

Positions for Iowa Gubernatorial Candidates

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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By far the biggest issue in the Iowa gubernatorial campaign is the state's economy – both economic growth and the budget crunch that's plagued state government. Republican nominee Doug Gross has faulted incumbent Tom Vilsack, a Democrat, for the state's flagging economy, citing a variety of rankings for business health and business climate and noting that surrounding states are growing while Iowa's economy shrinks. Vilsack has countered that the economy is struggling nationwide and that he has achieved a balanced budget in tough times and protected state priorities such as education without raising taxes.

The Libertarian candidate, Clyde Cleveland, has outlined a detailed plan of action that includes eliminating income taxes over the course of five years and setting a maximum property-tax rate of 1 percent of the last purchase price. The Green candidate, Jay Robinson, supports community-based economies (particularly agriculture) and grass-roots democracy.

State Budget

Clyde Cleveland (www.clevelandforgovernor.org): Supports eliminating income taxes over five years and setting a maximum property-tax rate of 1 percent of a property's last sale value. He also supports eliminating inheritance taxes. Cleveland states that cutting taxes will increase state revenues. "Economic growth expands the pie from which the state collects revenue," he said. Cleveland supports a hiring freeze and salary cuts to bring Iowa in-line with levels of bureaucracy and pay in other states.

Doug Gross (www.douggross.com): Gross claims that Vilsack has mismanaged the budget and created a \$1.2 billion "structural deficit" – costs the state has incurred (through things such as labor agreements) beyond the money it's expected to bring in. He supports switching to a two-year budget process; shifting to a "performance budgeting" system in which the budget doesn't start with the previous year's figures; and dividing state government into five or six "functional units," setting goals for those units, and then allocating money. Gross will entrust managers with working within those budgets and accomplishing goals. He's not specific about what might be cut out of the budget in terms of service or staff. Gross supports freezing state salaries. He also supports eliminating the tax on pensions; lowering the top rate for income taxes; and lowering corporate-tax rates. Gross claims the state can meet its budget obligations and his spending priorities without raising the overall taxation level or tax rates.

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Jay Robinson (www.robinson-hart.org): Supports increasing funding to primary, secondary, and higher education; the environment; welfare; and community agriculture. He supports decreasing funding to law enforcement, transportation, and highway infrastructure. Robinson believes alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders, a reduction of corporate tax breaks, and luxury taxes will provide revenue for education, agricultural enterprises, and environmental programs. He also supports increasing taxes on “luxury” items such as cigarettes, SUVs, boats, and second home. Additionally, he has indicated support for higher taxes on alcohol, capital gains, cigarettes, corporations, gasoline, incomes over \$75,000, inheritances, and vehicles.

Tom Vilsack (www.vilsack-pederson.org): The governor says he has “no plans” to increase taxes but hasn’t promised that he won’t. He said he would support repealing the state’s tax on Social Security income if legislators identify a way to make up for the loss in revenues. The state budget was balanced this year with the use of the state’s Economic Emergency Fund, although Vilsack advocated using road-use dedicated funds.

Economic Development

Clyde Cleveland: Supports slashing taxes as a way to increase economic development. He also recommends investing in wind energy – which he says can provide four times the state’s energy needs and can be a tool for economic development.

Doug Gross: Has outlined a plan that would turn the entire state into an “enterprise zone,” giving incentives to businesses that invest certain amounts of money in the state and pay at least 10 workers 110 percent of a county’s median income. Gross’ plan also includes other tax and regulatory changes to make the state more business-friendly; an educational program; and an infrastructure-improvement program that includes high-tech connections, commercial airline service, and trails and waterways. He supports targeted tax cuts in certain areas to spur economic development.

Jay Robinson: Does not support tax cuts to spur economic growth. Instead, he supports “more value-added, local-economy efforts” for economic growth. He supports a state “micro-loan” initiative to provide assistance to small-business owners in the state instead of large corporations. Robinson promises to support agriculture and renewable-energy initiatives such as wind power.

Tom Vilsack: Has proposed dividing the state into 15 “regions” and creating a board for each to make decisions about how to distribute its share of \$40 million in economic-development block grants. He supports using \$150 million from the Restricted Capitals Account for productivity, connectivity, energy, and industry initiatives.

Campaign Reform

Clyde Cleveland: Does not support term limits or restrictions on individual contributions to political candidates. Cleveland does support limiting contributions from PACs, corporations, and political parties: “I would work to eliminate all donations of any kind to individual candidates or

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political parties from any non-individual.”

Doug Gross: Supports term limits for elected officials.

Jay Robinson: Supports term limits for governors and state legislators and limits on contributions from individuals, PACs, corporations, and political parties. He also supports instant-runoff voting, a system that allows voters to express preferences for candidates by ranking them. Robinson also supports spending limits on campaigns and partial public funding of campaigns.

Tom Vilsack: Supports voluntary public financing of campaigns, and supports having broadcasters donate time to political candidates.

Abortion

Clyde Cleveland: Supports a woman’s right to choose. Wants to make abortion rare by reducing the number of unplanned pregnancies.

Doug Gross: Supports prohibiting abortion except in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the mother is endangered. He supports parental consent for abortions by minors, and a waiting period before abortions.

Jay Robinson: Supports a woman’s right to choose.

Tom Vilsack: Supports a woman’s right to choose. Opposes a state-imposed waiting period before abortions. In 2000, he vetoed a bill requiring a 24-hour waiting period.

Crime & Punishment

Clyde Cleveland: Supports alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders. He does not support capital punishment. He does support handing over decisions about nonviolent offenders to county mentor/parole boards. He also supports giving communities the resources to deal with drug-abuse problems on their own instead of incarcerating drug offenders at the state level. Cleveland also supports the medical use of marijuana.

Doug Gross: Supports limited use of capital punishment, for people who commit murder in connection with another serious felony. Supports alternatives to incarceration to nonviolent offenders to relieve prison overcrowding.

Jay Robinson: Supports alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders. He does not support capital punishment, and supports de-criminalizing marijuana use for medicinal purposes.

Tom Vilsack: Supports alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders. He does not support capital punishment.

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Minimum Wage

Clyde Cleveland: Does not support increasing the state minimum wage.

Doug Gross: Does not support increasing the state minimum wage.

Jay Robinson: Supports increasing the minimum wage to at least \$10 an hour over time – perhaps by 50 cents or a dollar each year. He would prevent loss of businesses to neighboring states by “getting Greens elected in Illinois.”

Tom Vilsack: Supported increasing the minimum wage to \$6.15 over two years.

Education

Clyde Cleveland: Wants to make every school in the state a charter school, de-centralize education in the state, and institute merit pay for teachers. He supports school vouchers and high-school exit exams. He wants to end federal involvement in schools and limit state involvement. Cleveland argues that more money hasn't resulted in better education.

Doug Gross: Supports charter schools, school choice, and performance testing.

Jay Robinson: Supports state funding to increase teacher salaries, and pledges to increase funding for primary, secondary, and higher education.

Tom Vilsack: Opposes school vouchers but supports charter schools and performance testing.