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I Want it All

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, December 7 at Hoyt Sherman Place.
Our guest speaker will be Dr. Dennis Goldford, political science professor at Drake University.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, December 4 to Jonathan Wilson @davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

I'm being besieged by solicitations from and on behalf of presidential candidates. It happens, of course, every four years in Iowa, and that's a good thing. It's good for Iowa and it's good for the candidate selection process. Iowans take the process seriously, in part, because we've had lots of experience with the process, and we know that supporting one candidate over another requires much more than dutifully going to the polls and casting a primary ballot as is required in the other first-contest state of New Hampshire.

In Iowa, supporters have to be willing to go to a local caucus on caucus night (no absentee ballots allowed), spend an entire evening there at least listening to a bunch of local and state issues and candidates before the presidential caucusing begins, and help find others who will be similarly committed. Iowa represents the first, last, and only place where the selection process is driven by "retail" politics; where TV ads, mailings, and automated calls are of limited value; and where the candidates are required to interact personally, sometimes one-on-one, with actual voters.

The winner in Iowa gets a bump, a boost in credibility in other states that follow quickly, without a lot of opportunity for "losers" to regroup and spin the results effectively—and everybody knows it. If Hillary loses, her perceived invincibility for getting the nomination is seriously undermined. If Fred Thompson performs poorly, it could sound a death knell for his late-start-and-already-underwhelming campaign. If Ron Paul or Dennis Kucinich were to actually win in Iowa, . . . well, I'm not quite sure what would happen, but all Hell would definitely break loose if it hadn't frozen over.

So Iowans take the process and their role in it seriously. I know I do. I want to support the person who would, both, be the best president and the person most likely to win the presidency if nominated. Those two wants necessarily involve trade-offs. Customarily, I might settle for a candidate whose positions on certain issues are not exactly in sync with my own, and do so because s/he has the best chance of winning, her/his positions on most issues are close enough, her/his heart and head seem in the right place, and I agree with her/him on a few "no compromise" issues. For me, probable election trumps perfection on the issues. That's why I'm not a candidate myself. I agree entirely with myself on every single issue, but I'm not likely to get elected. I don't invite or expect a lot of write-in votes by those who also agree with me on every issue.

This time around I'm having a tougher time deciding. Here's my dilemma. None of the candidates is completely in sync with me on every issue and none of the candidates is, for sure, electable. So the kind of trade-off I'm used to isn't there.

Ignoring a plethora of positions and values I don't share with the Republican candidates, I absolutely want to end the ill-advised, utterly catastrophic "conventional war" that Bush and his neocons launched against an unconventional foe. It is abusing our patriotism and wasting lives, vast amounts of tax dollars, and good will around the world. It's not winnable in a meaningful sense or making us safer at home or abroad. It's aggravating our addictive dependence on foreign oil and aggravating our addictive dependence on borrowed capital from our international competitors. So I don't want any of the war-mongering, fear-mongering, Reagan wannabes

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among the Republicans.

Among the Democrats, I want the election “machine” and fundraising capability of Clinton. And I’d like to see a woman elected President. I want the star power of Obama, who should be able to inspire renewed optimism about the future and motivate younger voters. And I’d like to see a person of color elected President. I want the passion of Edwards in favor of building one America and not continuing on the path to separate America’s for the rich and for the poor. I want the remarkable experience in executive leadership and international affairs of Richardson. And I’d like to see a Hispanic elected President. I want the intelligence and idealism of Kucinich. I want the appreciation for complexity and nuance of Biden. I want the no nonsense candor of Gravel. In short, I want it all. We as a nation *need* all of those attributes in a candidate and president.

I’m left with trying to figure out the most electable Democrat who’s most capable of marshalling the skill sets of the other Democratic candidates and persuading them to be actively involved in the executive branch handling the domestic and foreign affairs of this great nation. All of them want to be in the executive branch of government *as President*, so the willingness to serve is a given. Electability probably narrows the field to four, and I’m still waiting to hear one of them articulate the commitment to involve all of them if elected. I’m still waiting. I want them all. ▼

Perhaps we should start electing public officials for what they won’t stand for instead of what they stand for.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the December 7 meeting no later than December 4 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com. He can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Dr. Dennis Goldford, political science professor at Drake University.

▼ ▼ ▼
Thanks to Larry Hoch for his introduction of our November speaker, the Reverend Mark Stringer.

▼ ▼ ▼
Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Send your check to Jonathan Wilson, 666 Walnut Street, Suite 2500, Des Moines, IA 50309. Make the check out to FFBC and write “Scholarship” on the memo line.

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Archived issues of the FFBC newsletter are available on our web site: www.ffbciaowa.org.

Fifteen Minutes of Fame

by Bruce Carr

Fresh from his own fifteen minutes of nationwide fame last September as the minister who legally united two men in marriage in Iowa, the Rev. Mark Stringer returned unusually triumphantly to our podium in November. Unusually,



From left-to-right, Larry Hoch, David Twombly, and the Rev. Mark Stringer.

because Stringer (who has been pastor of Des Moines’s First Unitarian Church since 2001, and who first appeared an FFBC guest speaker in December 2005) doesn’t ordinarily come off as “triumphant,” either personally or religiously.

Stringer entertained, instructed, and moved us with a dramatic and often hilarious account of his experiences on August 31 and the days and weeks following. First there was the judge’s decision, then several frantic phone calls, and suddenly there were Sean and Tim and their wedding party—consisting mostly of print “newsies” and TV camerapersons—crowding the front lawn of Mark and his wife’s house not far from Roosevelt High School. The minister was attired in house-cleaning clothes, sandals, and a pastoral stole.

The ceremony went off quickly and joyously, and then people went away to their lives, leaving Mark to assemble his thoughts about what had led up to this signal moment in his ministry (on the anniversary of his own wedding ceremony!)—as well as in the civil life of Iowa and the entire country. One of the starting points, he realized, came in his seminary days, when he began to encounter seriously the works of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote of “this-worldliness.” This concept urges us to bear witness daily, to take just action **in this world**—which is exactly what Mark had found himself doing after coming to Iowa: standing up and speaking up to those who would restrict liberty on the grounds of one religious doctrine or another.

He said that speaking out for civil rights and for the mutual independence of religious and governmental institutions is **not** discrimination against theological beliefs, nor is it religious intolerance, but rather simply fighting to maintain the

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Flattery is something you hear occasionally and wish it were true.

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justice and equality which are guaranteed to all Americans by our Constitution. To this end, he has campaigned tirelessly for political justice and fairness, civility, and respect. The marriage ceremony he conducted uniting two men was just another instance of bearing witness.

It was a stirring witness that Mark Stringer brought to us, and truly inspiring. ▼

Some succeed because they are destined to, but most succeed because they are determined to.

Meeting Cancellation Policy

Following the necessity to cancel a meeting last winter because of weather, the FFBC Board of Directors developed a Meeting Cancellation Policy and Procedures.

The decision to cancel a meeting will be made by 6:00 p.m. the day prior to the meeting. An attempt by the board to notify the members of the cancellation will be made as soon as possible following the decision to cancel. The following methods will be used to contact the members:

- An e-mail will be sent to all members.
- For those who have provided an RSVP for the meeting, and when a current telephone number is available, the board will make phone calls.
- The web server will be contacted to post the notice.
- Local radio and television stations will be contacted. Some stations may announce cancellations on the air while others list cancellations on a web site.

It is recognized that there may be situations when all of these methods may be ineffective. Any member who is aware of a threatening weather forecast may contact a board member to ascertain whether the meeting will be held. Board member phone numbers are published in every issue of the newsletter. ▼

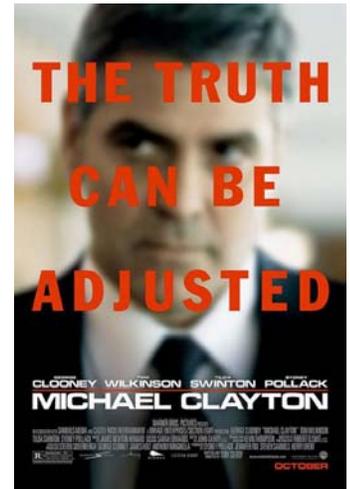
Procrastination is like a credit card: it works just fine until you get the bill.

The life you have lived doesn't have to be the only life you will ever have.

Michael Clayton

Starring George Clooney, Tom Wilkinson, Tilda Swinton, Sydney Pollack, Pamela Gray.

Directed and Written by
Tony Gilroy
2Hr



In the opening of the film, Michael Clayton, we hear a maniacal phone message from Arthur Edens, the chief litigating attorney for a highly respected law firm. The message speaks of the filth that he suddenly feels covering him and how he has to get rid of it. He states that he is covered with a stench that he will have to live with for the rest of his life. What he did was strip himself naked in a deposition of a \$3 billion class action lawsuit and chase the plaintiff about the room. Michael Clayton, played by George Clooney, is called in to fix everything. Although once a successful litigation attorney for the firm, he is now a fixer—called a miracle worker by his boss—but Michael prefers to refer to himself as a janitor—brought in to clean up messes. Arthur Edens is brilliantly played by Tom Wilkinson, and, although Arthur has gone off his medication for manic depression, he has discovered a horrible truth. The truth is that the client he has been representing solely for the last six years of his life had indeed known that the company's chemical herbicide would kill persons who relied on well water in neighboring farms. This is the filth that he can no longer tolerate. This is the filth that Michael has to clean up.

The name of the company that manufactured the poisonous product is U North, and its new chief legal counsel is Karen Crowder, artfully played by Tilda Swinton. As the new chief counsel, Karen is out to prove herself and is one who will stop at nothing to solve the company's problems, even arranging for murder, if necessary. The story is told in a clever, flash-forward/flash-back style that keeps the tension fresh at all times. It is a story that engrosses and surprises with plot twists and turns until everything is revealed toward the end. The writer and director, Tony Gilroy, finishes the film with a very satisfying sting turnabout for Michael. I recommend you see and enjoy Michael Clayton. Tony Gilroy shines in his directorial debut, and George Clooney again demonstrates his excellent acting ability.

—Gary Kaufman

FFBC

*First, Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

DECEMBER 2007

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From the Editor

Capitol Gains

If you haven't visited your Capitol recently, I urge you to do so. The restoration of the rotunda from the second floor up is nearing completion. Gone are the garish psychedelic wheat sheaves installed in the rotunda in the 1960s. Gone is the inappropriate and peeling hunter green paint just below the wheat sheaves. Gone are the dirt and grime on the Kenyon Cox lunettes that depict the history of mankind. Gone is the darkened patina on the twelve statues around the rotunda.

The wheat sheaves now shimmer again in gold leaf which they were intended to do when first placed there in the early twentieth century. The peeling green paint is replaced with the correct olive-grey color. The Kenyon Cox lunettes reflect the bright colors they originally had and are now lit from above. The statues of history, science, law, fame, literature, industry, peace, commerce, agriculture, victory, truth, and progress received a gilding of aluminum leaf coated with a compound to make them appear gold. The rotunda glows with the richness it was meant to convey.

The Capitol is beginning to resemble the glory its original artists envisioned. There is, however, much to be accomplished. The impressive tile design on the first floor was destroyed in 1956 and replaced with the ugly tiles that are there now. Plans call for the original design to be put back. The hole in the first floor rotunda, opened in 1917, will be closed again with thick glass and iron that originally kept it in place. The cafeteria, that for decades sat in the basement rotunda and sent clouds of greasy smoke into the building, has been moved to the basement north wing with exterior ventilation. It is a great improvement. The east steps will soon be completed, shored up with concrete blocks and other enhancements.

The Capitol is a working office building, and like all such structures, must move as much as possible with the times. Fortunately, the idea that something old is useless is no longer the mind set, and history and progress work together to make an impressive whole.

Outside, the unattractive asphalt parking lot to the west of the building has been replaced with the impressive West Capitol Terrace. The terrace slopes gracefully to the Historical Building and incorporates a large map of Iowa that includes the names of all 99 counties. Plantings feature native Iowa flowers and grasses. The terrace provides space for demonstrations, exhibits, musical performances, and seating. It makes the Capitol look most inviting.

The Capitol is open for tours Monday through Saturday. Tours are usually hourly, beginning at 9:30 a.m., with the final tour at 2:30 p.m. It is always wise to call before if you want a guided tour because tour times can vary, especially if large groups are scheduled. Saturday tours tend to be shorter since none of the offices are open on the weekend. Come and see for yourself this magnificent building that we all own.

—Steve Person

*You don't get harmony when everyone sings the
same note. Celebrate diversity.*

*God made diversity; man made discrimination.
Whom do you trust?*
