



IOWA CHAPTER

Reframing the discussion around why the government is important to our lives and our success as private citizens

This is a transcript of a conversation on the role of government, taxes, and the budget between Pam Mackey Taylor, Director of the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club, and State Senator Joe Bolckom, from March 26, 2021.

Pam: Show me your budget, and I'll show you what your values are. Every budget has two pieces, what your core beliefs are and how you collect the money and spend the money. What we're seeing in Iowa is we have problems with dirty water that never get fixed and we claim we have no money. We like to have clean air, we like to have public education available to all students in the state. We think money should be used for post high school education, making sure that people can afford education. Public health is important to us, parks and recreation, but we never seem to have enough money. And it's because we are spending our money on large tax breaks to large corporations, cutting the taxes that we collect from them. We're forcing those taxes onto the middle class, because they don't have a way of shifting those taxes to someone else or getting the same tax breaks. And so we care deeply about whether or not things like tax increment financing takes away local taxes. Sometimes tax increment financing is used to fund things that we don't like, like tearing down trees and woodlands or to expand into farmland. Sometimes those research activities tax credits are funding things that we think should be better funded like a public research activity at the universities. So we care about how our money is spent because it affects all of the things that we do at the legislature and all the things that we do in front of the agencies.



Senator Bolckom: In terms of values, we live in a democracy. In a democracy we have a government and, as Lincoln said, it should be by the people, for the people. That means everyday people are making decisions that benefit the people. And when I say the people I mean, everybody. If you think about it, you really can't have a private sector, without the government and the government services that are provided. The example I used earlier about the business, the road is provided by the city. The streetlights on the road are provided by the government, right, the water system that gets hooked up to the factory is the public water system. The sewer system is the public sewer system. Late at night when it's dark out, the police patrol the street so that the factory is protected. We've got all these investments and so you can't really even have a private sector

without government and government services. And if you think even harder about those workers, they have to drive from their home to the factory, and they need a road to it. And then those workers might want to go to a restaurant when they're off work. And they can rest assured that the food being served at the restaurant isn't going to kill them, because the health department has come in and made sure that the food that people eat is safe. They have water at the restaurant to serve you water and to wash your dishes. You can't really even have a private life and do all the things you want to do without the government. You want to go to the baseball game? Well you got to ride on the road to get to it. And there's a street sign, you have to stop your car so you don't kill anyone. Again, you can barely make a move to do anything to get to work or to get to recreation as a private citizen without the government. So really the question is, what kind of government are we going to have? Are we going to have a government that pours our money into refund checks for big profitable companies or pours our money into higher education or K 12 or after school programs, or preschool to help our kids right to help us all be successful across the community? And that's I think a narrative in a democracy, we have a government, it should work for all of us, we couldn't have any, we don't have anything without it, it's the basis of all the things we do in the private sector. And the question is, do we have it if it doesn't work for us? Does it do it efficiently? Does it spend our money the way we want it to? I just want to leave with that idea, that we don't make that case enough. It's always tearing down the government, it's always cutting down government making it smaller. We had a pandemic, what number did everybody call when the pandemic got here, the government. We have a problem, call the government. If your house is on fire, who do you call? So we have to reframe the discussion here around why the government is important to our lives and our success as private citizens.

