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Future Tense: Iowa Looks Ahead

A Call For Action From Limbo

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A Call For Action From Limbo

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I grew up next to my parents' small business in a rural Iowa town. My family worked hard to build a business that contributed to the community, generating public revenue and providing jobs to individuals who may otherwise have had difficulty finding work.

My parents are Republicans, something I have always attributed to their roles as small business owners. There is a fiscal foundation behind their political views. Socially, we are very liberal. For example, my sister is a lesbian with two children, and we have always supported her, her partner, and their family. I was raised to view every person as an equal, despite our differences. I was taught that, above everything, everyone deserves the same rights and freedoms my family was so lucky to have.

I spent the four years of my collegiate life in a constant struggle with my mother to maintain my identity as a girl raised with a perspective that varies from many at the university. My parents sent me to college with valuable life advice: don't believe everything you hear, and approach everything with a critical lens (even if something seems like a great idea now, it may have irrevocable consequences in the future).

I received a Bachelor's degree from the University of Iowa at the brink of the economic collapse. I spent the following turbulent years fighting for work with a nation of displaced degree-holders. In 2009, entry-level jobs required five years of practical experience. After struggling through a number of service jobs, I decided to move abroad in search of greater opportunity. I landed in an Asian country, working under a one-year visa as an English teacher. I was fortunate enough to find employment in a nation that welcomed foreign workers, providing a hospitable environment and opportunity for upward mobility.

After my year teaching, I traveled around Asia, seeking insight into different landscapes. My world changed upon seeing countries like Laos, Cambodia, and the Philippines. The problems of my American life suddenly seemed trivial; my needs frivolous. I realized how much I had taken for granted by living in a cycle of want and expectation. My American dream quickly seemed less like a reality.

Returning to the States with a stronger critical prescription has made this election particularly difficult. I have always viewed our political system as deeply flawed, but my recent experiences have only added to that sentiment.

How can political candidates understand my needs when they have access to exorbitant wealth? How can I take a man seriously when his suits cost more than I make in three months of labor (or more)? How can I relate to them when their friends and colleagues are wealthy connections financing their campaigns? Am I a friend to these men and women? It doesn't feel like it.

I have no health insurance and keep my radiator off through the first few months of cold because I worry about the cost of heating my efficiency-sized apartment. My life is a game of chess, living like a pawn, trying to prepare against life's next blow to my bank account.

Along with the dip back into poverty, returning to college reminded me of the disheartening feeling that accompanies graduation and entering the job market. Despite the growing opportunities in cities like Des Moines, Iowa does not have a great draw for the young and educated. We live in a graying, White state that educates youth, but provides little incentive to stay. What can our state do to promote expansion and utilize the educated, ambitious graduates who continue to fly from the nest after eating their share of the state's worms?

With this presidential election, I find myself thinking more about local politics, as I am fed up with the catlike national scene. When I do find myself eyeing the media, listening to the rhetoric between the divided, I find myself caught in a limbo between "us" and "them," yet I don't see myself as an us or a them. I don't identify with either side. We live in a city, state, and nation as dynamic as the great expanse, yet we choose from two political parties that seem to ignore the gaping middle ground. I continue to hear people talk about "the Democrats" and "the Republicans" as if anyone who aligns with those groups falls into a specific archetype. Are my friends socialist pigs pushing to spend our country into doom? Are my parents geriatric, racist, homophobes who want nothing more than to steal from the poor?

It is time to question our political structure and a system that seems to shovel a spectrum of ideals into two piles. We need to live in a country where all points of view are valued and considered. With every argument, good or bad, religious or secular, liberal or conservative comes a point to be considered. Despite some of Stephen Bloom's assertions, Iowa is a vibrant state with an increasingly diverse population caught between two sides in nearly every election. We are a noted swing state, and a decision maker in each Caucus. Perhaps we can lead our country into a more representative state of mind, one that encompasses all thoughts, ideals, and visions.

In the next four years, let's bring it home. While the national outlook may seem bleak, we can take control of our local climate. The big picture does not seem to be working, so we must work to improve on a smaller scale. If we want to fix the problems of the nation, we need to start locally, expand nationally, and think globally. Let's look ahead and see the future clearly, from every perspective.