



**REVIEW OF IOWAPOLITICS.COM FORUM FEATURING STATE PARTY CHAIRS  
MICHAEL KIERNAN (Iowa Democrats) AND MATT STRAWN (Iowa Republicans)  
Thursday, January 14, 2010**

The comments below are paraphrased and are not verbatim. No attempt to interpret or change comments has been inserted in this summary, any intentional additions are clearly denoted with brackets, i.e. “[...]”.

**Moderator:** Lynn Campbell, Des Moines Chair of iowapolitics.com

**Panelists:** Michael Kiernan, Iowa Democratic Party Chairman  
Matt Strawn, Republican Party of Iowa Chairman

**Lynn Campbell:** Welcome and introductions. The precinct caucuses for the State of Iowa are on Saturday, January 23. Why did this change [from a weeknight]? Did the parties work together on this decision? Were those of Jewish faith who recognize the Saturday Sabbath considered?

**Matt Strawn:** The parties are usually separate, but worked together on the caucus issue. We made a joint decision to try to increase participation. Historically, the other caucuses have been held on Saturdays, but precinct caucuses were held during the week. We switched to Saturday afternoon at 1 p.m. to try to increase participation. We always try to accommodate religious schedules, and are respectful of faith differences.

**Michael Kiernan:** The idea has been brought up in the past, and we worked together. The Democratic National Convention really looks at participation levels: the switch has been talked about for several years. We decided to try it out.

**LC:** Why was the afternoon time selected? The Jewish Sabbath ends at sundown.

**MS:** Several reasons: partly in respect of time, because it does take a while for the caucus process. Those with young children value being home a little earlier. In the case of inclement weather, roads should be cleared by early afternoon and late-night travel can be avoided, particularly for those in rural areas.

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**LC:** Looking ahead to the 2012 presidential election cycle, will the Saturday precinct caucus remain in effect?

**MK:** We'll see how it goes. It is important that we can say to the national committee [DNC] that we tried something new in an off year. So if it goes well, it may remain in effect for the 2012 caucuses.

**MS:** I agree.

**LC:** Walk us through the caucus process.

**MS:** Well, the first thing that would happen if you walked into a Republican caucus is you would change your registration from a Democrat or Independent to a Republican. (*laughter*) Because we are not electing anyone other than the delegation for the county convention, any citizen can bring their ideas about policy positions to the table. This really helps craft the planks of the platform.

**MK:** March and April are the dates for ladder moving. The precinct caucus is a wonderful opportunity for voices to be heard.

**LC:** Where do constituents go for their precinct caucus? Is this the same location as their polling location?

**MK:** Go to [www.iowademocrats.org](http://www.iowademocrats.org) and type in your address, your precinct caucus location will pop right up.

**MS:** [www.iowagop.org](http://www.iowagop.org): some communities have several locations, other counties (such as Linn) are centralized and may only have one.

*\*Both the Democratic and Republican parties have over 1700 precinct caucus locations for the 23<sup>rd</sup>.*

**LC:** Iowa is the first in the nation to caucus. This is a mid-year election, so why is it important?

**MS:** Our system of government is complicated. Its important for citizens to get involved to try and change things. The town hall meetings of last semester were a great example of this. Citizens can show up and speak about or make a case for a certain issue, and help define the platform.

**MK:** Caucuses are a great way to bring friends and neighbors together, to really discuss the issues of the day.

**MS:** Over the years, the national media members continuously comment on how educated the citizens of Iowa are.

**LC:** Attorney General Tom Miller [IA] is fairly certain that Iowa will stay first: do you agree? Do you work together to keep us first?

**MK:** I am cautiously optimistic that Iowa will retain its status as the first caucus state. There is a vigorous battle to keep us first; Attorney General Miller has done a lot for us.

**MS:** Also cautiously optimistic that Iowa will retain status.

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- LC:** Traditionally in early February, is there a better time?
- MS:** I have a family, so I do enjoy it a little later.
- MK:** As long as we are #1, first in the nation, I don't care about the date.
- LC:** What about absentee voting in caucuses? This has been discussed as a change at the national level.
- MS:** No matter the changes, it is vital to maintain the integrity of the caucuses. No matter what we look at, we need to ensure that the process is secure.
- MK:** This is certainly a national-level conversation, and we want to be very careful: we don't want other states perceiving us as a primary. We want to increase participation in the caucus, not become a primary.
- LC:** The Democratic Party had a lot of success with absentee voting in the 2008 election.
- MK:** We need to be very careful; the precinct caucus is a different situation.
- LC:** What about the super delegate changes in the Democratic Party?
- MK:** The changes aren't set, still being discussed. I look forward to the conversation at the first meeting of the rules and bylaws committee.
- MS:** With the Republican Party, delegates don't get pledged until state convention in June, when Republicans unite and come together.
- LC:** What else about caucuses should we know about?
- MK:** It's worth it just to stop by and take part of the conversation.
- LC:** How about the upcoming elections in the State of Iowa? There are currently four Republicans who have announced plans to campaign for governor in 2010. Governor Culver just gave his Condition of State address on Tuesday, and some Republicans in Iowa feel that he may be vulnerable this year.
- MS:** It's not just some Republicans in Iowa, it's the people in Iowa who vote and see Governor Culver as a vulnerable candidate. If you look at what the state needs right now, its leadership. We'll have a competitive primary, and I think that is healthy. Republicans want to make that decision for themselves. It's a very exciting time to be a Republican in Iowa right now.
- MK:** I disagree. If you look at the big picture, the national economy has had an enormous downturn, the state has gone through the 4<sup>th</sup> largest natural disaster in the country, and the budget has been balanced every year. Look at I-JOBS: these are long-term investments in the state. I think that Governor Culver and his leadership team have done a wonderful job.
- LC:** Terry Branstad recently announced his fundraising figures, and in the last quarter of 2009 he reported \$1.5 million, which is more than Governor Culver raised in 2008.

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- MK:** I can't give away all the secrets! *(laughter)* I haven't broken that down to see if it's smaller or larger donors .... Terry Branstad is going to need every cent of that money to get through the Republican primary.
- MS:** Republicans all across the state of Iowa send in an average of \$26/person. It's the new donors: \$10, \$15, they all add up.
- LC:** What about Jonathan Narcisse, a former Des Moines School board member? He recently announced that he would run for governor either as an Independent or a Democrat.
- MK:** I'm not going to speculate on his intentions. I've worked with him on a lot of different issues. Obviously, everyone has the right to run for office.
- MS:** Time will tell.
- LC:** What about the six Republican candidates who are in the running for Congressman Boswell's seat?
- MS:** It's all about which candidate lines up with the voters. Leonard Boswell has consistently voted in line with Nancy Pelosi, and that has had several negative effects for Iowa. The 3<sup>rd</sup> District sees the need for real change. Competitive primaries are important for Republicans.
- MK:** If the argument is that he [Boswell] has been in office since the 80s, then Sen. Grassley should concede the election because he's been there since the 50s. Leonard Boswell has served the 3<sup>rd</sup> District well, even with district lines being re-drawn: he has been elected in two districts.
- LC:** Speaking of district lines, with 2010 being a census year, it is likely that Iowa will lose a Congressional seat. Do the parties influence redistricting?
- MK:** The parties keep out of that process, and don't really play a role.
- MS:** Iowa does well keeping parties out of redistricting.
- MK:** Iowa is a state that works together and keeps elections clean.
- LC:** What about the loss of a seat? This would mean condensing: currently there are three Democrats and two Republicans.
- MS:** If you mean, how would I feel about Representatives Braley and Loebsack getting their districts combined, well of course! *(laughter)* We're focusing on the 2010 elections right now.
- LC:** And there are four Democratic candidates facing Grassley.
- MK:** Whoever gets the Democratic nomination, I think it'll be the race of Grassley's career. A lot of Iowans are disappointed with Grassley: he wanted to work on a bipartisan healthcare bill, but came back to the town hall meetings and spoke about death panels and pointing a gun on Grandma. Not talk that Iowans want to hear.
- MS:** Senator Grassley has a long record. His values haven't changed one bit. He is in every county, every year, and most importantly he is working while he is there.

- LC:** Are our November elections yet to be determined by our legislative activity, or is the table set?
- MK:** Nothing is set. Obama has been in office one year. By the time fall rolls around, the mood of the country will be very different. Healthcare will be passed; there will be a lot of changes.
- MS:** We do know what has happened over the last year in the Iowa legislature. Recruiting success have me excited. There are several people who are willing to put their lives on hold and run for office. It is the untold stories: quality people who are planning to run for Secretary of State, some who have not yet announced looking at Auditor...
- MK:** Look at the environment of recent years: there have been two special elections, and the Democrats overwhelmingly won both. Back to the state budget: Democrats can invest after the floods – fire houses, bridges, roads. Democrats are concerned with moving the state forward.
- LC:** How do Democrats keep the registration advantage? What can Republicans do to overcome this?
- MK:** One major way is that the Democrats keep in touch with their base. People voted for change. Iowans want to come together and move the state forward. People will see that we stepped up in time of crisis. Some people try to say “pay as you go”- you wouldn’t have gotten any Federal money [after the flood]. Long term investments in the state, like healthcare reform, which has been discussed for 60 yrs.
- MS:** There is talk at length about I-JOBS: now it is becoming a flood recovery bill. Job loss has gone up a full percentage point, unemployment is continuing to rise. A child born today will still be paying off Governor Culver’s debt when they graduate high school in Iowa. Republicans have the message – we need to unleash the entrepreneur spirit in this state, that’s what creates jobs. People see a majority and a government who are out of touch with what the people want.
- MK:** Interesting. Terry Branstad borrowed almost \$1 billion in today’s dollars to fund the communications project that is now considered wasteful. He raised sales taxes twice, and raised the gas tax. Democrats didn’t raise taxes. I-JOBS: it’s always been about long-term investment. Democrats didn’t raise the gas tax or sales tax twice. The last thing we can afford is higher taxes. You can’t have it both ways. Here there is a candidate for governor who bonded almost a billion dollars...
- MS:** The 10% cut, why was that necessary? Democrats spent too much. The money came from school districts. Those who have prudently saved now are being told that they need to go into their reserves to make up for overspending. This will lead to increased property taxes.
- MK:** That’s what families do, dip into savings. Terry Branstad raised sales taxes twice, and brought casinos to Iowa. I think its hypocritical.
- MS:** There will be a contrast for Iowa voters in 2010. Our state had warnings: our Governor last year signed the largest budget in Iowa’s history. Eventually it was balanced, as the law requires.
- LC:** Could the Democrats promise that they won’t raise taxes if they retain their positions?
- MK:** I can’t say, but the Governor and those elected have said it’s off the table. So it’s off the table.

- MS:** It might not be taxes, but what about fees, or usage charges.
- MK:** Again, Republican former Governor Branstad raised sales taxes twice and the gas taxes.
- LC:** What about the growing Tea Party here in Iowa? How does that affect the Republican Party?
- MS:** I had given a speech in Greene County and stopped to get gas, where I saw a couple with a bumper sticker on their car for the Tea Party. We got to talking and they told me they had been at the rally at the Capitol for the Tea Party, and asked, "When are your meetings?" They didn't ask "when are your conventional meetings," they weren't speaking in the language of an activist. They were speaking as a frustrated citizen, and were getting involved.
- MK:** With the Republican running for governor who decreased federal deductibility, people feel disenfranchised. It's an exciting year for us, voters will make a choice.
- LC:** You've both been Party Chairs for almost a year. What do you view as your biggest success?
- MS:** Changing the focus of the party, preparing and believing that we can make a difference. What has motivated all these people to run? The Republican Party is coming together. Republicans are speaking with one voice. I look forward to taking back Terrace Hill and giving the new Governor a Republican legislative majority.
- MK:** Running a ground game, and how we run campaigns. I run a team, and we continue to improve. We bring all parties together.
- LC:** Some moderates are concerned with a lack of civil discourse between the parties.
- MS:** There are issues that we work together and increase civility. We also have passionate disagreements, which is healthy. We can disagree but not be disagreeable people. We have competing visions: we fight fair and fight hard. At the end of the day, I still raise my family here, we are still Iowans.
- MK:** We do work together. We also believe in future generations. I'd like to thank Chair Strawn for being good to work with – as long as he fights fair (*laughter*).
- LC:** Thank you for your attendance. Mediacom will broadcast this discussion on MC22 on:
- Monday, January 18: 2:00 p.m.
  - Wednesday, January 20: 3:00 p.m.
  - Sunday, January 24: 11:00 a.m.
  - Same times on Jan 25, 27, and 31.

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