

Iowa's Record Setting Governor: The Terry Branstad Story

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emissions, increase biodiversity, improve human health and still ‘feed the world’” (6). While there are strong, culturally resilient ideas associated with respect for nature’s wholeness and simplicity, independence and freedom to engage in meaningful and sustainable relationships to land, abundant harvests and health, respect for honest hard work, and higher purposes in life (12), there are powerful capitalist infrastructure forces that enable concentrated economic, political, and cultural authority to sustain the hegemony of conventional chemically based agriculture.

O’Sullivan argues that while the organic movement convinced many people that they can formulate policy through consumer power, it failed to coalesce an organized movement to influence systemic reform. This study reveals that placing the burden of social and environmental damage to human and environmental health on the shoulders of consumers draws attention away from the crucial players in organizations and government who should be accountable for making agriculture sustainable and food safe and nutritious. This rigorous study shows how the viability of organic farming and its broader implications for health and sustainability depend on policy change and not consumer appeal. The challenges to consumption, she argues, should be focused on a challenge to the frameworks that sustain over-consumption (259).

This book should be of interest to Iowans because it challenges us to think about our food production systems in terms broader than just our daily bread. O’Sullivan argues that “the entire organic movement has remained oriented toward praising acts of individual salvation, not mobilizing for social revolution (194).” A broader moral vision is important, she argues, because organics may provide solutions to the rising costs of health care, global warming, and world hunger, but not without more integrated scientific studies, central organizational vision, and charismatic leadership. Much more is needed than just individual ethical decision making.

Iowa’s Record Setting Governor: The Terry Branstad Story, by Mike Chapman. Des Moines: Business Publications Corp., 2015. xxii, 234 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Timothy Walch is director emeritus of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and a volunteer at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

You should never judge a book by its cover, but it is fair to judge this biography by its title: *Iowa’s Record Setting Governor*. That Terry Branstad has served as governor of Iowa for a long time is a given. Several

years ago he passed his next-closest contemporary, Bill Janklow of South Dakota. And in December 2015 Branstad passed George Clinton—the long-forgotten governor of New York, to become the longest-serving governor in U.S. history. In length of gubernatorial service, Terry Branstad has no peer.

In recognition of that achievement, well-known Iowa journalist Mike Chapman has compiled a useful if uncritical biography of Branstad's life and career. Although this is not an official biography, Chapman did have the cooperation of the governor and his family as well as numerous staff members who worked with him over the years. The result is an affectionate, anecdotal portrait of a hard-working, unpretentious leader who has steered Iowa for a generation.

Chapman follows the traditional arc of most biographies, beginning with three chapters on Branstad's life before he launched his career in Des Moines. Here you will find stories of Branstad's youth in Leland and life on the farm with his parents and brother. Chapman goes on to write about the governor's years at the University of Iowa, two years in the U.S. Army, and law school at Drake University. The third chapter also includes his courtship and marriage to Christine Johnson and his burgeoning political career in the state senate and as Robert Ray's lieutenant governor.

The next four chapters focus on Branstad's first four terms as governor from 1983 to 1999. For the most part, these are brief overviews of the political landscape in Iowa as the governor sought election in 1982 and then re-election in 1986, 1990, and 1994. Although there is passing mention of the issues that he faced in each of these terms, the focus is more specifically on Branstad's political campaigns against Roxanne Conlin, Lowell Junkins, Don Avenson, and Bonnie Campbell. It is noteworthy that his closest race was a primary challenge from Congressman Fred Grandy in 1994.

Branstad chose not to run in 1998 and turned the office over to Democrat Tom Vilsack. The next three chapters touch on Branstad's career since 1999. In "Life after Terrace Hill" Chapman summarizes Branstad's work as an attorney and advisor and briefly discusses his six-plus years as president of Des Moines University. "The Comeback" returns the story to politics—Branstad's decision to run again in 2010 and his election victory over Chet Culver. The last chapter, titled "The Chinese Connection," traces the unusual friendship between Branstad and President Xi Jinping of China.

Chapman concludes the Branstad story with three chapters of summary: "Life in the Bubble," "The Legacy," and "Reflections." In addition to 27 pages of photographs and cartoons, the book ends with

appendixes listing the governors of Iowa, the longest-serving governors in U.S. history, the Branstad family, and staff members of the Branstad administrations. The book also includes footnotes, a list of interview subjects, additional sources of information, and an index.

Chapman has written a readable biography that belongs in every library in Iowa. That having been said, it is only the first draft of the Branstad story. Yet to come, of course, will be more rigorous study of his leadership through challenging times. That future work will necessarily be based on Branstad's gubernatorial papers and records held by the State Historical Society of Iowa. Indeed, a future study also will include assessments by Branstad's critics as well as his staff and supporters.

Corn Poll: A Novel of the Iowa Caucuses, by Zachary Michael Jack. North Liberty, Iowa: Ice Cube Press, 2015. 496 pp. Discussion guide. \$21.95 paperback.

Reviewer Matthew Schaefer is an archivist at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch.

Iowans have grown used to the quadrennial invasion of politicians seeking their votes, or at least their caucus-night commitment, to jump start their presidential campaigns. Those who have lived in Iowa long enough might even grow tired of the fresh-faced volunteers canvassing neighborhoods, robo-calls from uncharted political vectors, and the relentless drone of television ads and news merging into tasteless political mush. For Iowans who have gone so far as to become jaded by the caucus process, Zachary Michael Jack's *Corn Poll: A Novel of the Iowa Caucuses* would be a bracing tonic.

Corn Poll is a sweetly savage satire examining the all-too-familiar characters of the Iowa caucuses: cardboard cut-out politicians making feeble efforts to appear authentic in the retail politics of Iowa; worldly agents of the press corps deigning to spend a month in the Hawkeye state [in a state of high dudgeon], back-room politicians stage-managing events to make the "three out of Iowa" cut. Into this toxic mix, Jack introduces a hero, Jacob Preston, an Iowan ex-pat who recently lost his writing job at the *Rocky Mountain Partisan*. Preston wins the "Politics up Close" contest cosponsored by the Iowa GOP and the Republican National Committee. The political hacks hope to trade on Preston's access to further their own agendas for the 2012 election.

At loose ends, Preston packs up his Honda and motors east to Hereford, Iowa—home of the Fighting Plowmen, the Calvin Coolidge Café, and Herb Clarke, curmudgeonly editor of the local newspaper.