



First Friday News & Views

September 2014

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The Monthly Newsletter
of the First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.

How Iowa Education Funding Works: Shamefully By Jonathan Wilson

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Education Funding
Works: Shamefully by
Jonathan Wilson

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▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am,
Friday, Sept 5, 2014, at Hoyt
Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland,
Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by September 3 to
JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com,
or phone 515-288-2500

Everyone knows that rural Iowa has been losing population now for a long time. That demographic shift has created the reality of smaller and smaller school districts that lack the resources to provide a quality education for rural kids. The Iowa Legislature sought to address the problem by implementing "Open Enrollment" that ostensibly allows parents to send their kids to any school district in the state, usually an adjoining district. In principle, it was designed to permit parents to choose an alternative school district perceived to be superior to the one where they reside. Parents are responsible for transporting the transferring students, and resources attributable to the transferring students -- both local tax dollars and state aid -- follow the student into the coffers of the receiving school district. Over time that scheme was expected to starve school districts shrunk by those choices and force "self-closures" or mergers with adjoining districts.

This Open Enrollment approach to our shrinking rural population, that indirectly necessitates closure over time of unneeded school districts, has actually worked, albeit slowly and to the educational prejudice of the last students to leave a closing or merging district. The better and quicker approach would have been for the legislature to set a minimum number of students for a district to remain open and close any that failed to satisfy that minimum within a set period of time. That better and quicker approach would have required greater political courage than is characteristic of the Iowa Legislature.

That said, the scheme still violates the law against unintended consequences when applied to an urban school district, like Des Moines, that is surrounded by more affluent, lilly-white suburbs. It allows more affluent, white parents in Des Moines to participate in racial and socioeconomic segregation without even leaving home. The potential for that phenomenon to occur was recognized when the scheme was adopted, and the Des Moines School District was exempt for an entire year in order to figure out how to address it. An impossible task is not made possible by the mere passage of time.

The scheme provides that a receiving school district is required to accept a transferring student only if there is "room" for that student. If there isn't room, the transfer can be declined. Having "room" for a transferring student is a function of classroom space and available teachers, or both. If acceptance of a transferring student will necessitate neither the addition of classroom space nor adding a teacher, the receiving school district must accept the transfer. In other words, if the receiving school district has elastic classroom and teacher capacity, a transfer cannot be refused. *Continued on p. 2*

Jonathan Wilson, Continued from p. 1

Superficially, that makes sense. How can a receiving school district be required to enroll another student if there isn't "room" available?

When I was on the Des Moines School Board (and still today), almost 100% of the District's overhead was either for bricks and mortar for classrooms or for teachers. Under the Iowa Open Enrollment Law, the receiving school district gets the local tax dollars attributable to the student from the sending district as well as the state aid attributable to that student. In essence, a receiving school district is required to accept a student transfer only if doing so adds no overhead. The additional tax dollars attributable to the students are just gravy.

At last report, suburban school districts were paying Des Moines over 3.6 million dollars a year for students gravitating to exceptional educational opportunities offered by the District. But get this, in that same year the Des Moines School District paid the affluent suburbs, collectively, a total of over 9.3 million dollars, a net out-flow of local tax dollars of over \$5,700,000 per year! State aid enriches the affluent receiving district even more.

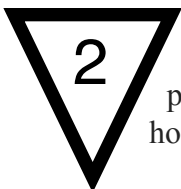
One has to ask, who is subsidizing who? If I didn't know better I would think the scheme was designed by the Sheriff of Nottingham, taking money from the poor and giving it (and state aid as well) to the undeserving rich. We in the state of Iowa should be ashamed.



Michael B. Keegan, President of People for the American Way (PFAW) will be our September Speaker.

PFAW was founded by Norman Lear in 1981 specifically in response to what he felt was the divisive rhetoric of such increasingly influential [televangelists](#) as [Pat Robertson](#) and [Jerry Falwell](#). Co-founders included [Barbara Jordan](#), [Andrew Heiskell](#), and other leaders from the political, religious, business, and entertainment communities.

PFAW's operational mission is to promote the American Way and defend it from attack, to build and nurture communities of support for our values, and to equip those communities to promote progressive policies, elect progressive candidates, and hold public officials accountable.



Briefs & Shorts

Be sure to RSVP for the September 5 meeting no later than September 3. Contact Jonathan at 288-2500 or email him at JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. Our speaker will be Michael Keegan of People for the American Way.

Thanks to Jeffrey Campbell for his introduction of our August speaker, Steve Pilchen (The Round Guy), emcee of The Funny Bone comedy club.



Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Barry McGriff for coordinating the book exchange.

Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both.

From the Pastor's Pen
Gay or Just Straight and Acting Out?
A Reflection on Nigeria
By Rev. Jonathan Page

"You're not gay," she said. I thought I might have misheard her. It was loud in Cheers, a bar whose name evoked serious cognitive dissonance for a Bostonian in Nigeria.

"What was that?"

"You're not gay. No one is really gay." I looked at this woman with incredulity. She was in her 40's but looked as though she could have been ten years older. How could she not know any gay people?

"I can assure you that I am gay. I have sex with men." I told her bluntly. She shrugged her shoulders, obviously not satisfied with my response.

"That is not right." She responded. I wasn't sure whether she meant morally or simply incorrect.

"I think it's time I leave." I said to her.

She seemed disappointed, but said, "Okay." Then she proceeded to grab my arm as we left the bar. It was only after telling her in explicit language that she finally got the point that I was not interested. For some reason this really got under my skin. Nigeria had been a constant march of subtle and not so subtle homophobia. It's not as though she said anything particularly shocking, but I had had enough.

Frankly, the gay situation in Nigeria was worse than I had expected. In many intolerant countries there is a large city where gay people can go and manage a relatively open life. That was certainly my experience in Turkey, which is not a gay-friendly country, but in Istanbul I found a large, if somewhat muted, gay scene in 2010.

Nigeria is a more populous country than Turkey and Lagos at least as large as Istanbul. Yet the gay scene in Lagos is virtually non-existent. I found no gay bars or even gay friendly bars. There are fewer people on Grindr in Lagos, a city of fifteen million where smartphones abound, than in Ames, Iowa. I spoke at length with a gay friend of mine who moved back to Lagos from New York City earlier this year. He said the situation was just as bad as I thought. He was warned by someone on Grindr

never to send any face pictures, even on private chat, for fear of potential blackmail.

In many ways the most unnerving thing about the gay scene in Nigeria, if you can call it that, is that there was little sense of sexual orientation. In the United States today, nearly everyone, even in conservative circles, admits that such a thing as sexual orientation exists. Some people are innately and immutably attracted to people of the same sex, whether from genes, hormones, or very early influences. It is this acceptance of sexual orientation that is the basis for the legal victories on behalf of gay marriage in the last ten years. If people are gay by nature, and not because of moral deviance or psychological damage, then gays deserve basic protections and civil rights.

In Nigeria, however, I was struck that there was little acknowledgement that gay people existed, other than from the small portion of the population that had spent significant time outside Nigeria. Not one of the Nigerians I told believed that I am gay. There was this notion that if I only found a good woman my gay desires would evaporate in some sort of heterosexual lustful bliss. Their attitude reminded me of early 20th century America when the terms "fairy" and "trade" predominated. A "fairy" was someone who was abnormally effeminate. The issue of his same sex attraction had to do with gender more than sexual orientation. Someone who was "trade" enjoyed using "fairies" for sexual pleasure but was not gay in the sense that we would think of today.

It is important to note that the homophobia in Nigeria is not fundamentally rooted in the Bible. As Christian as Nigeria is, I was struck time and again by the lack of theological education among the clergy and the ignorance of the Bible among the average church-goers. The vast majority of Nigerian Christians are Pentecostal and they require, and indeed expect, no theological training for their pastors. Much to my surprise, adultery is deeply embedded in Nigerian culture and spoken about frequently on the radio and in private conversations with few, if any, acknowledgments of the biblical prohibitions against it. The homophobia

From the Pastor's Pen, cont'd on p. 5





TEACHER LEADERS STRENGTHEN CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

[Research](#) shows a correlation between a school's ability to keep good teachers and student achievement. We want the best teachers in Iowa classrooms and are giving them the tools they need to help students succeed.

We're rewarding effective teachers with more responsibility and higher pay, attracting promising new teachers with competitive salaries and opportunities for advancement, and encouraging greater collaboration among all educators. Top teachers taking on leadership roles was central to our 2013 Education Reform initiative.

The goal of a new [Teacher Leadership and Compensation System](#) is for 25 percent of teachers to take on new leadership roles, such as instructional coaches and mentors, to improve the classroom experience and raise student achievement. Teacher leadership systems promise to help students learn more by better meeting their individual needs.

West Des Moines and Norwalk will be among the first Iowa school districts to launch the teacher-leader program this fall. A Commission on Educator Leadership and Compensation selected 39 school districts (made up of about one-third of Iowa students in both urban and rural areas) for the first year of funding from a pool of 146 applicants. The Teacher Leadership and Compensation System will be phased in over three years, with the goal of having all Iowa school districts participating on a voluntary basis by 2016-17.

In addition, Des Moines schools have been selected to benefit from a Wallace Foundation effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning in urban schools. The initiative will finance training and support for principal supervisors with a four-year grant. Des Moines is considered one of nation's most advanced districts in recognizing the importance of the principal supervisor position.

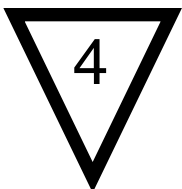
With higher expectations for students, it's no longer realistic for one principal to provide all the instructional leadership in a school. Teacher and principal leadership teams are key to preparing students for the college and career training they'll need down the road.

Additional information

This is a legislative update from Senator Matt McCoy, representing west part of Des Moines, portions of West Des Moines and Cumming in northwest Warren County. For newsletters, photos and further information, go to www.senate.iowa.gov/senator/mccoy.

To contact Senator McCoy during the week, call the Senate Switchboard at 515-281-3371. Otherwise he can be reached at home at 515-274-0561. E-mail him at matt.mccoy@legis.iowa.gov.

Senator McCoy is an Assistant Senate Majority Leader, chair of the Commerce Committee and chair of the Transportation & Infrastructure Budget Subcommittee. He also serves on the Appropriations, State Government, Transportation and Ways & Means committees.



From the Pastor's Pen
cont'd from p. 3

in Nigeria is far more a cultural problem than a religious one.

The most painful part of visiting Nigeria was seeing people who were clearly gay and wondering what their life was like or would be like in the future. There were two people whom I assumed were gay working at my hotel in Port Harcourt. I met another person at church who must have been wearing sequins out of the womb he was so fabulous. What will happen to them?

Unfortunately, I had no exposure to the lesbian scene in Nigeria. I can only hope that, like with "Boston marriages" of late 19th and early 20th century America, gay women there find more acceptance than gay men. But somehow I doubt it.

In the end, it is imperative that the United States continue to insist that the rights of gays and lesbians be respected around the globe. The Obama administration has been a strong advocate in this regard and has provided some balance to the pernicious influence of certain American evangelical missionaries who spread a gospel of hate. Our voices matter in this regard, as do our votes.

Day Trip Thursdays

by Gary Moore

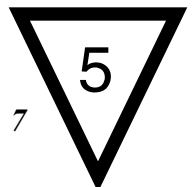
Now that I am semi-retired and have a little more discretion on how to spend my days I, along with friend Bill Brown and my Greg Trumbo, are taking advantage of it. We have started using Thursdays as a time to explore Central Iowa and enjoy its offerings.

This week's Day Trip Thursday ended up being a little longer than planned but worth every minute of time spent from 9 AM until our return home at 7 PM. Bill, Greg and I enjoyed a visit to Marshalltown, Iowa.

Our first stop would lend itself to a brief walk around the Marshall County Court House Square and Main Street.



We had the fortune to have lunch at Tremont Grill, with a charming staff. The senior ambassador would show us around the Restaurant and Hotel after sharing her pumpkin bars made fresh that morning. We then visited the Fisher Community Center and Martha-EllenTye Theatre. The Center houses the Marshalltown Art Center as well as other community agencies. It was just off Main, over the via-duct on Center Street. The grounds contained a small collection of sculpture but the surprise was the French impressionist collection worth millions, a gift of J.W. Fisher. Not to be outdone, his sister then donated the community theater that bears her name and some of her art collection which graces the theatre's lobby. Along the way we had the good fortune to have kind workers give us tours describing the works and providing history.



Day Trip Thursdays, cont'd on p. 7

News and Reviews

by Gary Kaufman

News

Reviews

FIND HARVEY MILK AT THE POST OFFICE

By Gary Kaufman

I hope you are all stocking up on the Harvey Milk stamps currently at the post office. It is rare for one of our heroes to be commemorated by the U. S. Postal Service. Harvey Milk was one of the first gay politicians to win a political seat in government and was tragically murdered along with the mayor of San Francisco by a fellow member of the city council who, amazingly, was found not guilty of premeditated murder after his rampage in city hall. Of course Sean Penn won an Oscar for his portrayal of Harvey in the movie, **Milk**. But if you really want to get to know the real Harvey I would strongly recommend you seek out and rent or buy the documentary, **The Life and Times of Harvey Milk**. In the documentary you will discover his genius, occasional brassiness, and wit. It also ends with a very emotional candlelight parade in San Francisco held after his tragic death. The scene was so strong that the footage from the documentary was used for the ending credits of the Hollywood produced movie, **Milk**.

We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are. Anais Nin

Don't follow your dreams; chase them.

Create a life that feels good on the inside, not one that just looks good on the outside -- come out of the closet.

Be the type of person you want to meet. Igor Holeczy

When you change the way you look at

Get On Up

Review by Gary Kaufman

Get On Up, a film about the life of James Brown, starts when James was definitely past his creative peak, going off the deep end, and getting in trouble with the law. But the film then uses that as a segue into Brown's early life, living in a shack with a violent alcoholic father, and a mother who abandons her baby when she can no longer stand the beatings. The film proceeds back and forth among different parts of his life, sometimes in an almost mythical state. He views things as he would do it, or peers into his future.

Two cute brothers take turns playing the role of the young James., and Chadwick A Boseman does a masterful job of portraying the adult James. His mannerisms, his moves, are so dynamic; he really captures the energy of James Brown. It certainly is an Oscar-worthy performance.

And by far the highpoints of the film are the performances. James Brown's recorded voice was blended with the incredible skill of Chadwick A Boseman to create a masterful portrait of the King of Soul. So take the advice of one of the featured songs, "get on off of that thing" and see **Get On Up!**

things, things you look at will change.

It takes courage to stand up and speak; and it also takes courage to sit down and listen. Winston Churchill paraphrased

Two things define your character: your patience when you have little , and your attitude when you have much.

When odds are one in a million, be that one. Tabitha Engle



Day Trip Thursdays, *cont'd from p. 5*



It was then off to Gladbrook and Matchstick Marvels. A slight unanticipated detour did not dampen our astonishment with the Matchstick creations of Patrick Acton, a name familiar in Marshalltown history. His works from a little town of 945 have been displayed around the world. I cannot imagine the patience it must take to create these pieces. The sheer number of hours spent creating these well-scaled masterpieces and the number of matchsticks used (millions!) is mind boggling.

After enjoying the old theater postings next door we moved to Traer, Iowa with its Salt and Pepper Shaker Collection of Ruth Rassmussen, one of the largest in the nation. We had the good fortune that Ruth was at the Gallery Thursday. What a delight to meet the 90 year old Ruth with her impressive smile and

The reality and inevitability of death is the only things that forces us to prioritize. J. Wilson

You will be the last person to die in your lifetime.



boundless spirit. Ellen mans the Gallery and guided us through explaining about “Go With Shakers,” “Nodders,” and the various classifications. Who knew. Bill Brown had brought a pair of shakers to donate to Ruth’s Collection. She glowed. She didn’t have them.



Life gets better by change, not chance -- come out of the closet.

Sometimes what you’re most afraid of doing is the very thing that will set you free -- come out of the closet. Katie Tennant



FFBC

First Friday
News & Views

Des Moines, Iowa

September 2014

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MADE ON A  MAC

MY M.O. (MONTHLY OBSERVATIONS)

by Steve Person
Book Reports

It was in my early years of college that I learned to love doing research. In those days of the late 1960s, there was no such thing as a personal computer or the Internet. Research involved going to the library and checking out what books were possible to check out or remaining in the library with pencil and pad looking through those volumes that were reserved for in-library-use only. Things are much different today with the advent of spectacular changes in technology.

I have three books to mention in this month's article. One is of a personal nature, and the other two I have been reading alternately over the last few weeks, switching back and forth as my reading mood changes.

Criminal Witness: A Milo Powell Mystery is my brother's first attempt at a novel. My brother, Tom, is a retired private investigator. This book is his second to be published, the first being Milo Powell's (pseudonym for my brother) account of cases he actually worked on. **Criminal Witness** is a fictionalized amalgamation of certain cases with some imagination thrown in. Though set in the present, my brother's style reminds me of the detective genre of the 1930s and 40s. The book is available on line at Xlibris in hardcover, softcover, or e-book format.

Going back five centuries from my brother's novel is Anne Somerset's definitive biography, **Queen Anne: The Politics of Passion**. Somerset's research is complete and exhaustive. Including the private letters of Queen Anne (the last of the Stuart monarchs in England), Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, and her husband, and many other players at the time of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the later reign of Anne, I found the book to be tedious reading. Anne Somerset's research cannot be faulted, but her writing lacks the brilliance and sparkle of other British historians, notably Peter Ackroyd (see First Friday News and Views of October 2013, December 2013, and June 2014 for Ackroyd reviews).

Finally is Hillary Clinton's **Hard Choices**. Admittedly, I have not yet finished it, but I do enjoy her writing with its clear, crisp, and honest reporting of her time as Secretary of State. The book received so-so reviews when it first came out a few months back, but her reactions to various world leaders and events is refreshing. I especially enjoyed the "Author's Note" when she was pondering what to title the book. Says Clinton, "When I began this book, shortly after leaving the State Department, I considered a number of titles. Helpfully, the **Washington Post** asked its readers to send in suggestions. One proposed 'It Takes a World,' a fitting sequel to **It Takes a Village**. My favorite was 'The Scrunchie Chronicles: 112 Countries and It's Still All About My Hair.'" The lady has a great sense of humor. I like her now more than ever. I think she would be an excellent President!