

## Iowa Politics Roundup: Branstad Gets Mostly Positive Reaction for Reynolds Pick

Written by Lynn Campbell  
Friday, 25 June 2010 12:48

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While most of the reaction to Republican gubernatorial nominee Terry Branstad's pick of state Senator Kim Reynolds (R-Osceola) as his running mate was positive, at least one key special interest group is still not ready to jump on board the four-term governor's bandwagon.

Iowa Family PAC Board Chair Danny Carroll said Thursday that "at this point nothing has changed" when it comes to the group endorsing a Branstad/Reynolds ticket.

"As far as the Iowa Family PAC is concerned, our expectations remain the same, whether it be the nominee for governor Terry Branstad or his lieutenant governor. We are looking for leaders who will take a strong position in defending life and marriage and the family."

Carroll said "we'll have to see if Senator Reynolds is that kind of a leader; we don't know a whole lot about her at this point." But he seemed to suggest the pick doesn't make that much of a difference for the group.

"The focus is still on the nominee," Carroll said. "Regardless of the lieutenant governor, the focus is still on Terry Branstad and Chet Culver."

Reynolds, a 50-year-old mother of three and grandmother of two, is in the midst of her first term in the Iowa Senate and served four terms as the Clarke County treasurer. Branstad insisted that

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Reynolds' sex wasn't a factor in his selection, saying "it just happens to be a coincidence."

Branstad explained that there's good chemistry between his family and Reynolds', and that they both have three grown children. He also touted Reynolds' work as a county treasurer for 14 years, modernizing the office and making the issuance of driver's licenses more convenient at less cost.

Reynolds pointed to the 115,000 unemployed Iowans, the potential billion-dollar deficit, declining test scores, and teacher layoffs but said she's optimistic about the future. She said she hopes to be a liaison between state and local governments, and said she's passionate about rural development.

"Iowans deserve better. We can do better, and we will do better," she said. "The state is kind of in rough shape right now. I truly believe that our best days are ahead of us."

Reynolds also said she's ready to step in as governor as necessary: "I know that's an important role of the lieutenant governor, and I would not have accepted this position if I wasn't ready."

Former Republican gubernatorial candidate Christian Fong said it was clear when he interviewed for the lieutenant-governor position that Branstad's team was not primarily looking for someone to attract support from special-interest groups, but for someone who was ready to be governor and who shared Branstad's beliefs.

"They wanted to know that there was an alignment of philosophy, not just on the issues but what government is about, what it's for, and what the priorities from the governor's office can and should be," Fong said. "So they were looking for someone and in Kim Reynolds they've found somebody that is philosophically aligned with Branstad, and I think that's the most important thing."

Pete Jeffries, senior counsel on Jim Nussle's 2006 gubernatorial campaign, said he thinks Reynolds will be well-received from all corners of the party -- fiscal conservative, social conservative and Main Street Republican.

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"If people measure her by her work experience and her legislative record, I think that the proof is in the pudding, and I would think that that's another step forward for the Branstad campaign," Jeffries said.

The Branstad campaign seemed aware of how the pick would be received by certain sectors of the party. Thursday afternoon the campaign issued a press release noting that former Republican 3rd Congressional District candidate Dave Funk -- who received 22 percent of the vote in that seven-way primary -- has endorsed the Branstad/Reynolds ticket. The press release pointed out that Funk is a Tea Party activist who "praises [the] choice of Reynolds as a party unifier."

Branstad's campaign also on Thursday released the endorsement of Republican National Committeeman Steve Scheffler -- president of the socially conservative Iowa Christian Alliance -- and Republican National Committeewoman Kim Lehman.

### **CULVER GETS BACKING FROM EDUCATORS**

The Iowa State Education Association (ISEA) has endorsed Governor Chet Culver in his bid for re-election, a move that will give him both the grassroots volunteer support from educators across the state as well as the financial support from voluntary contributions of members.

"Governor Culver continues to be a good friend of public education," said ISEA President Chris Bern. "As a former classroom teacher and a coach, Governor Culver understands the challenges facing educators in these difficult economic times. He is willing to listen to our concerns, and we feel he is the natural choice for our members."

The decision follows interviews that the teachers' union did with both Culver and Branstad. It was made by a vote of the ISEA-PAC Central Committee, which is made up of two Democrats and two Republicans from each of the ISEA's 19 regions. The ISEA executive board concurred with the decision.

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During Culver's interview, he pledged to keep his commitment to making teacher salaries a priority (Iowa has moved from 42nd in the nation in Fiscal Year 2005 to 26th), place educators at the table when discussions and decisions are being made on education reform, and ensure a world-class education for Iowa's public-school children.

Culver hailed the ISEA endorsement and touted increased spending for K-12 schools, preschool, and teacher pay despite the national recession.

Branstad Campaign Manager Jeff Boeyink said that since Branstad left office, Iowa students' rankings on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests for math and reading have fallen dramatically, putting Iowa in the middle of the pack. He also said it was Branstad's initiatives that provided needed resources to rural schools to attract beginning teachers and to reward those teachers performing at a high level.

"More than ever our schools need stable and predictable sources of revenue and a governor who keeps his promises," Boeyink said. "Governor Culver's reckless 10-percent across-the-board budget cut hit our public schools the hardest, and he has no plan for restoring the fiscal health of our state so we can keep our commitments to our schools and the students they teach."

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### Unemployment Dips Slightly in May

Iowa's unemployment rate declined to 6.8 percent in May from 6.9 percent in April, Iowa Workforce Development said, with the number of unemployed workers in the state standing at 115,400. The unemployment rate in May 2009 was 5.8 percent, with 96,200 people out of work.

"Iowa's hiring pattern in May closely mirrored the U.S. employment situation, as the hiring of temporary census workers drove most of the gain in nonfarm employment," said Elisabeth Buck, director of Iowa Workforce Development. "However, the recovery is expected to be broader in scope in the months ahead."

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Iowa's nonfarm employment grew by 300 jobs in May. The manufacturing sector lost 1,500 jobs in May, while trade and transportation lost 900 jobs, finance lost 800 jobs, and state government cut 500 positions. Other services added 900 jobs, and professional and business services added 700.

Professional and business services have added 5,700 jobs since May 2009, something Iowa Workforce Development said can be read as an encouraging sign because that sector was the first to lose jobs at the start of the recession. The education and health sector has also added 3,000 jobs since May 2009. Trade and transportation lost the most jobs since May 2009 (5,900), while leisure and hospitality lost 2,900.

Meanwhile, Iowa's Rural Mainstreet Index in June was 54.2, down slightly from May's 54.8.

The farmland-price index rose to a healthy 57.0 from 54.4 in May.

"We have had a lot of rain in the last week or 10 days, but the crops look great in most areas," said Dale Torpey, president of Federation Bank in Washington. "If we can shut the rain off to just normal and get some heat, we are going to have some great crops."

### DHS Preps Improvement Plan in Reaction to Fed Review

Iowa will not pass its latest federal review of the state's child-welfare system despite having improved steadily over the last several years in preventing child removals or finding relatives to help if removal is necessary, Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) officials said.

As a result, the DHS will assemble an improvement plan, just as it did in the first round of reviews seven years ago. Officials said no state passed the first review, which they say uses aggressive benchmarks, and all 32 states evaluated in the second round have been informed that they will need to improve.

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"Iowa is far ahead of where we were in 2003, but the federal benchmarks are even more difficult to reach in this second review, meaning every state will once again be required to improve," said DHS Director Charles Krogmeier. "Iowa met the test of improvement in our first plan, and we'll do it again."

The federal review challenges states to prevent unnecessary removals, to keep children safe whether they are removed or not, to prevent multiple placements, to prevent re-entry into the foster system, and to quickly find an adoptive home if reunification is not possible, among other things.

Iowa officials released a self-assessment of the state's child-welfare system during a press conference in Cedar Rapids. The next step in the federal review is an intense on-site visit to discuss randomly selected cases in Linn, Polk, and Webster counties. Federal reviewers will then evaluate and approve Iowa's improvement plan sometime next year.

### State Saves More Than Expected from Early-Retirement Program

Thursday was the deadline for state employees to leave under the early-retirement incentive program; about 2,100 took advantage of the program that will save the state about \$88.6 million in the fiscal year that begins July 1 rather than the \$57.4 million to \$59.8 million originally estimated. Additional savings are the result of the legislature's and statewide elected officers' participation in the program.

Those eligible for the early-retirement program had to be 55 or older and have worked for the state for at least 10 years. Retirees could receive \$1,000 for each year of service, up to a \$25,000 maximum, paid in five equal yearly installments beginning next September. They also will get paid for unused vacation time and up to five years of health insurance. The program prohibits state agencies from filling vacancies created by retirements through the program without approval by the state Department of Management, and prohibits those retirees from resuming state employment.

The projected savings assume that about 1,100 of the positions being vacated will be refilled next fiscal year to maintain essential services. Of the total savings, approximately \$42 million will be in the general fund, compared to the original projection of \$26.4 million.

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