

OPINION



RICK MORAIN
GREENERY

The case against partisan city and school elections

If Senate File 23 were to become law in Iowa, all city and school elections would be partisan, and only partisan. Candidates in those elections would have their names placed on the ballot only by their political party; no independent candidates could run.

State Senator Brad Zaun, Republican of Urbandale, filed the bill on Jan. 9, and it was assigned to a subcommittee of the State Government Committee three days later. Zaun filed a similar bill last year. It went nowhere.

Almost all Iowa city and school elections have been nonpartisan for many decades. For all I know it's been that way since the creation of the state more than 150 years ago. I didn't try to research that history, and it doesn't really matter. The important fact is that at present, anyone of legal age in Iowa, whether affiliated with a political party or not, can take out nomination papers, get the required number of signatures on them by the filing deadline, and thereby become a candidate to help govern his or her city or school district.

It's a system that's worked just fine forever. Why change it?

Zaun's bill doesn't contain a preamble that explains what problems it seeks to fix. Zaun may believe that Iowa's local government

elections can be improved through subjection to partisan politics. I don't see how.

The most obvious goal of the bill is to openly inject partisanship even further down the government system, to city and school elections. That doesn't make sense. Cities and school districts don't need political parties. They need thoughtful council and board members who set policies, oversee staff selection, and develop local budgets. There's no role for partisanship in those duties.

Under Zaun's proposed new system, primary elections for city and school candidates would be held the first Tuesday of October in local election years, about a month before the general election. The bill provides that central committees of the parties, composed of party personnel within cities and school districts, would play a role in the new process prior to the primary election.

After reading Senate File 23, I don't understand how the central committee process would work. Normally, candidates from the two parties simply file nomination papers to become candidates in an election, with partisan central committees having nothing to do with candidate selection. The central committee requirement, it seems to me,

simply adds an unnecessary layer that increases the distance between candidates and voters.

There are reasons some people don't affiliate with a political party. Often that's because they see the good, and the bad, in both parties. In other words, they evaluate issues free of a partisan slant.

Those people – political independents – certainly should be allowed to bring their judgment ability to local government offices. They should not have to declare a party membership in order to offer themselves to city and school district voters.

In addition, it's sometimes hard to find candidates to serve on city councils and school boards, particularly in rural areas. Why make the problem worse by eliminating independents from the available leadership pool?

And of course, someone has to pay the cost of primary elections. I don't know if it will be the county, the city, the school district, or the political parties. I'm pretty sure it won't be a check written by the state.

As the old saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The current system ain't broke, and it certainly doesn't need fixing. I hope legislators of both parties reject Senator Zaun's bill.

DONALD N. BARDOLE
GUEST COMMENTARY

The magic on a summer's night

EDITOR'S NOTE: Donald Bardole is a 1965 graduate of East Greene High School. High school baseball games were played at the Rippey Ball Park.

There was magic in the night. It happened twice a week when the East Greene High School baseball team was playing at home. The sights, the sounds, and the smells all bound those hot summer evenings permanently to the memory of this country boy.

As a farm boy, I did not go to every home game, but the local Lions Club had the concessions booth and Dad was a member, so he worked there several times each summer. I could attend a few more times if I was spending the night in town with Grandma.

The game always started before dark. There was a fee for everyone who wanted to watch. The Lions Club was also in charge of collecting the entry fee at the gate. The fee seemed like a great, but fair sum for a boy of 10.

There was another way into the ballpark. The city skating rink was just beyond the left field fence and the ball field and skating rink backed up to the same corn field. A quick walk through the city park, through the rows of corn and into the crowd would buy free entry. No honest boy ever came in that way.

A summer of traffic took a toll on the road from the gate. No matter how slow the speed, cars kicked up great, rolling clouds of dark dust. It could be avoided.

"Drive off in the grass to keep that new car clean, Doc!"

The older boys competed to see who could build the greatest dust cloud. There were girls to impress.

The old and important folks parked their cars head into the ball field. The first base fence line was always parked full. They set in "private box" comfort, often with a "big league" game on the radio. A home run, double play, or a great catch by the home team would bring the staccato sound of their car horns.

The real fans always used the grandstand. It was built like those in a thousand other towns, rising high behind home plate. Ten, maybe a dozen rows of bleachers protected by chicken wire and a tin roof. Those benches for the committed stretched maybe 40 feet long. The top row was best. You might miss the high arch of a pop fly, but you had something solid at your back and the night breeze to keep you cool.

There was, in the middle of the top row, the announcer's box. An opening on the front let the announcer see out. Another opening on the back let the cool evening breeze in. No one - NO ONE - but the announcer

and an official score keeper was let in. It was a cloister for those in control.

Along each baseline were the dugouts. The 2-by-12 bench was protected by the ever-present chicken wire. Both ends were open. Just outside, close to home plate, was the "on deck" circle, a water jug set on the other end of the bench. In later seasons the jug was replaced by a fountain provided by the city fathers.

Before the game, a quick stop at the concession booth was expected. Popcorn, candy bars, pop, coffee, ice-cream bars, gum, and hot dogs were all available, if you had the money. They were all more expensive than up town. But that was all right, this was the ballpark.

Armed with a 10 cent bag of popcorn it was time for the magic to begin.

There was something about the mixture of smells. The dampness of early dusk blended with road dust, the faint odor of lime from the playing field, the smell of popcorn, and the overpowering odor of corn pollen. All those smells helped to weave the magic.

Just before the game began, the home town coach would jog down the third base line and lift the handle on the power pole. With that one motion, the lights were turned on and the field made ready for play. That simple act turned off the rest of the world.

Now, only those 18 men mattered. It was not like a play. You could not read the script of a ball game and know how it would turn out. It just happened. The skill and luck of those on the field created their own endings.

As their names were announced they trotted out of the dugout greeting each other with a back slap. As the opposing team was introduced, the home team greeted them with a warm handshake.

The umpire bawled "PLAY BALL."

The games, different as they were all carried common elements. The crack of the bat. A fielder lunging for a ball just out of reach. A runner sliding head first into home plate. Being out behind the stands to catch a foul ball and return it to the ump. The howl of the crowd if the call was good or bad. A friend to slap when you said, "I told you he was out!"

Dozens of ball games blur into one. Names of players never nationally known were, for a moment in time, ultimately important. And there was always a dream that one day my name would be "at bat."

Dreams pass as quickly as ball games.

The last out was made. The players crowded onto the field to wring the hands of the opposing players and

talk briefly about that really great play, debating if it was skill or luck.

The old timers and important folks in their cars parked along the base lines were the first out. Everyone else had to search out their cars and wait until a pathway opened to the road.

Those who lived in town began walking away from that place of magic.

The coaches assistant slowly began storing equipment in large canvass bags. Bats. Balls. Bases removed from their moorings. The water jug. The first aid kit. There were also other mysterious things that were simply not understood by the uninitiated.

When the stands were empty, the home town coach trudged down the third base line. This time the handle on the power pole was pulled down, secured, and locked.

Everything was suddenly dark. The two or three street lights along the drive were pale. The lights of the concession booth were dim as the last of the popcorn was given away. Candy and gum were returned to the refrigerator. The doors secured with a large padlock.

To be there when the lights went off was like losing your favorite ball. It took away all the magic that lived in a summer's night. Even two or three blocks away you knew it! That dark chased you down the street and into the house.

The next morning it was as if nothing had ever happened. The lime along the baselines and around home plate was gone long before the end of the game. The popcorn bags and candy wrappers were picked up by boys whose dads worked the concessions stand. You could not tell there had ever been anything happening in that place.

Occasionally, my friends and I would go there during the day just to poke around, check the lock on the concession door, the announcers booth, and the handle that controlled the lights. There might even be a coin found between the grandstand and the concession booth. Before the weeds grew, treasures lost the season before could be found under the seats.

We went there for ball practice as well. Being part of PeeWee League, Little League, and Babe Ruth League was expected. Some did very well and knew that one day they would play in a night game! Most of us were only fair to poor players, barely capable of fielding a ground ball.

During the day, we looked for the magic. We never found it.

When the lights went out on the last "town team" game, the magic was lost forever.

What ever happened to the magic on a summer's night.



NANCY DUNKEL
GUEST COMMENTARY

6 ways to help your student save for college

Nancy Dunkel is a Iowa Student Loan Liquidity Corporation board member

Chances are, you and your student will rely on multiple sources of funding for a college education. Common funding sources are your own savings and earnings, your student's savings and earnings, scholarships and loans.

Make a resolution to reduce the amount of future student loans with these tips.

1. Estimate how much your student will need.

Your student's choice of institution and type of education will greatly influence the total cost. You can start by helping your student determine an educational path suited for their potential career interests. Then, explore websites of in-state and out-of-state public and private colleges, community colleges or other training programs for current costs.

Check out the Resources for College Planning article at www.IowaStudentLoan.org/Plan to access online tools that can help narrow options and plan for expenses. Free online calculators are also available to help you compare estimated college expenses for the year your student will enter college.

2. Encourage savings by

your own example.

Foster an environment of saving by looking for discounts, reducing expenses and comparison shopping for everyday purchases. Discuss with your student how you spend less so you can save more for retirement, education and large purchases.

3. Work with your student on reducing expenses.

If your student quickly spends a large proportion of their earnings, gifts and savings, help set savings goals, come up with less-expensive alternatives and bargain shop. Gently used items may be available for a fraction of the cost of new ones. Delaying the purchase of the newest models can also reduce costs.

4. Explore interest-bearing accounts.

Leverage savings by depositing into interest-bearing accounts. Spend some time researching options and discussing the risks and advantages of different account types with your student. You may wish to make an appointment for yourself and your student with a specialist at your financial institution or an independent financial adviser to fully explore your options.

5. Understand how to reduce college costs.

If you realize you and your

student will not be able to save a significant portion of the total cost of a planned education by high school graduation, consider how to reduce the overall cost. Your student may choose to live at home to attend an institution within commuting distance, attend a less-expensive school for some or all of the required coursework, earn while learning with a skilled apprenticeship program, or work more before or during attendance.

The Resources for College Planning article for high school students at www.IowaStudentLoan.org/Plan is a good place to begin exploring available tools on how to reduce college expenses.

6. Monitor progress regularly.

Periodically check your and your student's progress toward the financial goals you've set together. It's also a good idea to investigate the expected costs now and then to better understand how estimated costs may change. You may consider matching contributions toward savings or rewarding your student financially for earning a large scholarship.

More Information
Visit www.IowaStudentLoan.org to access free college planning resources available from ISL Education Lending.



CHUCK GRASSLEY
U.S. SENATE

Foreign ownership of U.S. farmland

Q: What's new with your efforts to boost transparency in foreign investment of farmland?

A: Last year, Sen. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin and I teamed up and introduced the Farmland Security Act to shine a spotlight on foreign investment of U.S. farmland. Our bill requires the USDA to create an interactive public database so

that American citizens have access to foreign ownership disclosures reported to Congress via the USDA. This builds upon decades of my leadership to bring transparency to foreign ownership of U.S. farmland. As a then-member of the House of Representatives, I wrote the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act enacted in 1978 that requires foreign nationals to

report U.S. farm holdings to the USDA. At my county meetings, I hear growing concerns from Iowans that foreign investment in finite farmable acres will have a detrimental impact on prosperity and opportunity for family farms to be passed down from one generation to the next. Alarm bells are ringing around the country-

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Send us a letter

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The deadline is 3 p.m. Monday.