



U.S. Rep. Steve King R-Ia., left, chats with U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, during a pheasant hunt near Akron, Ia., Saturday.

‘Stupid votes’ not the kind of win Cruz should aim for

It's always like a game of Twister when incumbent politicians try to promote themselves as political outsiders. Congressmen and senators reach for safe spots with both hands as they rail against the evils of Washington, D.C. At the same time, they keep a toe in the middle of the same political shenanigans that the insiders like to play.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who spent last weekend in Iowa, has more credibility than most when he paints himself outside the Washington Beltway establishment. But even he found himself in a strange contortion when he tried to define victories from the failed effort to defund Obamacare.

Now, I know some of you are heartily tired of reading about Cruz after a wall-to-wall weekend of local and national media coverage from Iowa. But bear with me, there's a larger point here.

Cruz, as you recall, led the failed Republican strategy of pushing to defund Obamacare as a condition of keeping the government running and raising the debt limit. Speaking to an Iowa Republican fundraising dinner on Friday night, he ticked off several ways he thinks the GOP benefited from the gambit.

As you might expect, he talked about firing up the grassroots against the Washington establishment. Not much of a stretch for the tea-party standard bearer. But then he added, "We made Democrats take a lot of stupid votes."

ON POLITICS



KATHIE OBRADOVICH
kobradov@dmreg.com

For example, he said, every Democrat in the Senate voted against requiring themselves and their staffs to get their health insurance through the exchanges created by Obamacare. That provision is politically unpopular, because it's easy to portray as an example of Congress holding itself to a different standard than the American people. That's not entirely true, because the Obamacare exchanges are supposed to be for people who don't already have employer-provided insurance, which employees of Congress do. But that's not my point.

The point is, when Cruz crows about pushing majority Democrats into taking "stupid" votes, he's engaging in procedural gamesmanship. It's a common ploy in legislative bodies and one of the things Americans find so offensive about Washington.

The reality is that if the majority party is determined, for whatever reason, to pass a "clean" bill with no changes, the minority party can have a field day. They can get the majority party to unanimously vote down measures that at

least some might otherwise approve.

I've seen cases where majority-party members have had to vote against their own ideas or projects in order to avoid derailing a larger initiative. Political old-timers call that "eating your children." It's an ugly metaphor for a practice that often has the ugly result of misleading voters.

That's because when campaign season rolls around, political challengers will buy ads saying, "Senator X voted against mom and apple pie." And it will be true, even though Senator X was the author of the Mom and Apple Pie Act and only voted against it to avoid shutting down the government and defaulting on the debt.

I'm not naive enough to suggest Cruz shouldn't engage in such strategies. Sometimes, it's the only chance the minority party has to vote on a priority that majority leadership has decided to bottle up. Incumbents know it's part of their job to explain their voting record to constituents. But in this case, a three-week government shutdown and estimated \$24 billion hit to the economy was too high of a price for scoring political points.

For Cruz to tout Beltway procedural tricks as a victory suggests he's not as much of an outsider as he likes to project. Maybe he can hold the pose longer than some of his rivals. In Twister, gravity always prevails. In politics, it sometimes takes a little longer for reality to overcome posturing.

Iowa View

Job creators see Godfrey as a burden

Sen. Bill Dotzler's guest column in the Register claims that the Iowa workers' compensation commissioner should be given credit for making Iowa a better and less expensive place to do business. This is a distorted and unsupportable view of Commissioner Christopher Godfrey's performance.

Yes, Iowa's economy has significantly improved since Gov. Terry Branstad took office in 2011. Des Moines was ranked the No. 1 place in the nation for business and careers by Forbes Magazine in August 2013. Unemployment in Iowa is



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
JAKE CHAPMAN, an Adel Republican, is a member of the Iowa

Senate, where he serves on the Economic Growth Committee. Contact: Jake.Chapman@legis.iowa.gov.

down, and thousands of jobs have been created. But Godfrey does not deserve any credit for this improvement. Godfrey has been a burden on job creation in Iowa.

Every two years, the state of Oregon releases an objective national study ranking all 50 states based on which have the lowest workers' compensation costs — and are therefore most attractive to job creators. In 2006, when Godfrey became commissioner, Iowa had the seventh-lowest workers' compensation costs in the nation. As of the most recent study (2012), we had the 27th-lowest costs.

During Godfrey's time, Iowa has moved from one of the very best in the nation to average.

As of 2006, Iowa had a competitive advantage over Nebraska, Missouri, Ohio, Kansas, Michigan and many other states. We have now lost that competitive advantage.

Dotzler credits Godfrey with the 2.0 percent decrease in workers' compensation insurance rates that will occur in 2014. To be consistent, Dotzler must blame Godfrey for Iowa's 7.9 percent increase in the rates in 2013, the 4.4 percent increase in 2012, the 4.7 percent increase in 2011 and the 2.3 increase in 2010.

It is undeniable that Godfrey has issued some very bizarre rulings that have caused concern among Iowa employers and forced some to pay for injuries that were not related to any actual work activity.

In Durkop v. Tyson, an employee was awarded workers' compensation after falling on ice, after work hours and away from the job site, just because she was shopping for work clothes. Don't we all have to wear work-appropriate clothing? Should our employers have to pay us if we fall down and get hurt while shopping for clothing?

In Gazette Communications v. Powell, a business had to pay benefits to an employee injured away from the job site while bowling, after hours, because the employer sponsored the voluntary event.

If you were going to start a business that would create 500 jobs, and you know you'll be on the hook for every off-premises injury that Godfrey says is related to the job, would you want to start a business in Iowa?

Dotzler said that no judge has ever found any indications of bias in the commissioner's work. In Rizvic v. Beef Products Inc., Judge Michael D. Huppert called attention to "the lack of objectivity utilized by the commissioner." Huppert also said that "the commissioner in this instance overstepped his role as an impartial arbiter of the facts and became in essence an advocate for the respondent's position."

Iowa deserves better than a workers' compensation commissioner who steps outside his objective role and becomes an attorney for the person claiming injury. Iowa cannot reach its economic potential as long as job creators are living in fear of facing Godfrey, even when an employee gets hurt while off the job site and not actually working.

Another View

Americans' appetite for Amtrak service growing

While politicians can't agree on much, Iowans and the majority of Americans surely agree on one thing: They want more Amtrak service, not less.

On the heaviest traveled passenger rail corridor in the nation, the Northeast Corridor, Amtrak keeps breaking ridership records. But the untold story is that in a large swath of less-traveled rail corridors in middle America, including Iowa, people want Congress to keep investing in and expanding Amtrak service.

It is time for Congress to listen and stop pursuing risky defunding and private contracting schemes.

Amtrak recently reported that its trains carried a record 31.6 million passengers last year, up from 20 million in 2000. And ridership on the

California Zephyr and Southwest Chief lines, which traverse Iowa across southern counties, also saw a healthy spike in ridership.

No wonder a new poll of Iowans conducted by St. Paul, Minn.-based DFM Research shows that more than seven out of 10 residents in Polk County and the southwestern counties of the state want to increase federal government investment in Amtrak, or at the very least keep it the same.

So why are some in Congress constantly pointing to federal spending on Amtrak as wasteful?

If members of Congress listen, they will hear a message loud and clear on an issue that is a vital part of every American's life. Whether they live in red or blue states, in crowded cities or rural areas,



ABOUT THE AUTHORS:
JOHN PREVISICH is president of the transportation division of SMART, the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation union, and **EDWARD WYTKIND** is president of the transportation trades department of the AFL-CIO.



in southwestern Iowa or in Polk County, are Republicans or Democrats, old or young, Americans want to ride Amtrak.

In Iowa's 3rd Congressional District that encompasses Des Moines, the message couldn't have been any clearer. Among Democrats, the keep-or-increase percentage rises to 87

percent, while 64 percent of independents agree and a hefty 59 percent of Republicans agree.

Even among those who have not ridden Amtrak in recent years, 72 percent want to keep or increase the passenger railroad's federal funding.

These findings aren't limited to Iowa. In six middle-America states — Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Colorado, Kansas and Missouri — 70 percent of the people say they want more Amtrak service, and they want the government to fund it.

In other words, Amtrak isn't a blue state thing or a red state thing. It is an American thing.

Tens of thousands of Iowans who value their Amtrak service are increasingly taking the train each year and seek more connections to cities such as Chicago. The business

community has joined the choir as well, understanding that passenger rail expansion is good for business and job creation. And for good reason: For every \$1 Iowa spends in this sector about \$4 is injected back into the state's economy.

This is a no-brainer during the still anemic economic recovery.

Members of Congress need to get that message, and get it fast, as they prepare to rewrite the law that governs and funds Amtrak and that will decide who in Iowa and other parts of middle America will get to keep their service or ride new train service.

Americans' appetite for Amtrak service is growing regardless of their political views. This train has long left the station, and the American public is on board.