


Business Trends Meeting
Norwest Bank Iowa
Monday, November 15, 1999
Remarks of Michael Gartner

Thank you, Scott.

Before I start, I'd just like to say a word to a couple of the men seated up here with me. I read, somewhere, where you, Dick, were a terrific baseball pitcher in your days at Stanford, so I'd like to invite you back to Des Moines to throw out the first ball in an Iowa Cubs game on some nice summer day.

In anticipation of that, Dick, here's the ball – signed ~~in this era of globalization~~ – by Hideo Nomo. 

And, Lynn, I'd like to invite you to that game to try to hit that first pitch – we'll see not only how good your eye is but how deft your office politics are – and to do that, here's an official Louisville Slugger bat. You'll note that it's the one favored by Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire – the official "Lynn Horak" model. It says so right here.

And, of course, I invite all of you here to come to that game.

As paying, ticket-buying, hotdog-purchasing, beer-buying patrons, of course.

I'm sure that's the way Dick and Lynn would want it. After all, they lent Michael Giudicessi and me several million dollars to help buy the team. So they don't want you getting in free.

I was told I was to talk to you about Iowa and the Iowa economy. I am not an economist or a politician. I can't tell you whether it's good or bad for Iowa that banks can now buy insurance companies, or vice versa. I have no idea if the Fed should raise the

interest rate again. I am, I think, one of the six people in this state who understand the property-tax system – but you'd leave in droves if I talked about that – and I am not one of the four who understand the school-aid formula. So I can't talk about that.

Still, I'll tell you about Iowa and its economy.

Iowa is lovely. And the economy, if you're not a farmer, is pretty good.

Iowa has been blessed with all the favors that God and Neal Smith could bestow – though, as you know, God has been on His own for the past six years or so. Or Her own.

We have wonderful land and wonderful people – and, since we have 8 pigs for every person, I should add that we have wonderful pigs, too.

We have a glorious past, and – if we do things right – we have a glorious future as well.

To understand the future, you need to understand the past. So let me tell you – briefly – about two incidents in our history that I particularly cherish and that I think have set this state apart since – well, since before it even was a state.

The first occurred on July 4, 1839 – and a more fitting day could not have been chosen. That was the day the Supreme Court of Iowa – and it was then the territory, not the state, of Iowa – handed down its first decision. That first court had three justices – and I should point out, without trying to draw any parallels, of course, that the Chief Justice was a newspaper editor and Democratic lawyer who had spent a lot of time in New York and therefore – being a newspaperman, a lawyer and a sometime New Yorker he was particularly wise....

Let me start that sentence again. On July 4, 1839, the court handed down its first decision. It involved a slave from Missouri who had bought his freedom and moved to

Dubuque to work in the lead mines but who had fallen behind in his payments to his former master. Some bounty hunters captured him and were trying to return him to Missouri to collect a reward when a farmer – his name was Alexander Butterworth, and the lawbooks describe him as a “noble-hearted Irishman,” though that seems redundant to me – at any rate, the farmer heard of the seizure and went immediately to his neighbor, a judge, who quickly sent the issue to the new supreme court.

The three judges heard the facts and then ruled – unanimously – in favor of the slave, whose name was Ralph. The court said, in that time which was a generation before Iowans went off to fight in the Civil War, that slavery did not and could not exist in Iowa. Iowa, it said, will not “restrain a human being of his liberty.” Iowa, it said, “extends equal protection to men of all colors and conditions.”

The second piece of history I want to tell you about occurred about 30 years later, in 1868, and it involved a 12-year-old girl from Muscatine named Susan Clark. She also was a Negro, and she also ended up before the Iowa Supreme Court. She wanted to go to school with the white children of Muscatine, but the school board said she had to go to the school for colored children. That didn’t seem right, her parents told the court.

Again, the court agreed. The laws of Iowa do not allow for segregated schools, the court said, and the state “makes no distinction whatever as to the right of children to attend the common schools.” So Susan Clark joined started going to school with the white children of Muscatine.

This happened, as I said, in 1868. That was about 90 years before the Supreme Court of the United States came around to the same conclusion in the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case.

As Casey Stengel would say – you’ll note that I don’t want your mind to wander too far from baseball – “you could look it up.”

And if you do want to look it up, the case names are *In the Matter of Ralph and Clark v. Board of Directors*.

I give you these two examples – I could tell you lots more – so that those of you who are relatively new to our state can understand the values that are imbedded in Iowa. For it is our values that have kept us on course – and that will, if we keep them and cherish them, ensure that we prosper in the future – prosper on the farm and in the factory, in the towns and in the cities.

Those values are clear.

Iowa is open – its spaces, and its government.

Iowa is clean – its air, and its politics.

Iowa is honest – its people, and its politicians.

Iowa believes in education – for rich and for poor.

Iowa believes in hard work – on the farm and in the factory.

And as those Supreme Court cases makes clear, Iowa believes in equality – for every man and woman and child, for everyone of every color, of every religion, of every belief.

There simply is no place like Iowa in the world.

And I think you – I think we, I think all Iowans – should make that fact the centerpiece of everything we do.

I think that that would be good business.

We should do four things.

First, we should put our money and our time and our thought and our energies into making sure Iowa builds on those values – and doesn't let them be destroyed by building hoglots in the wrong places, by abandoning farmers in their time of need, by letting our schools crumble or our economy tumble or our politicians stumble.

Second, we should put our money and our time and our thought and our energies into making sure we have an infrastructure that lets us enjoy those values – an infrastructure of parks and roads and trails and lakes and libraries and schools, an infrastructure that gives us livable towns and lurable cities.

Third, we should find a way to boast of what we have, to embrace those who are just passing through for a few years, to inoculate others with the wonders and awe of Iowa, to ensure that when people leave Iowa – after one week or after 20 years – that they never forget us.

And fourth, we should try to find a way to celebrate that which we're so lucky to have – which we sometimes take for granted, sometimes tend to squander, sometimes look askance at.

I have some ideas. Let's take that Department of Economic Development – a fine and well-run agency, I should add – and have it spend most of its money promoting our values. Let's not entice factories and firms with economic giveaways that any state can match. Let's let this new Department of Development and Values spend its money instead building on that which is unique, which no other state can match – our life-style and our people and our glorious resources.

In the long run, it's our hard-working people, our good schools, our roads and parks and lakes and trails and libraries – our lovely countryside and lively cities – that will entice new industry here and keep old industry from leaving. Let's take those old-fashioned assets and combine them with new-fashioned ideas to make Iowa simply irresistible.

What if we said we believe so strongly in educating our young that we are increasing our school year by six weeks. That's in effect adding two years of learning for every Iowa boy and girl who graduates from high school – making them two years smarter than youngsters from other places, giving them a two-year leg up as they enter college. What if we said every school would be outfitted with new-fashioned technology while demanding old-fashioned learning? Would that not be a great thing for those youngsters? Would that not lure business people who want their children to get great schooling, who want to be able to hire smart people, who want to live where education is praised and prized?

You'd think twice about leaving a state that cared about educating your children, that cared about taking them into the next era of technology. But you wouldn't think twice about coming to such a state.

Yet would another six weeks – 30 days – of school be a burden on our children? Iowa now has a 180-day school year. As Sen. Paul Simon noted in a speech at Drake last month, the school year in Germany is 240 days, in Japan it's 243 days, in Singapore it's 280 days. Even at 210 days – with that extra six weeks – we'd still be lagging the world, but we'd be well ahead of all the other states.

Let's have that Department of Development and Values subsidize the schools so we can do all this. We've got the greatest kids in the world; let's make them the smartest, too.

(And while we're at it, let's change that bizarre law that prohibits a town from taxing itself to spend more than 10% extra on its schools. Let's eliminate mediocrity, not reward it.)

Let's have the state work with our young another way. Let's have it set up a Peace Corps, an AmeriCorps, no an Iowa Corps of youths. Let's make community service mandatory as a requirement for graduation, as it now is in some schools like Dowling in West Des Moines. Let's send the young out to help Iowa's old – we have a higher percentage of people over 65 – and let me quickly say that I no longer think that that's old – a higher percentage than any state except Florida and Rhode Island. Let's send the high-schoolers out to read to them, to walk with them, to talk with them – and to learn from them. And let's have these smart kids tutor the young in the use of computers. Let's have them do physical work, too – cleaning up eyesores and fixing and painting and sawing and hammering. Will that not teach them about good deeds, teach them about Iowa, teach them about values? Will that not help them develop a pride in Iowa, a loyalty to her – and have them learn some skills as well?

And those old people. Let's enlist them, too. First of all, let's hire them. We have a labor shortage in this state – as does every state – but we have a surplus of able-bodied, hard-working older people. Let's fashion hours and transportation and benefits and tax laws to meet their needs – and help solve our problems. At the same time, why shouldn't every retirement home adopt a school? Why couldn't the old people there read to the little

kids, help them with their homework, listen to them – hug them? Would that not be wonderful for both young and old? You can't have too many grandparents. You can't get too many hugs – whether you're 8 or 80.

Let's quit wasting our time arguing about dumb things – the death penalty and abortion and prayer in school and the designated-hitter. (I'm told Bob Costas says the National League, without the designated hitter, is chess; the American League, with it, is checkers. Costas, incidentally, will be the speaker here on Feb. 4 at our Fan Fest. You should buy your tickets now.)

I seem to have gotten sidetracked. Let's quit arguing about dumb things. The courts will decide those, one way or another. Let's, instead, pour our energies into finding ways to save our small towns, to reinvigorate them, somehow, as growing branches of regional centers – the Carrolls and Mount Pleasants and Algonas and Waverlys and Fairfields of this state. Every town can't have a hospital and a school, but it can have good roads – and good fiber-optics – leading to hospitals and schools, it can have safe and secure homes, it can have access to the new technology. The Department of Development and Values must ensure that every town is safe and livable, that every town has links to a regional center, has links to technology. If we are to prosper, we must worry about the automobile highway as well as the information highway. Both must be modern and toll-free.

And let's build our pride as well as our highways.

Let's tell the world what a wonderful place this is. All the corporations in Iowa spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year advertising in magazines and trade journals, on billboards and television, on t-shirts and semi-trucks. What if they all agreed just to add

one little line at the bottom of every advertisement – a line that said, “XYZ Corp. of Indianola – proud to be an Iowan.”

Wouldn't that message of Iowa pride begin to sink in on people elsewhere – people who aren't proud of where they live and work? Wouldn't they start to wonder about Iowa? Wonder what it is that we have and they don't?

What if every tenth ad, say, went one step further and added one little fact about Iowa. These ads might end with a one-liner, like: State Fact: Iowa has the lowest murder rate in America. Or: State Fact: Iowa's youngsters score among the highest in the nation on college-entrance exams. Things like that. And I'll tell you one thing: you'll never run out of eye-opening state facts.

I have one other idea. Every fall, let's have a huge festival – in Des Moines one year, then Cedar Rapids, and Davenport, and Ames, and Iowa City, and Dubuque – a different place each year. Let's celebrate the land and the people.

Let's have it celebrate the great things we stand for – the Iowa Values – our good life, and our smart people, and our incredible resources, and our creative enterprises. Let's have it last a weekend, and let's have everything from scenic bike rides to barn dances to seminars and speeches.

Let's tie it in to that great World Food Prize that John Ruan so generously – and with such foresight – gives.

Let's invite an ex-Iowan – someone who was born here or who lived here – come and speak to us about something we should know about – be it war in East Timor or architecture in Los Angeles or the development of night baseball, (which, I should add, was first played in Des Moines, on May 2, 1929, in the old ballpark at Sixth and Holcomb.

Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, who was here for the game, predicted it would catch on.)

Let's learn, and let's have some fun. The Iowa Festival, and the Iowa Speech.

New Orleans has its Mardi Gras. The Twin Cities have their Winter Carnival.

Boston has its Marathon. Los Angeles has its Oscars. Why can't Iowa have its celebration?

Along with all this, of course, we need leadership.

Leadership to provide a sound tax structure that's fair to city and farm, business and home, rich and poor.

Leadership to pass laws that ensure safety for all, help for the needy, care for the sick, comfort for the aged.

Leadership that sets examples for the young, that shows the way for those of us of any age who are eager to follow – in business, in education, in politics, in agriculture.

Historically, Iowa has provided all that. Its legislators have, its judges have, its business people have, its educators have.

Iowa is blessed, as I said, with great people as well as great resources. People like John Chrystal, a Coon Rapids farmer and truly noble man who is recognized by more people on the streets of Moscow than on the avenues of Des Moines. Like Norman Borlaug, another farm boy, from Cresco, who won the Nobel Peace Prize and who, like Chrystal, has helped change the world. Like Ken Quinn, who was born in the Bronx but reared and educated in Dubuque, who almost single-handedly turned Iowa into a safe harbor for thousands of refugees and who went on to become ambassador to Cambodia – and who now is back in Des Moines, in the house he never sold because he knew that

somehow, some day, he'd come back. Like Jim Flansburg, the small-town merchant's son from Tiffen who became one of the best political reporters in the nation but chose never to leave the state he knew and loved. Like Sally Pederson, the girl from Vinton who came to Des Moines and succeeded first in business and, now, in politics by embodying all those Iowa traits of openness and honesty and creativity and intelligence. Like Gary Gerlach, the St. Ansgar boy who grew up (and up and up and up) and went off to practice law in Washington but returned to Iowa and built a successful newspaper company despite the fact that his partner, the editor, had a knack for irritating his advertisers. Like Art Neu, my favorite Republican – please don't take that personally, gentlemen at the head table – who unlike so many people went back to his home town, Carroll, after serving in state-wide office and now works tirelessly to make it a better place. Like Doug Brown, a farm boy from Mechanicsville who could have had a great career in the theater in New York but who chose, instead, to enlighten us and entertain us by reading to us very day on WOI radio – and, each year, explaining to us the ins and outs of honest-to-god high-school wrestling. Like Jack Rehm, who moved here as a top executive and chose to stay here after retirement, adding immensely to the leadership of downtown and Drake and all of Des Moines. And like John Ruan, the small-town boy from Beacon who started with a dumptruck and ended with an empire – and who chose to use the proceeds from that empire to underwrite the World Food Prize and find ways to help feed the world.

Those 10 Iowans – John Chrystal, Norman Borlaug, Ken Quinn, Jim Flansburg, Sally Pederson, Gary Gerlach, Art Neu, Doug Brown, Jack Rehm and John Ruan – happen to be my friends, so I know their stories. But each of you could come up with a

different list, from among your friends – wonderful men and women who love Iowa and make you proud to be an Iowan.

They share one thing – the same thing prized by those early justices on the Iowa Supreme Court. They believe in the values of Iowa.

Now, we are about to enter a new century, and we must reassess how we can strengthen those values and reposition this state to use those values as a way to grow and prosper.

I am not an economist, so I could not talk to you today about monetary policy or fiscal policy. I could not tell you about how we can increase our exports or right things on the farm.

But I can tell you this – no monetary policy or fiscal policy, no export policy or farm policy – can guarantee the future of this state or its businesses and business climate. But if we embrace the values of our populist and progressive forebears, if we prize education and praise openness, if we cherish the best of the old and embrace the best of the new – if we do all that, then this state will prosper.

Thank you, Lynn, for inviting me here today. Thank you, all of you, for listening.

And I remind you that opening day is April 6, against Memphis.

That's a Monday.

Game time is 1:35 p.m.

You can have the afternoon off.

For sneaking out to a baseball game is an Iowa value, too.