



Focus on the Family Action

Political novice becomes ‘leading light in the Legislature’

When no one else stepped up, Iowa businessman decided he would stand for marriage.

by John Paulton

Less than two years ago, Kent Sorenson had never been involved in politics. Today, few people are more discussed in Iowa politics than the same Kent Sorenson. What happened? Simple: the battle for marriage in Iowa.

In early 2008, Sorenson attended a rally for marriage at the Iowa Capitol. He told *Citizen* that, at the time, he thought that attending the rally “would be the extent of my political career.” After all, even though he cared about the issues, he was busy growing a cleaning business, not to mention the six kids he and his wife were raising and home schooling.

But then his wife gave him two phone numbers to call — of legislators who were blocking

POLITICAL SHOCK Two years ago, Kent Sorenson was busy running a cleaning business and raising his six kids. In November 2008, he shocked the Iowa political establishment by winning a state House seat by 163 votes.

the marriage amendment from being voted on. All he had to do was leave 30-second messages with these legislators, who weren’t answering their phones. But then, surprise, Senate Majority Leader Michael Gronstal answered the call, and Sorenson was pulled into an hour-long conversation. That led to a trip to the Capitol the next day, where he met with Gronstal. But an attempt to meet with his own representative, Democrat Mark Davitt, was unsuccessful even after Sorenson waited two and a half hours.

A few days later, Sorenson came to the Capitol again, this time to witness a big vote on the marriage amendment in the Iowa House. After

the amendment failed on a partisan vote, Sorenson approached Davitt to ask why he, as someone who claimed to support traditional marriage, would oppose the marriage amendment. When Davitt repeatedly tried to change the subject, Sorenson told him, “Mark, I’m going to remember you at the polls.” He then went home and told his wife, “We have to find out who’s running against this guy and get behind them.”

But, with the filing deadline just 11 days away, Davitt remained unopposed. After failing to recruit someone else, Sorenson filed to run.

Now, however, he was on his own. The Republican Party was glad he decided to run, but it was a Democratic district, and in the previous election Republicans had spent a quarter-million dollars in an unsuccessful attempt to win the seat. They weren’t about to target this district again, so all Sorenson got was a pat on the back. Leading Republicans also told him not to talk about marriage in his campaign.

Undeterred, Sorenson recruited volunteer help for his cash-poor campaign, and he knocked on the first of 12,000 doors that he would personally cover. He talked frankly about marriage, life, taxes and other issues — his candor earning him the respect (and sometimes the votes) of those who disagreed with him. On Election Day, after spending a meager \$44,000, Sorenson shocked the Iowa political establishment when he won by 163 votes. “In a terrible year,” says Chuck Hurley of the Iowa Family Policy Center, “he was easily the biggest surprise.”

More importantly, since the election, Sorenson has become, according to Hurley, the “leading light in the Legislature” — even though Democrats control both the House and the Senate.

“He’s a winsome, hardworking businessman,” Hurley said. “He’s a tiger.”

Earlier this year, Sorenson again shocked the political establishment by sending a letter to Iowa’s senior U.S. senator, Chuck Grassley. The letter challenged Grassley on his weak response to the Iowa Supreme Court’s anti-marriage ruling and his apparent softness on President Barack

Obama’s health care plan. The letter led to a meeting with Grassley and, eventually, to stronger conservative statements from Grassley.

“People were really shocked that a freshman legislator would take on a senior U.S. senator from the same party,” Sorenson said. “But I wasn’t elected to be a good Republican; I was elected to stand up for what’s right and to represent the people.”

Sorenson now finds himself targeted, as the leading gay-rights organization in Iowa has made Sorenson its No. 1 target for 2010.

But don’t expect that to change how he operates. About the marriage issue, Sorenson says: “This is a pivotal issue. You have

to communicate about it with respect, but don’t back down.

“This is my generation’s defining moment. This is what our kids are going to be reading about. It’s up to us to do what’s right.” ●

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Iowa state Rep.
Kent Sorenson

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