

Swaim of Davis, 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 and the members of the Senate were seated in the House chamber.

JOINT CONVENTION  
PIONEER LAWMAKERS  
SIXTIETH BIENNIAL SESSION

In accordance with House Concurrent Resolution 7, duly adopted, the joint convention was called to order at 2:00 p.m., President Kibbie presiding.

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

Gronstal of Pottawattamie moved that a committee of eight be appointed to escort the Pioneer Lawmakers into the House chamber.

The motion prevailed and the President appointed as such committee Dvorsky of Johnson, Stewart of Jackson, Noble of Polk and Ward of Polk, on the part of the Senate, and Cohoon of Des Moines, Lensing of Johnson, Wagner of Linn and Deyoe of Story, on the part of the House.

The committee escorted the Pioneer Lawmakers into the House chamber.

President Kibbie presented Senator pro tempore Jeff Danielson, who welcomed the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the Senate.

President Kibbie presented Representative Pat Murphy, Speaker of the House, who welcomed the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the House.

President Kibbie presented the honorable Representative Dennis Cohoon of Des Moines member of the House, who responded to the welcome.

Representative Dennis Cohoon of Des Moines County introduced O. Kay Henderson, News Director of Radio Iowa.

Thank you, Representative Cohoon.

Pioneer lawmakers, members of the 83th General Assembly, legislative staff, clerks and guests. Thank you for your welcome.

Representative Cohoon cornered me back in the House lounge a few weeks ago about this speaking gig. I asked Representative Cohoon when this event would be held. He told me April 1st and you know what immediately ran through my mind.

Cohoon quickly assured me this is no April Fool's Day joke.

I then asked Representative Cohoon what he wanted the speech to be about. He said: "About 10 or 15 minutes...Just don't go on and on and on."

I don't plan to go on and on and on, but I am going to go back -- all the way back to 1989.

It was a momentous year in world history and worthy of a little review. Apartheid was being ushered out in South Africa.

Pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square were beaten back by the communists -- as many of us watched on television. The Berlin Wall came down.

Back on the home front:

The first episodes of "Seinfeld" and "The Simpsons" aired in 1989.

The Rolling Stones set out on their first "Steel Wheels" tour.

The B-52s sang about a Love Shack.

And Cher was suggesting we "Turn Back Time" -- way before Senator Jack Kibbie ever suggested it.

Two decades ago, I was a 24-year-old statehouse reporter working for Radio Iowa. That may sound young, but let me remind you that two decades ago Representatives Pat Grassley and Matt Windschitl were in kindergarten.

These folks sitting in front of us today were among the newbies, the rookies, "The Class of 1989." They arrived at the statehouse on Monday, January 9 -- dressed in their first-day-of-session clothes.

Democrats were in control. There were 61 Democrats in the House and 30 Democrats in the Senate.

Don Avenson of Oelwein was the House Speaker. Some called him "the lead sled dog." I sat in the Law Library this week, reading through the House and Senate Journals from 1989. I read Avenson's opening day speech and it occurred to me that Barack Obama may have read it, too. As you may recall, Obama said this in a speech to supporters last year: "We are the ones we've been waiting for."

Avenson had almost copyrighted the sentiment two decades earlier. Back in 1989, Avenson said: "We have met Iowa's leaders and they are us."

The list of legislation which cleared the 1989 legislature is long. The General Assembly voted to establish a state minimum wage that was higher than the national minimum wage. Governor Terry Branstad surprised his fellow Republicans and signed it into law.

The 1989 Iowa Legislature established the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act -- REAP. They really loved the environment, so much so that the House Rules were changed and Styrofoam cups were banned from the floor.

But the issue which received the most public attention that year was riverboat gambling. Yes, 1989 is the year the Iowa legislature voted to legalize gambling on boats that cruised the state's rivers. Governor Branstad signed the bill into law and the floating casinos opened their doors on April 1st, 1990.

But just a year earlier, in 1989, the riverboat gambling bill hit a lot of waves -- and sunk a couple of times -- before it made it through the House and Senate.

First, the House debated the bill for seven-and-a-half hours. The votes were cast. The bill failed. It soon resurfaced, though, and passed the House on a 51 to 47 vote.

A short while later in this precarious process, a group of reporters stood around Senator Wally Horn. Horn was the floor manger of the riverboat gambling bill. A reporter asked Horn if he had the votes to pass the bill.

Here is Horn's answer: "Well, I can tell you I've got 26 'yes' votes and 24 'no' votes - and two people are still undecided."

Horn may have been closer on that math than we thought, though, as when the bill first came up for debate in the senate, it failed.

Then, a senator from Waukeez -- a Methodist! -- switched his vote and helped pass the bill.

But passing the bill wasn't easy even when the votes were there. It was a long debate, mainly due to the Herculean effort of Senator William Dieleman, a staunch gambling foe. At one point during debate in the wee hours of the morning, Senator Dick Drake of Muscatine yelled: "Point of order."

Drake had his foot up on his senate desk chair. His elbow was resting on his knee. He was sort of leaning over his microphone. Drake croaked into the microphone: "How long are you going to keep us here, Senator Dieleman?"

Dieleman kept on, but one local senator missed much of the floor show. Senator George Kinley, who lived on the south side of Des Moines, went home that night and

got a good night's sleep. He got up early, showered and suited up. Kinley arrived back at the statehouse in the early morning light -- fresh as a daisy and ready to vote for the riverboat gambling bill -- when that vote finally came.

On another occasion -- the old-timers around this place aren't quite sure it was in 1989, but it's a good story so I'm going to tell it -- two Democratic staff members in the Iowa Senate had to go to church on a Sunday morning to round up a senator. The "yes" vote of Senator Joe Coleman of Fort Dodge was needed to pass one of the final bills pending in the session. Theresa Kehoe and Debbie O'Leary were dispatched by Senate Majority Leader Bill Hutchins to find Coleman and they did. They found Senator Coleman standing in the communion line at one of the Catholic churches in town. The two women grabbed Coleman by the elbows and steered him out of church and back here to the statehouse.

There's another story to tell, featuring John Connors. Connors was in the speaker's chair and it was near the end of the session. The House was voting on some long-forgotten bill and a legislator who ended up serving just the one term in the House was standing with his hand in the air, indicating he was voting yes. Connors motioned to Joe O'Hern, the chief clerk. "Who is that?" Connors asked. There were three legislators who looked an awful lot alike. O'Hern said he didn't know who it was. So, this is what Connors announced: "The gentleman in the back of the room votes aye."

There are a million stories to tell about this place and that year. The 1989 legislature dared to take on the "fourth rail" in Iowa politics: small schools. Lawmakers passed an "open enrollment" bill which allowed parents to enroll their children in a neighboring school if they were unhappy with the district in which they lived. And legislators back in 1989 started the process of ending those "phantom students." No, kids, that's not a ghost story, but an honest-to-goodness term that was uttered almost as much as the phrase "federal deductibility" has been uttered here this year.

The 1989 legislature passed an increase in the gas tax. They passed a "comparable worth" bill which said women and men in state government should be paid the same salary when they're doing the same job.

Because of my job, back in 1989 I got to sleep on the floor underneath the press bench here in the House. That's because the House started its last "day" early on Friday morning and ended that "day" on Sunday.

In his closing remarks that year -- on Sunday, May 7th, 1989 -- House Speaker Don Avenson had a list of words to describe legislators' work product: "Epic, trailblazing, foresighted, Ben Hurian, George Pattonish."

Avenson went on to say he was always amazed that, in his words, "farmers, workers, lawyers, teachers and small business people can end up doing what (YOU) do every year. Coming from a hundred different locations and a hundred different family backgrounds," in the end, Avenson said, the Iowa legislature always seems to end up with something of which they can be proud.

And I have now "ended up with something" that's about 10 or 15 minutes long. Thank you for the kind invitation to speak with you today. From this member of "The Class of 1985" -- best wishes to "The Class of 1989."