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For those of us who have frequented the Davenport City Council Chambers for meetings, the charming, outspoken-but-always-diplomatic "ole lady" wearing all the different fun hats is a familiar face. Her name is Susie Bell, and she is the Republican candidate for House District 86 of the Iowa legislature, running against Democrat incumbent Cindy Winkler.

Susie has been following politics since her youth. A wide variety of issues has piqued her curiosity, and more often her ire. She has campaigned in more grassroots efforts than she can name, but give her time and she will recall key aspects of every one, including their outcomes.

Mostly she has fought against injustices. Up until now, her vote has been her ammunition. But to her mind, things have gone too far the wrong way, so she is taking a stand by running for a seat in the state legislature, where she believes she can effect the necessary change to restore senior Iowans' peace of mind - at least fiscally, anyway.

While Susie is a longtime activist on the municipal front, she has chosen to run for a state position because "the laws are made at the state level, and the cities are obliged to enforce them."

Susie has several key issues, such as reinforcing education as a top priority for funding; implementing constructive discipline in schools; establishing a more aggressive policy of capital punishment for crimes against children; establishing open primaries so that more citizens can vote without declaring a party; enacting a law to disallow raiding of the Senior Living Trust

Fund, using it strictly to meet the state's obligation for retirement incomes; establishing a stronger instrument to provide medical services, financial assistance, and tax relief for military personnel; and strengthening restrictions for the use of eminent domain by governmental agencies.

But the two issues most near and dear to Susie's heart - tax relief for seniors (including anyone on fixed incomes) and recall elections for municipalities - are the driving forces for this civic dynamo. She simply thinks her opponent has dropped the ball, especially where taxation is concerned. With the cost of living consistently rising more quickly than income for seniors, Susie is determined to bring tax relief to those folks sinking further and faster into financial ruin with each year. She notes that "Davenport seniors ... are experiencing unprecedented financial setbacks due to additional municipal fees, such as the rain fee and garbage fee, and recent property-tax increases."

Susie strongly supports the elimination of Iowa taxes on retirement income and freezing property taxes after age 65 or 70. "We would try for age 65, but we may have to go to 68 or even 70 to allow the financial wiggle room needed before implementing this law, even though the actual loss of revenue to the state is not that high."

The current new law limiting taxation on retirement income won't be enforced for another eight years, so she would like to revisit this during the next legislative session and reduce the implementation time to two years. This legislation is the only hope for senior citizens on fixed incomes to enjoy a reasonable quality of life that their years have earned them. It is viable legislation that has legs if expedited by another vote. According to Susie, Representative Winkler is the only Scott County legislator who did not attend a September forum to hear citizens' views on this most important issue of tax relief.

In light of her "maiden voyage" status, when asked how she would go about getting a law passed for less taxation, she replied with supreme confidence, "You have to enlist cooperation, get all views of the issue, and be willing to compromise some. But in a nutshell, you have to sit down together and hash it out."

Her other compelling issue, municipal recall elections, also has enormous potential. Susie has watched hundreds of hours of Davenport city councils' actions, including those of the city administration and department heads, and none has concerned her as much as those she has witnessed in the past two years. The conduct of Mayor Winborn and Aldermen Brooke,

Howard, Dumas, and Frink and City Administrator Malin are all the justification needed to aggressively pursue remedy on behalf of citizens that an option for recall elections would provide. "With some of the things that have gone on in this town and the money that has been wasted," Bell said, "if we had recall elections, we could have prevented a lot of it."

Susie is adamant on this subject, promising to make it one of her top legislative priorities, along with some tax relief. She also promises accessibility to her constituency. Because her approach to politics is based on old-fashioned common sense, she is a refreshing player with a "one-of-us versus one-of-them" persona.

Susie intends to follow a political policy mandating that regardless of her personal opinion, she will vote the way her constituency directs her. "Voting for me will ensure that citizens will be fully and honestly represented at the statehouse," she said.

It takes tremendous courage to step up like Susie Bell has done. Ideally, she should be enjoying retirement, playing bridge and gabbing with good friends, while sipping designer teas throughout the afternoon. Instead she is willingly walking into the quagmire of politics pretty much unvarnished and perhaps somewhat naïve, solely because she is a patriot.

If only we had another 100 citizens just like her ... . Image the change.