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64th General Assembly Reconvenes

A feeling of grim determination was in the air on January 10, 1972, when the Iowa legislature convened in an even-numbered year for the second time since the annual-session amendment was ratified by the people in 1968: Determination to make it a short session.

Leaders vowed to keep it short and the presiding officers of House and Senate emphasized that in their opening remarks. Good-naturedly, they suggested that one way to do it would be to cut down on excess verbiage during floor debates.

Lieutenant Governor Roger W. Jepsen even brandished a giant-sized gavel, admonishing members he would use it, if need be, along with Mason's *Manual of Legislative Procedure*, to keep debate "positive and productive." And on the House side of the rotunda, Speaker William H. Harbor requested the cooperation of members "in maintaining self-discipline in matters of lengthy debate."

It was an election year, so the presiding officers
were aiming their remarks specifically at legislators who were candidates, or likely candidates, for higher office. They assumed these gentlemen might give way to the natural tendency of most aspiring politicos to want the floor periodically for long-winded flights of oratory, tailored more to draw attention to their respective candidacies than to clarify issues raised in debate on pertinent legislation.

In truth, then, they were including themselves, for the Lieutenant Governor was running for the Republican nomination for Governor (although he withdrew his candidacy after the session ended), while the Speaker was seeking the Republican nomination for Lieutenant Governor.

Other aspirants included Senators John Tapscott, Des Moines Democrat, a candidate for Governor, and Arthur Neu, Carroll Republican, a candidate for Lieutenant Governor. Also eyeing the Lieutenant Governorship was Senator James Schaben, Dunlap Democrat, while two Republicans, Senators Tom Riley of Cedar Rapids and John Walsh of Dubuque, were potential candidates for Second District Congressman.

In his opening remarks, Lieutenant Governor Jepsen put the nix on any spending ideas Senators might be planning for the next year. The State treasury was in "a bare bones financial situation," he reminded them. Therefore, anyone proposing to spend money should be prepared to tell where it was coming from. Referring to the state's $5.5 mil-
lion financial deficit at the end of the last fiscal year, he said there was no need to dwell on what happened to the money, "We spent it."

Then he delivered a homespun lecture, discussing his idea of the American philosophy of government as outlined in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence:

"Government is supposed to maintain social order, prevent individuals from harming or defrauding each other, and leave everybody with the freedom otherwise to lead his own life..."

"Government can give the people nothing which government has not taken away from them. And the amount which government doles back to the people or spends to promote their welfare is always less than it takes."

For his part, Speaker Harbor reviewed the work of the 1971 legislature and observed that a number of study committees had carried on research during the interim between sessions to enable the 1972 legislature to cut the time needed for a short, meaningful session. However, he cautioned, good intentions "can be meaningless unless each of us dedicates himself to this cause."

"All of Iowa," he continued, "will be looking to see if we have spoken empty phrases or do we mean what we say—that a short, meaningful session is our creed in '72."

The emphasis on a short session was not lost on a majority of members. Visions of the fatiguing,
all-night hassle preceding adjournment of the 1971 session lingered in their minds and they wanted no part of another such scene. Moreover, they had heard enough from the home folks in the interim between sessions to convince them that these wild 20-hour meetings do nothing to improve the image of the General Assembly in the public's mind. The answer seemed obvious: Make this election-year legislature short and productive.

Toward that end they got off to an even faster start than in the 1970 session, which was the first in an even-numbered year since annual sessions started. There was a good reason for the faster start. In 1970 six new Senators and two new Representatives had been chosen in special elections to fill vacancies created by seven resignations and one death after the 1969 session ended. The ceremony of swearing in these new members, plus the routine business of assigning them seats and to committees, took some time in 1970. But in 1972 there had been no vacancies to fill.

Republicans, holding majorities of 63 to 37 in the House, and 37 to 13 in the Senate, dominated opening ceremonies. Even so, the Democratic minority got in a lick here and there. One of the most telling came on opening day when Senate Republicans voted to send back to committees some 85 bills that had been left on the calendar when the 1971 legislature adjourned. It was in the form of a public razzing from Senator Gene Kennedy, Du-
buque Democrat. Kennedy chided Republicans for placing so much emphasis on the need for a short session, saying “they’re already sending out smoke signals for us to go home when we should be talking about getting things done.”

Senator Kennedy charged Republicans with trying to kid the taxpayers into thinking they were saving them tax dollars when they actually were wasting time by returning to committees 85 bills that already had the approval of these committees dating back to 1971.

Over in the House, the situation was a bit different. Where the Senate had left its 1971 calendar intact, only to clear it on 1972’s opening day—over the protests of Senator Kennedy and others—the House had dumped its calendar into the sifting committee as the 1971 session drew to an end. So on opening day, 1972, the House rescued 21 bills that had been in the sifting committee’s possession and re-referred them to standing committees.

Other opening ceremonies included the appointment in each chamber of the usual committees to notify the other chamber, and the Governor, that the House and Senate were ready for business. Also, as in 1970, Governor Robert D. Ray was invited to address a joint session of the legislature on the afternoon of the opening day.