

POLK DES MOINES
TAXPAYERS
ASSOCIATION

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POLK COUNTY JAIL

Polk County Committee Chair Ron Morden and I attended the Polk County Jail dedication (thanks for the recognition, Sheriff Anderson) on Wednesday, October 22nd, and then went back on Friday afternoon to take a tour. Sergeant Palmer took an hour of her time to take us around the \$68 million facility, explained the setup, and shared her personal stories of working in a correctional facility. Our thanks to Sergeant Palmer for the excellent job as tour guide. The following information comes from a pamphlet that was handed out at the dedication.

The 325,000 square-foot facility sits on 40 acres of land just north of I35/I80. It will allow the Polk County Sheriff to house all inmates under one roof. Initially, the facility will hold 1120 inmates, with a total capacity of 1520. It is possible to expand the facility by another 1000 beds.

The jail was designed by the Durrant Group. Weitz Company won the construction bid. This facility is the largest, most modern in the state of Iowa. The use of new technology (20 miles of cable) is everywhere, from the use of video conferencing for visitor/inmate visitation, to a new security electronic system that enables staff to monitor and control over 280 cameras and over 1800 doors. Also planned for the near future is video conferencing between the courthouse and the jail. The medical center holds 24 beds and also includes padded rooms (which we tried out). The kitchen is huge and was built with the capacity to handle an expansion.

The jail was designed to have a direct supervision setting where most inmates are housed in large dormitory areas instead of in traditional barred cells that most of us think of - but do exist for dangerous inmates - when we envision a jail. Plans include an expansion of the in-house drug treatment program to 192 beds.

In addition to the new jail, the Polk County Supervisors and Sheriff are serious about controlling the jail population. They have established the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (along with the County Attorney, Chief Judge, Director of the Iowa Department of Corrections, & the Public Defender), of which I've spoken highly. Hopefully soon to be implemented is a Jail Court, which will "enhance and expedite initial appearances" and should reduce operational costs by lowering transportation costs from the jail to downtown. There is also funding for a two-year pilot Jail Diversion program. That program will develop a team that includes an Intensive Case Manager (assesses the appropriateness of jail diversion) and a Community Support Worker (links the individual to benefits, housing, and treatment).

FOURTH QUARTER BOARD MEETING

The Association held its Fourth Quarter Board meeting on October 22nd. Our guest speaker was West Des Moines Superintendent Dr. Tom Narak. I'm going to share with you some of Dr. Narak's points about Iowa.

IOWA

In many ways, Iowa schools have never been better.
In some important ways, schools in Iowa must work to get better.

CHALLENGES

Schools reflect society.

- More economically disadvantaged children and families

- More English Language Learners

- Enrollment fluctuations...2/3's of Iowa's Districts are declining

Historically...funding sources are hard pressed to keep up with the growing needs in our society
The world is becoming much more competitive for America in many ways and our schools share those challenges.

An Important cornerstone of America's approach to education is that all children can learn and will be provided many educational opportunities. That is not true in many competing countries.
Aging educators...fewer young people are becoming educators...will become a major problem in our state if the trends do not change.

- Rural educator salaries are not competitive with the metro area

- Other states are aggressive in hiring Iowa's educators

Many opportunity inequities for students based on geography, size, and community resources.
Lack of clear focus of expectations by society for schools.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS PRESENTS EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES

It is very important to help all Iowans understand that for our state to grow and remain competitive we must not see fewer people in the future.

The aging of our population means we must attract new people from other parts of our country and/or world.

BUILDING A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Relationships are very powerful in our work to improve student achievement in our schools.

A BASIC FACT OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Actively involved parents have successful children

Community service by our youth is growing

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE STUDENT APATHY AND LOW ACHIEVEMENT

Students perceived lack of caring and encouragement by school staff – we need stronger teachers.

An irrelevant and uninteresting curriculum – curriculum must become rigorous and relevant

Lack of school connection to families and communities – there must be a fostering of relationships and ways to engage parents.

PAYROLL WARP

John Donahue recognizes as well as anyone that comparing the salaries of government workers and those in the private sector can be misleading. The two spheres offer different tasks, different standards, and different forms of measurement. But that, he suggests in his new book, the *Warping of Government Work*, is precisely the problem. “The distance between public and private work has widened,” Donahue writes. “It is precisely by not changing [as] much that government employment has become a modern oddity.”

The problems of income inequality have been widely noted during this political season, but they are less an of issue for government workers, who largely have been sheltered from the exigencies of the global marketplace. This has made government work into an island with distorted incentives, argues Donahue, a lecturer at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. And that, he believes, undercuts the ability of governments to be efficient, effective, and flexible.

Blue-collar public workers are paid better and enjoy much more job security than their counterparts in the private sector – and are far more likely to be unionized. But those at the top end of the scale – lawyers, technology managers – earn much less than they could get doing similar work outside of government. That’s due in large part to their salaries being, in effect, capped by the politically sensitive pay scales of top elected officials such as governors. Many people are motivated to pursue public service for non-financial reasons, but the high-end pay gap has grown to such an extreme, Donahue concludes, “that government’s appeal to top workers has faded.”

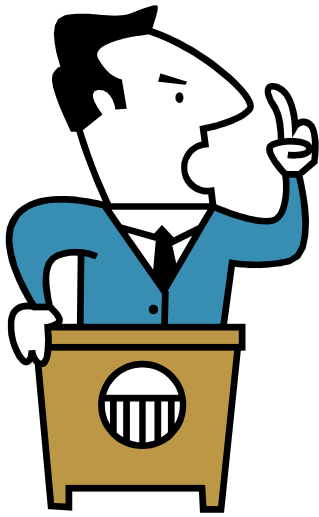
As usual with such books, Donahue’s diagnosis is more enlightening than his proposed cures. He calls for more outsourcing, but recognizes its hazards. He also recognizes that his favored solution – a flatter private-sector pay scale, which would make government less attractive as a haven for mediocre performers – is unlikely to happen. More pragmatically, he calls for programs to make it easier for highly trained standouts to dip into government work for a few years here and there without having to commit to a lifetime of government service.

But Donahue’s appreciation and detail description of an undeniable fact – that government work offers different incentives than the private sector – points to a real problem. Government has to compete with private companies on uneven terms to attract top talent, but too many of its own employees don’t feel they have to work as hard to keep up – and doubt that they’ll be rewarded very generously if they do.

GOVERNING OCTOBER 2008

LEADERSHIP

- Know what you what to do.**
- Tell people what to do, not how to do it.**
- Do your homework.**
- Lead by example.**
- Demand excellence.**
- Take care of your people.**
- Be humble.**
- Be honest, truthful, and dependable.**



**DON'T
FORGET TO VOTE
NOVEMBER 4TH**

