

The Part of the Legislator in the Building of the Commonwealth

Shirley Gilliland

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

Gilliland, Shirley. "The Part of the Legislator in the Building of the Commonwealth." *The Annals of Iowa* 15 (1927), 599-602.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.6806>

Hosted by Iowa Research Online

A. J. Chantry Page Co., Repr., 15 G. A.; Mills Co., Repr., 22, 23 G. A., Sen., 24, 25 G. A.

William S. Allen, Van Buren Co., Repr., 25, 26 G. A.; Jefferson Co. and Van Buren Co., Sen., 33, 34 G. A.

Theo C. Blume, Crawford Co., Repr., 27, 28, 40 G. A.

Henry C. Brandes, Pottawattamie Co., Repr., 32, 33 G. A.

A. L. Brooks, Audubon Co., Repr., 24 G. A.

A. B. Cummins, Polk Co., Repr., 22 G. A.

Wm. G. Dows, Linn Co., Repr., 27, 28 G. A.

Robert A. Greene, Madison Co., Repr., 29, 30, 31 G. A.

James D. Gamble, Marion Co., Repr., 11 G. A.

Parley Finch, Humboldt Co., Repr., 25, 26; Sen., 27, 28 G. A.

E. M. Hertert, Shelby Co., Repr., 29 G. A.

Lorin N. Hays, Marion Co., Repr., 18 G. A.

D. K. Harbert, Benton Co., Repr., 27, 28 G. A.

J. F. Lavender, Calhoun Co., Repr., 26, 27 G. A.

W. R. Lewis, Poweshiek Co., Sen., 27, 28 G. A.

Cyrus L. Stratton, Montgomery Co., Repr., 28, 29 G. A.

John R. Smith, Wright Co., Repr., 32, 33 G. A.

Geo. W. Schee, O'Brien Co., Repr., 20, 21, 33, 34 G. A.

R. W. Tirrill, Delaware Co., Sen., 18, 19 G. A.

H. H. Willson, Washington Co., Repr., 30, 31 G. A.

Charles A. Wise, Black Hawk Co., Repr., 28, 29, 30, 31 G. A.

The following addresses were then delivered:

THE PART OF THE LEGISLATOR IN THE BUILDING OF THE
COMMONWEALTH

BY SHIRLEY GILLLAND

I am proud and glad to be welcomed to membership in your honorable body. To me service in the Senate was an exceedingly enjoyable experience. In my first two sessions, the Thirtieth and Thirty-first, while we were changing from the annual to biennial elections, the personnel of the Senate remained the same. We quite naturally became more than usually intimate and learned to be

“Toward each other’s faults a little blind
And toward each other’s virtues very kind.”

In the session of 1906 I was selected by Governor Herriott to address the Pioneer Lawmakers on behalf of the Senate. My subject at that time was, “The Commonwealth of Iowa.” I said among other things:

“The problem of the best government involves the construction of such a system as will most effectually provide for the common defense and promote the general welfare with the least infringement of individual convenience, such an adjustment of the governmental machinery

as will lead the people to feel its presence and power not so much in its exactions and restraints as in the right it secures and the blessings it brings them.

"The problem of the best society contemplates a condition in which all men must be free and equal, where there is no aristocracy except in the qualities of manhood itself, where, in short, all necessary means for the attainment of the best things in life are put into every willing hand and where the highest honors are within the reach of the humblest born.

"Aye, taking the broad and ultimate view, what is the purpose of government? What is the mission of society? That some man may amass wealth? That another man may attain position? Certainly yes, as certainly no. The so-called practical man may see nothing more in them. But these are neither the hope of the philosopher nor the inspiration of the patriot. The real lover of humanity finds in these two purposes mere means to an end—the attainment of a fully equipped and well-rounded manhood and womanhood—the perfection of character. And all government and society that interfere with or fall short of this high end are failures to the measure of such interference or shortage."

Today I desire to speak briefly of the legislator and of his place and part in the building of the commonwealth.

First of all, he is human like other people, with some tints of partisanship and some glints of environment. Secondly, he will have to deal with his fellow legislators, some of whom are imbued with small ambitions, over zealous for personal honors or influenced overmuch by peculiar constituencies. Thirdly, there are his own immediate constituents, with their local interest and insistent demands, the fellows who in fairly close districts can say with some truth they sent him to Des Moines.

To hold himself true in this situation, in these surroundings, to keep

"The action faithful and the honor clear"

he must weigh his conduct and determine his course by the ultimate result—its probable effect on the general welfare. He must feel at all times the urgent appeal of service for the state and be keenly conscious that his time, his talents his knowledge and experience are all committed and pledged to that service both by his innate integrity as a man and by his oath as a legislator. As he writes the laws he must deal with the science of man and man, touching at once both government and society. He becomes a sort of rock on which may beat the greed, the pride, the passions of men, and again a sort of pivot on which may turn their welfare and security. With these responsibilities resting upon him he needs high integrity, large information, sound judgment, ripe wisdom, all mingled with a broad tolerance for the opinions of his fellow legislator and a kindly consideration for the genuineness

and sincerity of his motives. He needs a conscience alert, a courage unflinching, a vision so clear of the greater and better state of tomorrow that he may sift out true patriotism and sound policy from selfish design or doubtful policy, and so be able to stop at the line where the demands of ambition or unworthy private interest should give way to duty. For, let me emphasize by repetition, above his ambitious fellow member, his own over zealous constituent, even above and beyond his own preference and desire, as a sort of third and last call—when his vote is to be taken—must stand ever to the conscientious legislator the good name of his state and the true welfare of the people. And he has pledged himself to, he has sworn to protect the one and promote the other.

And just as the artist or the sculptor does his best work only when he keeps his thought on the canvas or the marble and thinks not of the price his product may bring, so the legislator does his best work when he can look beyond the applause or the votes of the populace and keep his mind steadily on his service for the state.

And here let me say that even the thoughtful legislator may tread on dangerous ground if he does not study well what may be and what may not be done by legislative enactment; in other words, the limits and bounds of legitimate legislation.

There has grown up in these later days a widespread belief, shared by some legislators, that legislation is the cure-all for every imagined ill of the body politic. And so if there is unrest or uneasiness in the community instead of an immediate search among ourselves for the cause and the cure, we must rush off to Des Moines or Washington for the solution and the remedy. The natural result is a multiplicity of useless if not harmful laws.

And yet it is always true that a community when wisely guided and undisturbed by demagogic utterance is happy and secure, not so much in its ordinances or laws as in the prevailing sense of public and private duty, the tenacity and vigor of its moral life, the average conception of individual responsibility.

The influences that determine the weal of the state lie not all in the statutes. The law cannot indeed undertake to establish righteousness or enforce morals. It cannot tell a man what he shall think or what he shall be. It can in all of these respects say little more than "All hail!" or "Hands off." Moreover, there is always a wide range of individual plan and purpose and conduct and conviction that can never be reached by any man made statute. There can be no effectual law against jealousy or envy; no law to make men gentle or tolerant or truthful or sincere; to instill pure thoughts or wholesome ambitions; no law to compel charity, the hearty grip, the cheering smile, the word of sympathy, the manifestation of brotherly kindness and solicitude for fellowmen; no law to make the woman in the drawing room or the parlor find a sister in the laundry or the kitchen; to make the man in the

director's chair find a brother in the engine cab or on the hand car; aye, no statute to enforce thrift or economy, to stop the waste of our time, our energies and our money on the fads, the foibles and the follies of our present day living. And yet these are the influences that tell upon life, that affect intimately and directly the peace, the happiness, aye, the welfare of the community. But no legislature that will ever assemble and no congress that will ever sit can control, provide for or settle these conditions.

Notwithstanding these facts this is a field into which the legislator is frequently tempted to enter. It is within this field the demagogue plies his arts and inflames the people. Here in his heated imagination dwell the political spooks, and hobgoblins hold their nightly orgies.

Let me now close with one of the final paragraphs of my address to the Pioneer Lawmakers of 1906:

"To be a worthy citizen of this great state is to bear a prouder title and one more significant and suggestive of the highest qualities of manhood than to be a potentate, prince or king of any monarchy on earth. And to be a participant in the making of her laws is to be the holder of a trust that none should take up with levity or pursue for a day without the devotion of all that is best and worthiest in his life."

ADDRESS

By PERRY ENGLE

One by one, at the beckoning of the silent messenger, our comrades have passed through the gate to the land of the dead. We miss their presence and counsels. Out of the fifty members of the Senate of the Twenty-third General Assembly, I only know of one comrade that remains; that one is our worthy president, A. B. Funk. Among the crowned jewels are a Kirkwood, a Harlan, a Larrabee, a Dolliver, a Gear, a Carpenter, a Cole, a Weaver, a Gillette. So many others, too numerous to mention. These pioneers bore the flag triumphant even to the gates of the sunset. These pioneers were the good men that Milton pictures as "The ripe fruit our earth holds up to God." The lives of such men are highly worthy of emulation. With my comrade pioneers, the morning of life has gone, the sombre shades of evening are gathering closely around us, we have heard the reveille at sunrise and listened to the tattoo of night. As the arrows of sunset lodged brightly on the tree tops, so I believe that somewhere the gates of light have opened wide for our departed comrades.

"Somewhere the sun is shining
Somewhere the song birds dwell."

We hope that our successors will honor us by excelling us; by giving the people the best of laws and the best of government. May we consecrate ourselves to that inspiring sentiment uttered by President Lin-

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.