

OUR OPINION

There was much value in the Iowa Caucuses

JOURNAL EDITORIAL BOARD

The Iowa Caucuses have always been a bit misunderstood.

"What is it you do there?" friends from neighboring states ask. "You break up into groups and if you don't get enough votes for one candidate, you have to pick another? In a matter of minutes?"

Sure, the process seemed archaic, but the attention that preceded it wasn't. Since 1972, when Iowa became the first to hold its Democratic caucus, politicians have been donning jeans, posing with farm animals and sitting with the good ol' boys at coffee shops, just to see how it smells out in middle America.

The process may have made Iowans weary of politicians far sooner than the rest of the country, but it gave us access few get. At some of those town meetings, residents had the opportunity to ask tough questions, press for answers and maybe change a mind.

Jimmy Carter freely admitted caucus attention helped him gain traction. Others did, too. It was a great way for a newcomer to make a first impression — one



JESSE BROTHERS, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Sonia Ranschau, precinct chair for Plato Township, helps Pete Buttigieg voters decide on delegates during the Democratic caucus at Parkview Event Center in Rock Valley, Iowa, Feb. 3, 2020.

that might have carried him or her to a primary state and, hopefully, to the White House.

While the Iowa Caucuses

didn't always produce winners (the state's Tom Harkin, for example, won in 1992, Bernie Sanders edged by Pete Buttigieg

for first place in 2020), they introduced the country to politicians who otherwise wouldn't have been able to mount cam-

paings in more expensive or unwieldy states. Here, a "coffee with the candidate" could have an impact. Here, we could cull the herd so others didn't have to waste their time.

There was a lot of value for both the candidate and the state.

The Republicans see the value and say they will still start their contest here in 2024.

But the Democrats blinked, indicating they were going to make South Carolina the first nominating state. Nevada, New Hampshire, Georgia and Michigan were also in the mix. No Iowa? That could be because Joe Biden came in fourth in the 2020 Iowa Caucuses. If he decides to run for re-election, the president wouldn't face much in-party competition. Still, he shouldn't have thrown out the bath water because the baby didn't move in his direction.

Screwy as they may seem, the Iowa Caucuses have played a role. They may not have been the slickest way of selecting a candidate, but they did give those involved a feeling they were able to make a visible difference.

In other parts of the country, that's certainly not the case.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Lawmakers must act urgently for children

With the election behind us and Iowa's 2023 legislative session approaching, newly elected lawmakers must make good on their commitments along the campaign trail and turn words into action. There is a child care crisis, and lawmakers must act urgently to create bold, long-term solutions for our kids and families.

In addition to being a parent of two toddlers, I worked in child care for almost five years — starting at the age of 15. While the quality of care and education varied between the centers I worked at, I saw the need for additional staff and resources for these classrooms across the board. Some circumstances made it impossible to address every child's needs — the most challenging being staff-to-child ratios. Although centers try to avoid burnout to improve staff retention, many often experience no relief. That is why I advocate with Save the Children Action Network.

Children cannot wait for elected officials to act when it is convenient; they need solutions now. I hope this legislative session brings urgent and immediate action demonstrating a commitment to the child care workforce — ending the child care crisis for all families. Our children are counting on it. — **Samantha Rahn, Sioux City**



COACHING CLAUSE IS COMING TO TOWN

THE REGULARS

Population declines require a more complicated solution



Legislatures in our region will be convening soon, with workforce shortages being a major topic common to each of them. Although highly touted actions changing unemployment compensation took effect, the changes resulted in minimal employment growth. The real issue is that the number of working-age adults is stagnating. Fixing that issue goes beyond quick fixes or punching down on the less fortunate.

Over the past 10 years, the nation experienced historically low population growth. The areas of increased population were primarily larger cities and their surrounding areas.

Some will point to Texas as an example of significant growth. The reality is that people moved to the Austin, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio areas. Harris County (Houston), grew by over 600,000 people in the past decade. Over 1 million moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. However, over half of Texas counties saw their population decline. Fifteen percent lost more than 10 percent of their population in 10 years.

People are moving, and not just to warm locations. Colorado Springs saw its population increase by 15 percent

while Denver increased by 19 percent.

Places without mountains grew as well. The population of Hennepin and Ramsey counties, home of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, increased by over 150,000 over the past 10 years.

So why is the population growing at a higher rate in some communities and states, including those with cold weather? Taxes are often cited as the sole reason for population growth.

In researching this column, I found that the U.S. Census Bureau has developed a migration pattern map showing where younger people grew up and where they moved to as adults. For example, 65 percent of Sioux Falls residents stayed in Sioux Falls 10 years later, with another 8 percent remaining in South Dakota. However, nearly 4 percent moved to the Minneapolis-Saint Paul region.

In contrast, 74 percent of Twin Cities youth remained in their community 10 years later. Of the top 20 non-Minnesota communities where the youth moved, not one was in South Dakota. Higher-tax Minnesota's population growth in the last 10 years was roughly half the entire population of low-tax South Dakota.

So perhaps taxes, while important, aren't the most critical element for where people move. Another factor might be wages. The communities where people are moving to do have higher wages. However, they also tend

to have a higher cost of living.

Perhaps people see that there are more opportunities in areas with a nearby large metropolitan area. The Census Bureau notes that more than half of American counties lost population in the last ten years. It would make sense that people pursued opportunities ranging from career to quality of life.

Minnesota doesn't have oceans or mountains but does have lakes and rivers. Iowa also has lakes, though not as many. It also has rivers, quite a few more.

However, which state can more effectively market those bodies of water for fishing and watersports? Swimming was not recommended at many Iowa beaches throughout last summer. In fact, one closed after a death from a brain-eating amoeba. Iowa has not distinguished itself for such recreational activities.

The demographic problems facing lawmakers in attempting to address the workforce shortage situation are significant. This challenge is facing legislators and economic developers from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi basin. If there were a simple solution that would increase population outside of major metro areas, it would have been implemented. When the problems are complex, and the proposed solutions are simple, be wary.

Steve Warnstadt

A Sioux City resident, Steve Warnstadt is government affairs coordinator for Western Iowa Tech Community College. He is a former Democratic state senator and retired Army National Guard brigadier general. He and his wife, Mary, are the parents of one son and one daughter.