



Remarks by John Norris Announcing his candidacy for Governor Red Oak, IA, July 8, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you all for being here today. I am honored to have you here where my family settled over 100 years ago. Thank you, James and Jan for hosting us. My mother, Patsy and all my family and friends who came to share this moment, I thank you so much.

To Jackie and my sons, Sam, Cole and Hunter a special thank you for your love and support for me. For your willingness to make sacrifices for this new adventure and your commitment to making Iowa better – thank you.

I came home to this farm and my Red Oak community to be with you – my family and friends – because this is the place that made me who I am today. This is where Iowa values began for me. The values we are all grounded in – our love for the land, caring for our neighbors, our devotion to faith and family, hard work, honesty, frugality, service to community and country and a commitment to justice and opportunity for all – that’s why I came home – to announce my candidacy to be your governor and the governor, for the people, of Iowa.

I have tested the political waters and I found them high in nitrates, bacteria and sediment. But our political leaders are low in Iowa values

Our political environment is toxic, our government is sick and our future is eroding.

What our governor and legislature did this past year was an assault on workers, abandonment of children, disrespectful to women and neglect of our environment.

I am here today to declare to the special interest and wealthy corporate lobbyists that their days of government handouts and sweetheart deals are about to end. In the words of Abraham Lincoln – we are going to rise-up and restore ours’ as, “a government of the people, by the people and for the people.”

It is time our government and our leaders exemplify the values of Iowans and the values that make Iowa a great place to live.

We know those values here Red Oak. Where farmers always pitch in to help a neighbor who was injured, or had lost a loved one, or helping a family who has a father or mother serving in conflict half way around the world.

Caring for each other, supporting each other with a hand up, not a hand out is what has always made us strong. Today we are leaving too many Iowans behind while our government leaders, in their quest to maintain power, are turning over the public treasury to big monied, special interest donors and right-wing ideologues at the expense

of public education, our need for health care and mental health services, cleaning up our environment and assisting small businesses, the engine of our economic growth.

Through tax credits in the hundreds of millions for large corporations that pay no state income taxes and multi-million-dollar handouts to multi-national corporations, our governor and legislature has lined the pockets of their donors, while underfunding public education, letting tuition rates increase at our colleges and universities, and closing much needed mental health care facilities to Iowa families.

They have turned over Medicaid – a program that worked fine for decades – to private insurance companies placing profits for a few over the health of our most vulnerable citizens. One half of the babies born in Iowa are born eligible for Medicaid. Many of our parents will need Medicaid for care in nursing facilities. Instead of focusing on getting people healthy and enabling our elderly to live their final days with dignity, our governor is bailing out this failed Medicaid experiment, placing the profits of insurers over the care of Iowans.

These are not Iowa values.

Too many Iowans – and especially new Iowans – are working two or more jobs to support themselves and their families. This is not good for them, their children, our schools or our economy. And it flies in the face of our value of a good day's pay for a hard day's work.

Today Iowa has the lowest minimum wage in the country and too many Iowans are working full time and still living in poverty. That is just wrong. Hard work should come with the dignity of a livable wage and equitable wages for men and women. Fairness to each other is what Iowans expect of themselves and their leaders in government.

It is time we restore Iowans faith in their government. That starts with respecting the values Iowans hold dear and embracing those values throughout all of government. Too much of what our governor and legislature does today is look out for special interests. As they say, we have the best government money can buy.

That must change. The wrong-headed "Citizens United" decision that turned our democracy over to the wealthy must be overturned. At the state level, it is time Iowa cleaned up its act by imposing campaign donation limits and reign in the power of lobbyists.

With a government rooted in Iowa values of fairness and community we can begin to shape a vision for a better and brighter future. Because, I believe we can do better and we can be better to each other.

I believe our future starts with what has been an anchor to our success in the past and that is a commitment to having the best public education in America. We should provide the resources necessary, and empower our teachers and administrators to prepare our children for life-long learning, skills development and the opportunity to succeed at high-value jobs and careers whether that is after high-school, community or technical colleges or our region's institutions or private colleges.

We must recognize the challenges our schools face today and equip them to meet those challenges. Our governor has set the bar too low... As governor I will make it clear - Iowa will be the leader in public education, again!

Too many children come to school unprepared to learn. We need to enable communities to provide childcare for working parents that prepares children to be ready to learn. Nearly all our schools today are blessed with new Iowans. We must embrace these students and help them learn English so they can succeed in school and contribute to our communities by meeting our workforce needs, starting small businesses or enhancing our colleges and universities.

I think of my good friend Aiddy Phomvisay who moved to Buena Vista County from Laos when he was seven years old. As Aiddy tells it, the church ladies in Alden taught he and his brother and sister to speak English. He faced misunderstanding and hateful acts by some but it was the love of others and the embrace he received from those women from Alta that gave him an opportunity. He and his siblings took that opportunity and have excelled. Aiddy today is an incredible contributor in our public schools as an educator. He received his PhD in education and has dedicated his life to helping all students reach their God-given potential.

We must make Iowa's economy work for all Iowans and not just the few at the top. Iowa must stop marketing itself as a cheap labor state. We must be a state where businesses want to start-up or grow here because they know highly educated workers will give them a hard day's work for a good day's pay. We must signal our support for our workforce by restoring collective bargaining rights for public employees so we raise the standard of living for all workers, rather than pitting workers and businesses against each other.

Iowa's Department of Economic Development must become a department for the people of Iowa, not a gravy-train for a few wealthy corporations looking for a government handout. We must foster small business development in rural Iowa and our cities. We should insist that financial assistance to businesses is contingent on those businesses providing good paying jobs with health and retirement benefits.

Iowa must care for all our citizens. That means working tirelessly to meet the health care and mental health needs of all Iowans, whether that is a child born into poverty, a laid-off worker, a small business owner, or a farmer. And, it means our older Iowans who need home health care assistance or nursing home care.

This is one of the biggest challenges of our day with the dysfunctional US Congress playing Russian roulette with our health care.

This will not be easy, but we will, as a state, put the health care of each other as a source of pride and determination and commit ourselves to a higher level of humanity and respect for human life and dignity by choosing health care for all Iowans.

That starts with putting the health of Iowans ahead of profits for a few and ending this governor's privatization fiasco with Medicaid.

We must relieve the burden on families suffering from mental illness and stop making our law enforcement officers the front-line servicers of mental health illness. Jails and prisons are not the places to treat mental illness. It costs more to incarcerate people

suffering from mental illness. The justice system is not equipped – nor should it be – to treat mental illness. Families and communities face issues of suicide and safety because our governor has closed needed mental health facilities with no alternative plan or accommodations.

We must once again be a place our young Iowans want to stay and a state that attracts others to want to live here. We cannot do that if you can't safely drink the water or swim in our lakes and rivers.

We must insist that those who are polluting our water and treating our land irresponsibly STOP. We did not inherit this land from our parents; we are borrowing it from our children. Our policies and laws must reflect our respect and love for our land.

We must support farmers in the practice of soil and water conservation. I believe they can do that while increasing profitability. Instead of cutting funding for the Leopold Center I believe we should double it. Working with some great non-profits like the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust, Whiterock Conservancy and the Environmental Council we can begin to change farming and land use practices that will save our soil, restore our water quality and may just help save rural Iowa in the process.

Finally, we will see hope for rural Iowa if we commit ourselves to seizing the opportunities we have before us.

It starts with making our rural public schools extraordinary, so that families will want to stay and move to rural Iowa because of the educational excellence here.

We must recognize the challenges our rural hospitals and health care providers face with cuts to Medicaid, the burden of mental health needs, drug addiction and the threat of thousands of Iowans losing health care coverage and fully commit to supporting health care needs and services for rural communities.

We should continue to seize on renewable energy opportunities with wind and solar energy along with biofuels. These are all a source of good paying jobs and big contributors to our property tax base.

We must make sure every rural community has access to high-speed internet so anyone in rural Iowa can do business anywhere in the world. As a great fictional Iowa farmer once proved, "If you build it, they will come" – and they will stay.

Restoring our environment and conservation practices means good paying, highly rewarding work in environmental services throughout rural Iowa.

Finally, we should be assisting our rural business owners who are ready to retire with selling those business to younger Iowans in those communities – or helping people looking for small business opportunities like veterans returning from service. Small business transfers in rural Iowa, along with targeting small business start-ups in rural Iowa, and throughout Iowa, will lay a solid economic foundation for the future.

This is our vision for Iowa. It is rooted in our Iowa values of community, fairness, caring for each other and our land.

But we can't do it alone. For our campaign to succeed we must become a movement joined arm-in-arm to make our dream of a better Iowa a reality.

We begin with a focus on restoring our values. We have a vision that defines our mission to make Iowa better. Now it comes down to hard work.

I stand here today with all of you who know what I mean by hard work. I ran those stairs with some of you in the early morning hours during wrestling season, those track intervals for Coach Morrison or hitting the sled for Coaches Philby, Bear and Downsy.

I remember getting farm work done for Dad so I could earn some money putting up hay for Ermil Eitzen or Rex Bradley. They would always pay me more because I could handle stacking a hayrack by myself rather than hiring two town boys to do it.

I learned at an early age that fighting for change is hard work when I saw my dad work with other family farmers in the National Farmers Organization when they fought to collectively bargain for fair prices. I learned working with Tom Harkin as he fought for the rights of disabled Americans and opened the door of opportunity to millions. I learned when I helped Jesse Jackson start the Rainbow Coalition in Iowa and realized the power of coalitions in fighting together for economic and social justice. I learned when I marched with Cesar Chavez in California for environmental justice watching a movement literally help save the lives of thousands of migrant farm workers by protecting them from pesticides and other deadly chemicals. And, I learned when I marched with Paul Wellstone at the "Battle in Seattle" to protest the WTO and the economic devastation bad trade deals had on American workers and small businesses owners.

I will never forget when I was working for Jesse Jackson in 1988, a former Chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party told me I was "finished" in Democratic Party politics. Ten years later I was elected Chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party where I pulled the Party out of deep debt and led the effort to elect the first Democratic governor in Iowa in 32 years - the longest of any state in the nation. I know what it means to put your values and ideals ahead of politics.

I know the hard work of being a small business owner from my years in my restaurant business in Greenfield and my work with the local chamber of commerce to restore our downtown and improve our community.

I continued to do that during my service as Chief-of-Staff to Governor Tom Vilsack where I helped him build a cabinet dedicated to improving the opportunity and lives of all Iowans. As Chairman of the Iowa Utilities Board I pushed the envelope on renewable energy and energy efficiency - both of which Iowa is now a national leader. As Chief-of-Staff for the United States Department of Agriculture, I helped Secretary Vilsack manage a budget of over \$100 billion and a staff of over 100,000 to focus on rebuilding rural America through small business assistance, rural housing, expanding internet access, supporting farmer's markets and helping small and large farming operations alike.

On the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, I pushed for policies to open the door for new technologies that made our energy system cleaner and more efficient.

And finally, at the United Nations, I represented U.S. agricultural policies and programs to help both American farmers and farmers in developing countries so they can grow and feed their own people.

My life has been a journey of action and service. And, the most important lesson I have learned on this journey is that it is not about me. It is about us. We must build this movement for a progressive Iowa. We must reach out to Iowans and empower them to join us on our mission to make Iowa better.

The great Paul Wellstone summarized our mission ahead very well: "...There are three critical ingredients to democratic renewal and progressive change... Good public policy provides direction and an agenda for action; grassroots organizing builds a constituency for change; and electoral politics is the main way we contest for power..."

Ladies and gentlemen.... Friends, neighbors and family... it is time the people of Iowa contest for power.

Thank you.