luck.

On motion by Siegrist of Pottawattamie, the joint convention was dissolved at 2:45 p.m.