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WHITE FLIGHT WITHOUT LEAVING HOME

by Jonathan Wilson



JONATHAN WILSON

In an act of too typical cowardice, the Iowa Legislature several years ago adopted the Iowa Open Enrollment Law. The law allows parents to send their kids to any school district in the state regardless of where they live. Obviously, the most likely candidate to receive students would be a school district that joins the one where the parents reside. School funding in this state is driven by enrollment numbers. While the law is couched deceptively as a law to give people greater freedom of choice, the unspoken legislative objective was to bleed small school districts to death financially as parents in marginal districts choose to send their kids to larger districts. Therein lay the legislative cowardice; the scheme obviated the alternative necessity of mandating closure of school districts that had shrunk to an inoperable size.

Adopting the law gave rise to the unavoidable law of unintended consequences, primarily for school districts like Des Moines with racial desegregation responsibilities, a growing minority student population, and surrounded by affluent lilywhite suburbs. The unintended consequences were *not* unanticipated consequences. The legislature gave school districts like Des Moines a one year exemption to figure out what the legislature had been unable to do: how to keep the law from aggravating the phenomenon of white flight that was well underway as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education* and installation of I-235. To make sure that the law would please the Sheriff of Nottingham, no provision was made for free transportation to a neighboring school district. That assured that it would be used predominantly by more affluent parents who happen to be predominantly white.

It works like this: a school district is required to accept transferring students only if there's room. That makes superficial sense. It would seem unreasonable to require a school district to accept students if there weren't space available. In my experi-

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, June 2 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our guest speaker will be Iowa First Lady Christie Vilsack.

- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, May 30 to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or 288-2500 by phone.

ence, however, “having room” for whatever number of students is a function of classroom space and teachers, i.e., about 100% of the overhead of operating a school. The law provides, therefore, that if a receiving school district can take in another student without the need to add any overhead expense, the transfer must be permitted. The receiving school district, without any added overhead expense, gets state *and local* tax dollars for the transferring student. Annually, the Des Moines school district writes a net check to its affluent suburban neighbors totaling more than \$1,000,000.

It’s obviously inequitable to force an underfunded school district that serves predominantly low-income students, to subsidize districts that, by definition, don’t need the money. Aside from that inequity, the open enrollment scheme is bad policy both democratically and educationally. It’s undemocratic because it requires parents to forego the right to vote for school board members who will be spending their tax dollars or making educational decisions for their kids.

More importantly, it encourages folks to flee a school district perceived to be poor, rather than staying to fix things. Folks without kids attending a troubled school district won’t be motivated to help solve problems like folks who have the education of their own kids on the line. This “un-gored ox” phenomenon is aggravated when those opting out are the educated, affluent, influential citizens, and those left behind are just the opposite. This has been going on for fifty years in every metropolitan area in this country. It’s no wonder that urban school districts have re-segregated racially and continued to decline. Separate is no more equal today than it was when it was practiced unapologetically before *Brown*. Leave it to us to Americanize apartheid, and to the Iowa Legislature for helping folks participate in apartheid without even leaving home. That’s what’s happened. It’s no wonder that white folks are just a little anxious about the browning of America. When the numbers are there, there’s an unspoken fear that they’ll do to our progeny what we and our forbearers have done to them.



—Jonathan Wilson

May Speaker Review

by Bruce Carr



A VOICE in the debate. A VOTE when it matters.
A VICTORY for equal representation.

Our guest speaker in May was Chuck Wolfe, president and CEO of the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund and Leadership Institute—the nation’s leading organization that identifies, trains, and supports openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political officials, candidates, and campaign staff.

A powerful and effective speaker, Wolfe outlined the current political situation from the Victory Fund’s perspective. The Fund was begun by the Human Rights Campaign in 1991 at a time when there were fewer than 50 openly GLBT officials in the USA. Fifteen years later, with the aid of funding and training from the Victory Fund, there are 356 of them, plus, of course, uncounted thousands more still in the closet. Still, there are some 511,000 elective and appointive political officers in the country. Ten of the fifty states have *never* had an openly gay official.

Wolfe stressed the importance of candidates’ dealing with—defusing—the “issue” of non-heterosexual orientation by putting it on the table forthrightly, and thus taking it away from our opponents as a weapon. To that end, the Victory Fund Leadership Institute’s Candidate and Campaign Trainings provide comprehensive, nonpartisan programs for current and future openly LGBT candidates, campaign personnel, and community leaders. The trainings offer attendees the intellectual and technical skills required for success through practical training from proven campaign professionals. Participants are empowered to become viable players in the political life of their communities. All the resources and technical assistance are there that we will use to “change the face and voice of American politics.”

Wolfe also recommended the Victory Fund’s

Iowa First Lady Makes Second Appearance at FFBC Scholarship Awards Meeting

Since becoming the First Lady of Iowa in January 1999, Christie Vilsack has worked to improve literacy, expand opportunities at community libraries, and focus attention on issues concerning Iowa's children.



In April 2000, Mrs. Vilsack created Iowa Stories 2000, a statewide literacy initiative designed to help communities better understand the importance of local libraries, early childhood reading, and family storytelling. Through Iowa Stories 2000, Mrs. Vilsack's projects have included the Literacy Communities initiative to help communities identify unmet literacy needs, the annual Kindergarten Book project in which every kindergartner in the state is given a specially selected book, and the Glass Apple Award, created in 2005 to honor the state's outstanding teacher-librarians, and to call attention to the critical role certified teacher-librarians play in educating children in an Internet-based, high-tech world.

The First Lady also recently created an online, interactive book club for middle school students called "In the Middle." More than 400 children from across Iowa participate in the club, discussing selected books with each other and Mrs. Vilsack.

Referring to libraries as the "souls of Iowa communities," the First Lady works to strengthen libraries through her support of Enrich Iowa, a program that partners the State of Iowa with libraries to provide Iowans with more educational resources. Mrs. Vilsack has visited more than 450 of the state's approximately 560 public libraries where she reads to children and talks about books with Iowans of all ages.

Mrs. Vilsack has been a teacher for 30 years. She is a graduate of Kirkland College in New York and earned her master's degree from the University of Iowa School of Journalism. Before moving to Des Moines, she taught eighth grade language arts in Mount Pleasant for 15 years and freshman English and journalism at Iowa Wesleyan College for six years. Now she makes Iowa her classroom, traveling to schools throughout the state, reading, conducting book talks, and promoting the opportunities Iowa has to offer young people.

Mrs. Vilsack also has focused attention on the health issues facing teenage girls. In November 2000, she hosted the second Governor's Conference For Women's Health that centered on critical health issues facing young women. She convened a group of teenagers from across Iowa to help her set the agenda and activities for the conference.

In partnership with Iowa's Secretary of State Chet Culver, Mrs. Vilsack sponsors the Capitol Project, which brings high school students to the Capitol during the legislative session to experience lawmaking firsthand. Mrs. Vilsack also speaks to students statewide about the importance of good citizenship and political involvement.

The First Lady served on the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service, and she encourages participation in community service and volunteerism throughout the state.

Mrs. Vilsack hosts numerous events to draw Iowans to Terrace Hill, the Governor's Mansion, which she considers a home for all Iowans. She has published a new Terrace Hill cookbook, a collection of recipes and stories celebrating Iowa's diversity. As a member of The Terrace Hill Education Committee, she helped produce an interactive CD ROM of Terrace Hill that public schools and public libraries received in the spring of 2003.

The Governor and the First Lady have two children. Jess is an attorney who lives in Des Moines, and Doug graduated from Colorado College in May 2003. ▼

United 93

Starring
Opal Alladin,
Erich Redman,
Ben Sliney,
Susan Blommaert,
Peter Hermann



Directed by Paul Greengrass

2Hr 1 Min

United 93 is a movie that is a very emotional ride for the viewer. It is a non-sense view of the flight of United 93, the one plane that was hijacked on September 11, 2001, that did not reach its intended target. The director, Paul Greengrass (*The Bourne Supremacy*), took great pains to talk with all of the families who lost members on United Flight 93 and received their permission to do the movie. A number of the people in the film are the actual people who were involved in the control towers, National Air Traffic Control, and military on that fateful day. There is no background development of the characters; we only see what they experienced on that day.

The film is especially good at building pace. Initially, everything is a little uneventful, except for the hijackers who were mentally preparing for their undertaking by saying their prayers. It is also a movie in which you experience heightened emotions because you already know what is going to happen, at least in an ill-defined way. Viewers will experience emotions in the movie in their own manner, but as the film introduces the passengers by showing them getting onto the plane, it is strange knowing that they are all going to die—yet they are unaware of anything being wrong. They are carrying out their lives in the way passengers always carry out their lives on an airplane.



It was especially frustrating to witness the confusion of the air traffic controllers as planes individually stop communicating,

change their course, and ultimately disappear from the air traffic controllers' screens as they hit the World Trade Center. It is also very frustrating to witness the lack of effective response from the military and our leaders. There were those who made timely decisions and those who didn't. The most striking of those who didn't was the President and the Vice President, neither of whom seemed able to make the decision that, if the military intercepted a hijacked plane, they could shoot it down. But as we know now, the President was listening to a reading of *My Pet Goat* as a photo op with school children, and waited seven minutes to leave and address the crisis situation after he had been told of the second plane slamming into the World Trade Center. That he "didn't want to scare the children at the elementary school" has been his stated excuse. His order to allow the shooting down of a hijacked plane did not happen until 10:18 a.m. that morning, long after the third plane had hit the Pentagon and fifteen minutes after United Flight 93 had crashed in Pennsylvania. Communication was so bad between the branches of government that day that the military were not even informed of the hijacking of United Flight 93 until four minutes after its crash!

The President, who likes to be known as "the decider," was failing to make a decision that day for whatever reason. Those on United Flight 93 made theirs. With the miracle of modern technology, those aboard the flight found out the intention of their hijackers was not a ransom and release of those on board as they had been told by the hijackers. Instead, their aim was to use the airplane as a bomb to strike at the United States. With this realization, those onboard mobilized and attacked the hijackers. It took a great deal of courage and ingenuity, but they took control of the situation as best they could. One hopes that all of us would have that courage.

I highly recommend this movie. It has a greater impact than I expected, and the way the movie ends is more effective than if the director had used a traditional approach. It creates an emotional ending that no one in the audience can ignore.

—Gary Kaufman

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excellent and non-editorial, Web-based news feed of stories relevant to our community's issues. The Gay & Lesbian Leadership SmartBrief is the premier source of news and information for gay and lesbian elected and appointed officials; and business, organization, and community leaders. Twice weekly, SmartBrief delivers the most important news stories via e-mail to the "grass-tops" decision-makers and leaders of the nation's LGBT community. Launched in January 2005, SmartBrief provides the news, research, best-practices, and leadership stories that we need to stay successful. You can go to www.smartbrief.com to subscribe.

—Bruce Carr

“Wires”

by Jay Thompson

Wires report torn-word from burb to town.
How before police stirred, wind took him down.
His best shirt, a shatter of cotton glass.
First responders--wheeled-wonder--fenders passed.
Wires are smart, stay silent with dumb ditch.
They barb with nature, not man, hate can clip
The daylight from their long lines of silver,
So hang string remains of Mathew Shepard.

—Jay Thompson

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com no later than May 30 for the June 2 meeting. Our guest speaker will be Iowa First Lady Christie Vilsack. It is also the meeting where we recognize our FFBC scholarship recipients for 2006.



Thanks to Allen Vander Linden, FFBC vice-president, for hosting the May 5 meeting in Jonathan's absence. Thanks, also, to Mike Baldwin for his introduction of our May speaker, Chuck Wolfe of the Victory Fund.



Thanks to FFBC member Fred Mount for lending his vintage 1957 Ford Thunderbird for use with the FFBC booth at Pride Day activities, June 11.



Congratulations to Jay Thompson for his poem "Epiphany" which won the 2005 Iowa Chapbook Award.

Ennis Del Mar

by Jay Thompson



He is the sheep led to envelope's slaughter,
brokeback who strays too close to twisted wolf,
loses blood, Actor Category,
and custody of two daughters.
Hate makes a mockery of his wounds.
He is the sheep led to big-screen slaughter.
Crash—Get the Picture.
Best Killer goes to Oscar.

—Jay Thompson

