

## Iowa Politics Roundup: Tax Increases Hot Topic in First Gubernatorial Debate

Written by Lynn Campbell

Friday, 17 September 2010 13:09

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Governor Chet Culver repeatedly asserted that former Governor Terry Branstad is not telling the truth and is misleading Iowans, while Branstad argued that Culver's across-the-board state-budget cut led to property-tax increases across the state during the first televised debate between the two in Sioux City.

The spirited, hour-long debate offered the first direct exchange between the current and former governor. Eighteen minutes into the Tuesday-night event, Branstad said Culver has acknowledged publicly that he's made mistakes and asked him to name the three biggest.

"Well, Terry, like all governors including you when you were in office for 16 years, we've made our fair share of mistakes. The difference is that we've taken responsibility for those mistakes," Culver said. "In your case, you've had 20 different scandals in 12 separate state agencies. You continue to not be honest with the people of this state. You attack day after day after day and I think tonight, it's important that you be straight and honest with the people of Iowa. What happened during your administration?"

Branstad noted that Culver had launched an attack on his administration, but he wanted to keep the focus on Culver.

"I think he's made some huge mistakes," Branstad said of Culver. "One was in 2009, passing the biggest budget in state's history when the whole nation is in a recession and then denying

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what the auditor and the Legislative Services Agency said about the budget problems facing the state ... until October, and then doing a massive across-the-board cut, which led to property-tax increases that we're now seeing ... and then also pushing through the legislature this massive bonding plan which has put the state in debt."

Branstad said he believed in doing things on a pay-as-you-go basis. But Culver asserted that Branstad bonded for \$4.3 billion while he was governor – four times as much as Culver – just to keep the lights on. Culver also said his I-JOBS bonding-for-infrastructure program is not adding to the state's debt because it's being paid for with gambling revenues.

When asked about his position on a potential increase in the alcohol tax, Branstad said: "I don't think we ought to be raising any taxes."

He said many fees, taxes, and fines have been increased under Culver, but the worst thing has been a large increase in property taxes that hurts people who are laid-off and on fixed incomes.

"We've just had the biggest property tax [increase] in Iowa history, in the last 30 years," Branstad said. "Why did that happen? Because Governor Culver mismanaged the budget, and then he panicked and instead of bringing the legislature back to make thoughtful reductions in programs, he does this massive across-the-board cut. Schools had already hired their teachers, so what do they have to do? They had to either lay off teachers or raise property taxes. ... We should not be raising taxes on beer or anything else at this time."

The question allowed Culver to bring up Branstad's record on taxes. He called it another example of a promise Branstad did not keep.

"In 1982, he promised the people of Iowa, 'I will not raise your taxes,'" Culver said. "The first bill he signed as governor in 1983 was an increase in the sales tax. Terry Branstad is not telling the truth about his record. He has raised taxes 60 times on hard-working Iowa families. Those are general taxes: gas tax, sales tax, corporate income tax, business tax. ... He's done it before and he will do it again. I guarantee you that he will continue to resort to the tax increase, something that I have resisted for four years as governor."

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### Axelrod, Plouffe Defend Obama's Economic Policies at Harkin Steak Fry

Democratic strategists David Axelrod and David Plouffe on Sunday defended President Barack Obama's agenda over the first 20 months of his administration and blasted Republicans on the economy during speeches at the 33rd-annual Harkin Steak Fry in Indianola.

"The president made some very tough decisions about the economy," said Axelrod, a senior White House adviser who was the chief strategist behind Obama's 2008 campaign. He said the bailout and stimulus bills prevented another depression: "They weren't necessarily the popular decisions, but they were the right decisions."

While last year's guest, Senator Al Franken (D-Minnesota), pushed health-care reform in his keynote address, Plouffe and Axelrod spent the majority of their speeches playing defense, with Democrats poised to lose control of the U.S. House and take sharp losses in gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races nationwide.

"These were the policies that took the \$237-billion surplus that Bill Clinton left and turned it into a \$1.3-trillion deficit," said Axelrod, referring to policies under President George W. Bush. "These were the policies that unleashed Wall Street and special interests to write their own rules at the expense of middle class and our economy. And these were the policies that led to the greatest economic catastrophe since the Great Depression. Why in the world would we go back to that?"

The Harkin Steak Fry, attended by about 1,500 people this year, is one of Iowa's largest Democratic fundraisers. This year, the event came days before a conservative heavy-hitter – former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican nominee for vice president – will headline the Republican Party of Iowa's Ronald Reagan Dinner in Des Moines.

"Next week you have a good opportunity to remind your neighbors and your friends and your family members about who the real Republican Party is, because the very best organizer and fundraiser for the Democratic Party is going to be here in Iowa – Sarah Palin," said Plouffe, a Delaware native who was campaign manager for Obama's 2008 presidential bid. "Listen, Mitch McConnell and John Boehner are bad enough," he continued. But "they're not the real Republican Party. It is Sarah Palin and Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck. That is the power. All

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of these Republican candidates have to pledge allegiance to them and their intolerance.”

Plouffe also routinely mentioned Sunday that there is a stark difference between the economic policy of Democrats and Republicans, calling policy during the Bush administration “an unprecedented assault on the middle class.” He stressed that recent polls showing Democrats trailing Republicans nationally are nothing to worry about.

“We have the numbers here in Iowa and so many other states,” Plouffe said. “Tens of thousands of people right now in Iowa are no threat to vote for Terry Branstad or Chuck Grassley or any Republican, but they’re not committed to voting. If we get great work done on the ground ... we can win this election. More importantly, I think we should.”

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### National Group Reports Spending \$235K on Statewide TV Ad

The National Organization for Marriage spent \$235,037 on a statewide television ad that will run for two weeks and calls for the rejection of all three Iowa Supreme Court justices facing a judicial-retention vote in November, according to an independent-expenditure report made public by the Iowa Ethics & Campaign Disclosure Board.

It looks like that money helped to finance a new statewide television ad launched by Iowa for Freedom this week, which says it was paid for by [IowaForFreedom.com](http://IowaForFreedom.com), a project of AFA Action, and by the National Organization for Marriage.

The Iowa for Freedom ad is airing on network and cable TV stations across Iowa.

The ad states that activist judges on Iowa’s Supreme Court have become political, ignoring the will of voters and imposing same-sex marriage on Iowa. It says the liberal judges ignored Iowans’ traditional values, legislated from the bench, usurped the will of voters, and redefined marriage. It urges Iowans to vote “no” on the retention of three Supreme Court justices on the November ballot.

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Meanwhile, the American Family Association told the ethics board that it will provide all the money for Bob Vander Plaats' Iowa for Freedom group aimed at ousting the three justices. The group has already spent nearly \$60,000, according to other reports filed with the ethics board. The largest sum of \$24,859 was sent August 31 to an Austin, Texas, firm called Shaw Research. AFA Action is a not-for-profit 501(c)(4) organization.

"It is anticipated that all source funds for the Iowa for Freedom will come from AFA directly and that no other individuals or organizations will contribute specifically or directly for the campaign," William Gustoff, a Des Moines attorney for AFA Action and Iowa for Freedom, told the board. "AFA Action may make solicitations for contributions. However, the donations will be made to AFA rather than to Iowa for Freedom. If any donor wishes to contribute funds earmarked specifically for Iowa for Freedom, the donation will not be accepted."

The ethics board said Iowa law permits AFA to make independent expenditures that expressly advocate for or against a judicial-retention candidate so long as AFA complies with applicable campaign laws.

### Regents Reduce Support for Athletics

With little discussion, the Iowa Board of Regents voted unanimously Thursday to accept proposals that will reduce general-fund support of athletics at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) and will eliminate general-fund support for athletics at Iowa State University (ISU).

ISU President Gregory Geoffroy gave only a brief presentation, saying that ISU has been steadily reducing general-fund support over the last several years and is prepared to now take it down to zero. He said there will still be an allocation of tuition set-aside funds to support scholarships for student athletes.

UNI President Ben Allen gave a more impassioned presentation, arguing the need for at least some continued general-fund support of athletics. UNI's plan reduces but does not eliminate general-fund support of athletics. Over four years, general-fund contributions would be reduced by nearly 18.3 percent, down to \$4.2 million. Athletics would not receive more than 2.4 percent

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of the university's general-fund budget in future years.

"Excellent classroom experiences must be supplemented by outside classroom activities including athletics," Allen said. "Athletics along with lectures ... are part of the total experience of being a student, in particular an undergraduate student at UNI."

A key part of UNI's plan to make up for the loss of general funding to athletics is to hold an additional football game in Fiscal Year 2013. A game against a bowl-eligible team can bring in \$400,000 to \$500,000 to the university, UNI officials said. The hope is that this will be a regional game. Challenges include changes in the Big 10 and Big 12 conferences and teams having only three nonconference openings.

The University of Iowa has not provided general-fund support for athletics since the 2007 fiscal year. "Fourteen universities across the country operate without general-fund support," said Board of Regents President David Miles. "We will soon have two. UNI has reasonably balanced the priorities. I know this hasn't been easy."

### Legislature Likely to Take Up Synthetic-Marijuana Issue

It appears the Iowa legislature will take a closer look at the control of synthetic cannabinoids such as K2 and "Spice" during the upcoming session, as lawmakers approved a motion to refer the matter to the appropriate committees.

"It seems to me perhaps the legislature should take up this issue ... rather than let the agency legislate through rule," said Representative David Heaton (R-Mount Pleasant).

Iowa Board of Pharmacy Executive Officer Terry Witkowski told the Administrative Rules Review Committee that after initially adopting an emergency rule to make synthetic cannabinoids a Schedule I controlled substance, the board then determined it did not have the authority to make that designation until the federal government takes that action. Instead, the board determined it does have the authority to identify products such as K2 and "Spice" as imitation controlled substances.

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“I don’t believe that the board is going to propose any legislation on this,” Witkowski said. “This action is the only action that needs to be done to put them into the imitation-controlled-substances act, but there may be a proposal from the board or the Iowa Office of Drug Control Policy to identify them as controlled substances to have stiffer penalties.”

No approval was required from the committee, and the rule is now in effect, making synthetic cannabinoids illegal to manufacture, deliver, or possess in Iowa.

Witkowski said she doesn’t have information on how widespread the use of those drugs is, although she said it is clear that use of the substances is a nationwide problem, and the drug has been blamed for the death of at least one young Iowan.

*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.*