

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-FIFTH BIENNIAL SESSION

In accordance with Senate Concurrent Resolution 6 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 Hedge of Mahaska 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 Senator Lamberti of Polk and Senator Flynn of Dubuque on the part of the Senate, and Representative Weidman of Cass and Representative Reynolds of Van Buren, on the part of the House.

The committee escorted the Pioneer Lawmakers into the House chamber.

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

President Kramer presented Representative Christopher Rants, Speaker pro tempore of the House, who welcomed the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the House of Representatives.

President Kramer presented the Honorable Richard Drake, member of the Senate who responded to the welcome.

The Honorable Richard Drake announced the 1979 class of legislators who were eligible to become members of the Pioneer Lawmakers.

Honorary members of the 1999 class were the following: Virgil Deering, Edward Failor, James Flansburg and Serge Garrison.

The Honorable Richard Drake presented Dave Yepsen, Chief Political Writer for the Des Moines Register, who addressed the joint convention as follows:

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, Pioneer Lawmakers, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Iowa General Assembly:

Thank you for inviting me to address the Pioneer Lawmakers session of the Legislature.

When Senator Drake asked me if I would make a few remarks to the Pioneer Lawmakers session, I said I surely would and was honored that he asked. But I also asked if he had the votes to get that motion approved. After all, many of you hear more from me on Monday morning than you really care to.

Senator Drake replied, "Haven't you ever been to a transportation committee meeting?" Well, yes, I replied. They're fun to cover if you're up at that hour or don't blink. "Then you know I've got the votes," he said. "Just keep it short."

So thank you Senator for the invitation. In that spirit, I'll proceed. Far be it from me to do anything to impede the adjournment of this session. What was it you promised, Representative Siegrist - April 23?

This is actually the second time I have addressed the Iowa General Assembly. The first time, in June, 1967, I was the 17-year old governor of the American Legion Boys State program. They weren't in too good of a mood, mired in a June session as they were. I told them they should lower the voting age. They didn't.

And legislators haven't taken my suggestions since, so I'll not preach any here today. However, my work has been acknowledged frequently from the floor of each chamber although not always in flattering terms.

I was recognized once by Representative Doderer. Fourteen years ago this month she rose on a point of personal privilege to say this was an important day for Iowa women. Everyone looked around the chamber to ask what was going on. She said, "David Yepsen's wife just had a baby girl and that's going to make him a whole lot more sensitive to the needs of Iowa women than he's been."

Well, I want to report, Representative Doderer, that Elizabeth's teachers have given her the tests and find she has a "slightly liberal" political philosophy. I told Governor Vilsack that, and he said tell your wife she's doing a good job raising your daughter.

To the point here today, my friend John Flannery out in the lobby is fond of telling me that this place is really just one big family. We've all got our roles to play as members, as staff, as reporters, doorkeepers, clerks, secretaries or lobbyists or pages. We work, fight, celebrate and commiserate together. Like it or not, for several months

out of the year we're all thrown together into this hothouse atmosphere where we all play that part and try to do the right things for the people of Iowa.

I tell John I think he's right because you don't get to choose all the members of your real family either. Sometimes our family roles conflict. Most of you understand the press has a watchdog role to play in our society. But you still don't like it when we write those stories about campaign finance, ethics or secrecy in government. But that's our job.

But John's on to something. Regardless of the role we play in this statehouse family, we all come here with a fierce love of Iowa and a desire to make it better. It's a trait that has gone on in these halls for over 100 years and if Senator Jensen has his way, it'll go on here in a newly restored capitol for another 100 years. In fact, it may take 100 years to complete the restoration.

For decades, men and women from all walks of life have come to this building to serve Iowa. Most of us could be making more money doing something else. Most make personal, financial and family sacrifices to be here. All of us have had the unpleasant experience of calling a spouse or loved one to tell them we won't be home for dinner that night or have to work this weekend. If it weren't for their understanding many couldn't work here. So on this day of remembrances, I'd like to acknowledge your families at home who put up with so much to enable you to be here. We overlook them too often.

There are also lots of hidden stories in this statehouse family that really never get told. Like the members who helped one another through tough financial times, or help a colleague fight an alcohol problem or console one another in time of trouble. Some great battles have been fought on this floor. But some lifelong friendships have been formed here too and today's the day we renew those friendships and forget the fights.

It's a story we don't often write because they're private matters. But they're no less real and it's why all of us are saying our prayers for Stew and Jean Iverson right now.

I have noticed over the years there are family rituals to this place and Pioneer Lawmakers is one of them. Every two years we get together to honor the family elders – those members who came here twenty years ago and to remember those members who have passed away.

This year, we honor the Class of 1979 – those lawmakers who were first elected in 1978. That was just a year after I was assigned to cover the statehouse. It seems like yesterday I was walking into the building and thinking what a beautiful but intimidating place this was.

I think most of us can recall a similar memory of our first day walking into this capitol to go to work, whatever our job. We were all newcomers to the family and, truth be told, we are all honored to come to work each day. I succeeded Jim Flansburg who had succeeded George Mills.

They passed on a lot of advice – like:

– "Watch the code editor's bill. Laverne Schroeder repealed the whole state housing code one year in that bill."

- And "it isn't really tea that Jimmy Briles has in his cup on the last night of the session."

- "Watch the IPERS bill to see if there's still someone in Boone County who Jack Nystrom hasn't got covered."

- "In 20 years, you'll figure out what really went on." Which is why I'm looking forward today to finding out what deals really were cut in that usury debate of twenty years ago.

- Or, debate will always be long-winded when it's a bill everyone understands and short when they don't understand it. So we all know we're in for a long afternoon when there's a bill about dove hunting, fences or farm pickup trucks.

- Or don't go out with Ed Jones at night if you have to be functional the next day.

1978 was an important election in the country and in Iowa. It was a harbinger election that foretold the sweeping change coming in the 1980 election. In Iowa, Democratic U.S. Senator Dick Clark was upset by Roger Jepsen. It was a stunning upset, caused as many Catholic and evangelical voters left the Democratic party over the abortion issue. For the most part, they have not returned and the shape of politics has been different ever since. The change in politics was affirmed in 1980 by the Reagan landslide, an election that fundamentally changed the nation's philosophy toward government.

The change rippled through legislative politics, too. Democrats who had won the Legislature during the Watergate era lost it to the Republicans in 1978. The GOP control would be short-lived, thanks to the farm crisis of the 1980s that made Democrats out of many rural voters.

The only good news for Democrats that year was the election of Tom Miller as Iowa's new attorney general. He defeated the eminently quotable Richard Turner, who was always a reporter's best friend on a slow news day.

Bob Ray won yet another term as governor, defeating Jerry Fitzgerald. Lieutenant Governor Art Neu retired from that job, having grown tired of waiting around for Ray to leave his job. That enabled an unknown state representative named Terry Branstad to win the Lieutenant Governorship and we just all knew that little guy was going nowhere in Iowa politics.

A new generation of leaders emerged that year. Lowell Junkins became minority leader in the Iowa Senate. Cal Hultman became majority leader. Those two have proven that there really is life after the Legislature and it's often quite profitable, too.

What the election of 1978 illustrated was something that is still true today. Iowa has a healthy, vigorous two-party system. The two parties in Iowa compete hard with one another for the support of Iowans. When that competition turns nasty we're all losers. But when that competition turns positive as each side tries to outdo the other by offering the best candidates and best ideas they can find, then all of us in Iowa are the winners.

That's the kind of session you are having this year and it's commendable. A healthy two-party system is alive and well in Iowa today.

The 1979 session of the Legislature was memorable for a couple reasons. They had a \$150 million surplus that year and gave a third of it back to the taxpayers in a rebate. That's not been repeated since but just imagine what these boys could do today with a \$900 million surplus!

They also started income tax indexing. Inflation was 9.4 percent that year so that meant something to taxpayers. Unlike the rebate, indexing's an idea that successors have kept around.

They legalized graduated payment mortgages and variable rate mortgages. They cut unemployment benefits and allowed credit unions to run checking accounts.

Much has changed since 1978 and not all of it for the better. Budgets are larger. Staffs bigger. The costs of campaigns have exploded and they're about to become more expensive now that corporate contributions are legal. Why, in 1978, you could win an open seat in the Iowa Legislature for less than \$5,000!

Some things never change, though. If you aren't a member, it's still hard to find a place to park around here. There are about thirty lobbyists here who are former members and they'll all tell you the greatest mistake they made while serving was in not providing more places for people to park.

But a lot of good things have happened, too. It's more business-like. The work week is more family friendly. Marathon late night sessions are rare. More women serve in the Legislature today. Some day when half the membership is female, we'll be able to say we have a Legislature that truly reflects the population of this state.

But there I've started to preach and I promised not to do that. So to Senator Drake, thank you again for the invitation to address this joint session. To the Pioneer Lawmakers, welcome home. To the members, good luck in making that April 23rd adjournment.

And to both present and former members in this chamber, I want to say something those of us in the media rarely say – and that is thank you. Thank you for your personal sacrifice. Thank you for your public service. Thank you for trying to make Iowa better and for your willingness to be in what Theodore Roosevelt once called "The Arena."

On motion by Gipp of Winneshiek, the joint convention was dissolved at 2:28 p.m.

The House stood at ease at 2:28 p.m., until the fall of the gavel.

The House resumed session at 2:45 p.m., Gipp of Winneshiek in the chair.