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## ESSAY/COMMENT

# Branstad, the liberal governor

■ Branstad understands that many people say they are conservative, but they line up at the state trough for pet deals.

One thing we'll be seeing a lot of in 1998 will be stories about Gov. Terry Branstad's legacy. What did he do in the last 16 years that will amount to a hill of beans in the next 16? Until this session of the Legislature is over we won't know the full answer, and maybe not until long after he leaves office.

One thing is clear: He's been one of the best liberal governors this state has ever had. Huh? Liberal? I know, everyone is saying there, must have been something illegal in my New Year's Eve cigar. Everyone knows Terry Branstad is a conservative.

Is he? Just imagine a governor who raises the sales tax twice. Just imagine a governor who increased spending every year he was in office. Just imagine a governor who increased the state payroll and expanded gambling. Just imagine a governor who built a state-owned telephone company. Iowa was a pro-choice, no-death-penalty state 16 years ago and it still is. Just imagine a governor who wants to spend more on schools, including programs that will get the government more involved even earlier in children's education.

You've got him, Terry E. Branstad of Lake Mills. Branstad has run as a

### ON CAPITOL HILL



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conservative, but he governs as a liberal. That's because he understands something about us Iowans: Many people say and believe they are conservatives. But when it comes to wanting something from government, they're at the trough, demanding and getting their pet deals and encouraging an activist government. All the corporate welfare that state government hands out to "conservative" business types is an example.

Branstad's liberalism is why next week he'll propose a state budget that 1) increases spending at double the rate of inflation and 2) spends more than current tax revenues are taking in. Sure sounds like something a liberal would do, doesn't it?

His minions figure they can get away with this for a couple years. The state has a fat surplus he can burn off and they have some hokey five-year budget forecasts they've cooked up to tell us there will be 3 percent growth each of the next five years.

But the warning clouds are out there for anyone who cares to notice: Good economies don't last forever. Things like the Asian banking crisis can come out of nowhere and knock the bloom off the Iowa rose any time. There are parallels between 1928 and 1998. What happened in 1929? What will happen in 1999?

Spending at rates above inflation means there is a real increase in government activity. When the economy turns sour, the ability to finance those endeavors will evaporate. But those salaries and programs will still be there demanding payment, so taxes will be increased. (Remember, the sales tax in Iowa was started during the Great Depression.)

Spending more than you take in is hardly a "traditional Iowa value," and in

the late 1970s and early 1980s that was an early warning sign of budget problems to come. Only a few legislators like Dick Welden or Edgar Holden warned about it at the time, but they were dismissed as party poopers.

This year, Branstad and his liberal budget may run into trouble in the Legislature. More than a few legislators were around during the budget crisis and don't want to repeat it. At least a few Republicans in control of the place really are conservatives and believe in less government.

They're wary of spending practices like Branstad is suggesting. Look for them to make some trips in his budget, support only small tax cuts and finish a big study of how to fix Iowa's tax problems before doing any more big cuts. If there's money in the till, a lot of Republican senators figure they ought to leave it there so it can be used to help finance tax cuts in 1999.

Unfortunately, there are also a lot of legislators like Branstad who want to spend money. He's trying to buy a legacy. They'll be trying to buy some votes. Some things never change.

**A PLUG:** The 1997 version of "Iowa Counties: Selected Population Trends, Vital Statistics and Socioeconomic Data" has just been published by Iowa State University's Census Services. Willis Goudy, the leading expert on Iowa's population trends, is the main author. He and his colleagues have produced a useful reference for political types and policy wonks. Copies are \$35 each and can be obtained by writing Census Services, 303 East Hall, ISU, Ames, Ia. 50011.

**LEAD BALLOON:** State Senator Mary Lundby, a Marion Republican, has dropped her plans to run for secretary of state. Statehouse polls take that as a sign that her friend, Secretary of State Paul Pate, might drop his bid for governor and run for re-election.

Pate said that's not true — he's staying in the race for governor.

Lundby said she quit because when she was asked why she wanted Pate's job, the best reason she could give was that the pay was good. (At a salary of nearly \$80,000 a year, it's about double what a legislator makes. And there's nothing to do but campaign for some higher office.)

"That's a pretty poor reason to be running," she said. "I like what I do" in the Legislature and "I don't want to live

in Des Moines all year."

While Pate said he's campaigning hard, former Congressman Jim Ross Lightfoot has such a huge lead in the GOP contest that some GOP insiders have been urging him to drop out of the race for governor and stay where he is so he can live to fight again another day. Pate rejects that counsel.

But at some point, financial realities will start to set in on Pate, David Oman and Lt. Gov. Joy Corning. Lightfoot's huge lead will make it impossible for all of them to raise money, and they will have to quit the contest or run only token campaigns. The filing deadline is at the end of March, so there's plenty of time for these candidates to change their minds and fold their tents.

"I think he should get out," said Lundby. "But I don't know if that's his idea." Pate said it isn't.

Lundby's decision also makes it possible for Lightfoot to tap her as his running mate. He needs to add a woman to his ticket, a moderate and someone with some vote-getting ability in eastern Iowa. Lundby fits all three requirements.

Another reason Lundby's departure from the secretary of state race is important is because it gives new hope to the Democrats. Chet Culver, son of former Senator John Culver, is running for the Democratic nomination for the job. Democratic leaders are grooming him to run for governor or U.S. senator someday. With Lundby out of the running, Culver has a better chance of winning.

Lundby's departure also gives Republican legislative leaders a chance to do something many have wanted to do for a long time: Get rid of the job. It's a hollow post with only ministerial functions. Since it makes no policy, there's not much point in having it be an elective office, but GOP leaders haven't been able to ax it as long as a colleague wanted the post. With no legislators running, there's no longer a political reason for Republicans to keep wasting money on the position.

Getting rid of it would enable all legislators to polish their images as budget-cutters.

It would also enable the Republican Legislature to deny a base to young Mr. Culver. It defies political logic for the GOP to keep a job around that helps him.

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