

## Iowa Politics Roundup: Democrats Kick Off General-Election Campaign at State Convention

Written by Lynn Campbell  
Friday, 11 June 2010 13:13

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Four days after the primary election, between 800 and 1,000 Iowa Democrats are gathering for this year's Democratic state convention in a rally-like setting at the Polk County Convention Complex.

It will be Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Roxanne Conlin's first big speech since capturing the nomination on Tuesday.

"Speaking to the delegates, formally accepting the nomination ... I think it is a big deal," said Iowa Democratic Party Executive Director Norm Sterzenbach. "It will be a big moment."

While Labor Day weekend is the traditional kickoff to the general-election campaign, the state convention sets the tone for how the summer campaign is going to go, Sterzenbach said. Iowa Democrats last week moved into a new coordinated-campaign headquarters in Des Moines, and that campaign officially opens next week.

Governor Chet Culver told reporters right after he voted Tuesday that "it's on now."

Saturday's convention is expected to produce few surprises, but there will be at least one point of contention: One of the proposed amendments to the Iowa Democratic Party's constitution says that precinct caucuses shall not be held on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday. That proposal likely stems from a delegate who wasn't happy about this year's caucuses being held on a Saturday.

"Some didn't approve this year's Saturday caucuses," said Sterzenbach, who said it was a worthwhile effort in a nonpresidential year to see if it works. "I don't think Iowa Democrats are likely to have caucuses on a Saturday in the future. When we did it this year, we weren't nominating anybody. The presidential caucuses are different. Holding them on a Saturday can make it more difficult for some religious groups and just may not be overall the best time. We don't want to make it more challenging for people who might have some religious objections to the timing of it."

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But Sterzenbach said that the amendment to prohibit the caucuses from being held on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday will "not necessarily be successful in passing." He said he opposes it because it could conflict with what the Democratic National Committee says about the timing of Iowa's caucuses.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal (D-Council Bluffs) agreed with Sterzenbach's assessment. "I think it's important for Iowa to do whatever it takes to stay number one in the country," he said. "Tying our hands in that respect probably isn't a good idea."

The keynote speaker Saturday will be U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota. Klobuchar is described as an up-and-comer in Democratic circles, and there is always speculation about the presidential aspirations of national figures coming to Iowa (because of its first-in-the-nation caucuses). However, because President Barack Obama is expected to seek a second term in 2012, her political future isn't expected to be a major issue this weekend.

"She's a progressive senator from a neighboring state. She's a Midwesterner who comes from a state that has a lot of the same issues that Iowa does," Sterzenbach said in describing Klobuchar's appeal. He said she is a close ally of U.S. Senator Harkin, much like the late U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone was. "She's been here before ... [and] addressed our delegation at the national convention. Most delegates wouldn't have had the chance to see or meet her yet. She's not one of the ones that is always on the newscast, but she's a pretty impressive senator, very intelligent; she speaks very intelligently and passionately about progressive causes."

### Republicans Look to Unite as Branstad and Culver Trade Jabs

Days after Iowa voters had their say in the primary election, candidates are already trying to consolidate their power bases and woo voters for the November general election -- and are taking shots at each other in the process.

On the morning of the primary, Culver was already going after former Republican gubernatorial nominee (and former Governor) Terry Branstad, saying he "cooked the books" during his time in office and wants to force women considering an abortion to view an ultrasound. He also said Branstad wants to do away with the state's preschool program.

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And Branstad on Wednesday criticized Culver on issues ranging from the state budget to I-JOBS to ethics during remarks before several hundred at an Iowa Association of Business & Industry conference.

Branstad cited the "film-office fiasco," Culver's letter to Iowa Racing & Gaming Commission members asking them to approve casino licenses for all four applicants, and the former Department on Aging director that "acted as a dictator" and "muzzled" his staff. Branstad campaign spokesperson Tim Albrecht said he expects Culver to come out swinging, and said "we'll be ready one way or another."

"When they [Culver supporters] formed Iowans for Responsible Government, that pretty much started the general election," Albrecht said. "So we're forced to battle those lies and distortions."

Branstad, who served as Iowa's governor for 16 years, seems to have made the first big move in the general-election campaign for governor. On Thursday morning, he announced a new television ad called "Leader" that outlines his endorsements from newspapers and political figures. However, the socially conservative wing of the Republican Party wants to get its two cents in before Branstad gets too far down the campaign trail.

Chief gubernatorial rival Bob Vander Plaats -- who secured more than 40 percent of the vote with a socially conservative message and said after losing Tuesday that he plans to help Branstad "unite the Republican Party and unite the state of Iowa" -- has yet to endorse Branstad. The two have plans to meet sometime in the near future, Branstad said, and he said he hopes Vander Plaats and the Iowa Family Policy Center will "recognize that we share their values. ... We want to work together and we want to put together a broad-based group of coalitions to bring the change needed so that the better days in Iowa will be ahead of us, not behind us," Branstad said.

Vander Plaats said he "doesn't believe in blanket endorsements," and that the two will "put our differences on the table and talk about some brutal facts within the party."

The Iowa Family Policy Center congratulated Branstad on his win but has yet to say whether it

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will stand by its commitment to sit out the election if Vander Plaats was not the nominee.

Branstad has yet to make a choice regarding a running mate. The former governor said he is looking for someone with conservative views, leadership ability, and a strong work ethic. The choice will be made some time before the June 26 Republican state convention, and Branstad wasn't willing to tip his hand this week and narrow the field.

"I think there are several possibilities," Branstad said. "Certainly I have a lot of respect for the people that ran for governor, both the ones that stayed in through the primary and some of the others that dropped out previously, but there are many others beside those as well that we will take a look at and consider."

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### Republican Team Comes Together to Tour Turnout

Iowa Republicans on Thursday touted their top-of-the-ticket candidates led by former Governor Terry Branstad and declared that people are ready for a change from the current Democratic administration.

"Those 226,000 people that turned out to vote on Tuesday for our candidates, that is the 16-year high for turnout in a Republican primary," said Republican Party of Iowa Chair Matt Strawn. "Now compare that to our friends on the other side of the aisle. Preliminary estimates show that is the lowest Democrat turnout in this state in over 60 years."

About 75 people attended Thursday's kickoff to Republicans' three-day "Road to Victory Tour," held on a dark, stormy day at Branstad's campaign headquarters in Urbandale. Branstad, Republican nominee for attorney general Brenna Findley, and Republican nominee for state treasurer Dave Jamison joined together to launch the statewide tour two days after their primary-election wins.

The three GOP candidates quickly launched into attacks on Democratic incumbents.

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"I never imagined I'd be doing this again," said Branstad. "But I never imagined we'd have a Governor Chet Culver, either. I never imagined we'd have a governor that would put the state in the financial mess that we're in, that we would have the scandals involving the film office and now the Department on Aging and now we have the DCI [Department of Criminal Investigation] investigating this pay-for-play scandal with the Racing & Gaming Commission. ... This is starting to sound like Illinois."

Findley said one of the things she wants to do is clean up state government. "As I travel this state, people are ready for a change," she said. "We have the right team in place to lead Iowa's comeback and to get our state back on track."

The tour on Thursday took the Republican candidates to Ottumwa, Marion, and Bettendorf. It continues Monday in Council Bluffs and Sioux City, and Tuesday in Mason City, Waterloo, and Ames.

Culver took his own statewide tour this week, spending the first day after the primary election emphasizing what he said is one of the significant differences between him and Branstad. He announced a substantial expansion of the voluntary preschool program, while Branstad has said he'd cut funding for statewide preschool.

Strawn criticized Culver's preschool tour this week, saying it mixed his official duties as governor with his campaign.

### **Health Issue Forces Kiernan to Resign as Iowa Democratic Party Chair**

Fighting back tears, Iowa Democratic Party Chair Michael Kiernan announced that he would resign as chair because he's been diagnosed with a tumor; he said he chose to share the news publicly to avoid additional criticism of more staff turnover in connection with Culver.

"I cannot risk what we've built with this party and the elections and the decisions that will face

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the voters this November," Kiernan said. "This is bigger than me. This is about the party. There's too much at risk, and because of the speculation of the people that have left the campaign for various reasons in the past, we don't have the luxury. Another person stepping aside without an explanation just couldn't happen. ... People are quick to judge without the facts much of the time."

Kiernan, 35, explained to reporters during a brief news conference that he noticed in late January a lump below his right ear. After a battery of tests, he was diagnosed with a tumor in the deep lobe of his salivary gland. He'll be treated at the University of Iowa Hospitals and will require surgery. "I've had several positive signs that it is not cancer," he said. "But until they do the surgery, I will not know for sure."

"This is something pressing; otherwise, I would not quit the fight today," Kiernan said, his voice shaking. "I am stepping down because I need to focus on my health and my family. Otherwise, I would not leave this fight. ... I have tried to hold on as long as I could to make sure that this party was stable, and it is. The ground game is set for the fall."

The young chair -- elected in February 2009 -- said Culver did not want him to make the public announcement, but he felt he had to emphasize publicly that he's resigning for personal health reasons. "I want to be very clear about that because of much of the criticisms that are out there regarding Governor Culver," he said. "This governor seems to have dealt with so much, from floods to recessions, and now he's got a chair that has a tumor."

Details of the election for Kiernan's replacement have not been set. Vice Chair Sue Dvorsky will act as chair until a new chair is formally elected. No nominees have stepped forward for the position so far.

### **New Criminal Charges File in Iowa Film Office Case**

Minnesota resident and filmmaker Zachary LeBeau surrendered to arrest at the Polk County Jail and was released on \$10,000 bond in connection with the Iowa Film Office case.

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LeBeau was named in a new criminal complaint filed last week along with defendants previously named, Wendy Weiner Runge and Matthias Alexander Saunders, who are free on bail bond.

The complaint and affidavit contains one count of ongoing criminal conduct and 11 counts of first-degree fraudulent practice against Runge, Saunders, and LeBeau. They are accused of committing unlawful activity for financial gain on a continuing basis, engaging in deception, and knowingly making a false statement in writing for the purpose of procuring economic-development assistance from a state agency.

This involved about \$90 million for the making of 11 films.

Also charged in the new preliminary complaint are Polynation Pictures LLC, Maximus Production Services LLC, and The Scientist LLC.

*This weekly summary comes from [IowaPolitics.com](http://IowaPolitics.com), an online government and politics news service. Reporter Andrew Duffelmeyer and other correspondents contributed to this report.*