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MARY SCHMICH

Struggling dad's lesson on giving

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"You never ask for anything," he said. He was standing up, fishing in his pants pocket. He pulled out some change, counted it in his palm, pressed it into one of mine. "Buy something for your brothers too."

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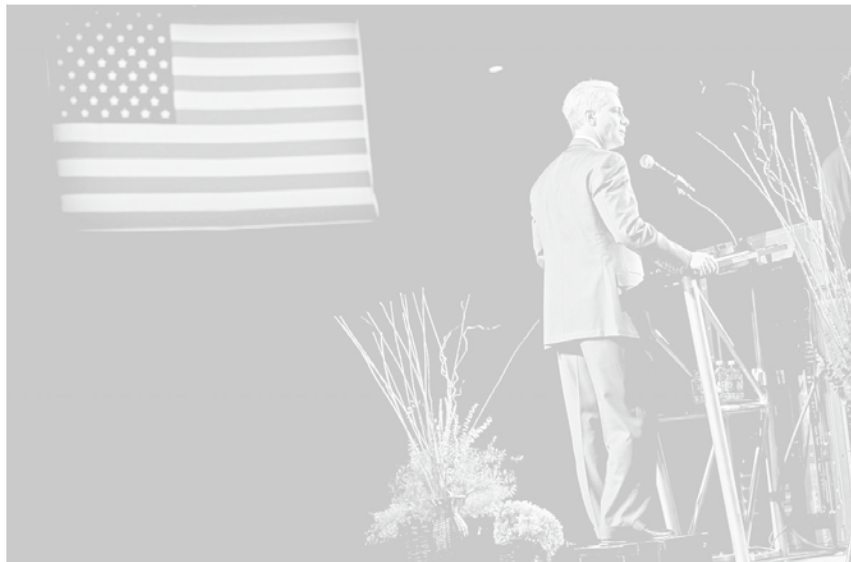
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mschmich@tribune.com



NANCY STONE/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Rahm Emanuel told Iowa Democrats at a fundraiser on Saturday that President Barack Obama is up to the challenge of revitalizing the U.S.

Emanuel lauds Obama vision

At Iowa fundraiser, mayor slams GOP hopefuls as 'turkeys'

By RICK PEARSON
Tribune reporter

DES MOINES, Iowa — Trying to rebuild enthusiasm in the state that launched Barack Obama to the White House, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel told Iowa Democrats on Saturday night that his former boss has the leadership and values to restore the nation's middle class and reject the Republican economic agenda.

The former White House chief of staff spoke at Iowa's annual Jefferson Jackson Dinner—the marquee pre-caucus fundraiser for the state's Democrats—in his most high-profile role as an Obama surrogate to defend the president and blister the Republican field.

"In the next four years there will be more challenges and more crises that will determine the economic vitality of the middle class and the economic future of this country. Whose character, whose judgment, do you want in that office?" Emanuel said. "Over the next four years, there will be a series of choices. And it won't be clear what the outcome will be—like the auto industry. We will need leadership; we will need values as guideposts in the oval office."

Traditionally, the use of the word "values" has been associated with conservative Republican candidates. Conservative, church-based values were a major topic at a forum featuring six of the GOP hopefuls earlier in the day at the First Federated Church across town.

Emanuel, who left the Obama White House last year to run for mayor, told an audience of more than 1,200 people who paid at

least \$100 a ticket that the decisions Obama has made as president—a mix of issues such as health care — were based on principle, not politics.

"He did not make choices for the next generation," said Emanuel, who has often said the president disregarded some of his advice as politically expedient. "President Obama never tailored what he believed for the moment."

The mayor traveled to Iowa with a new perspective from running a big city in tough economic times. He's recently expressed frustration with Washington inaction and repeatedly faced off with unions that form the backbone of Democratic political activism.

Iowa again is a crucial part of Obama's election strategy. His 2008 caucus victory here propelled him past the conventional wisdom that had Hillary Rodham Clinton, now secretary of state, winning the state and the Democratic nomination.

But Emanuel visited a state that last year saw Republicans take back the governor's office and the state House, narrow the Democrats' control of the state Senate and recall three state Supreme Court justices who had joined in a unanimous ruling authorizing same-sex marriage.

This year, as the nation's first presidential caucus state, attention in Iowa has focused on Republican candidates bashing Obama as they try to win their party's nomination, possibly giving the GOP a general election advantage in a swing state that the Democrat won with 54 percent of the vote in 2008.

Against that political backdrop Emanuel was tapped as keynote speaker for Iowa's Democrats. His task — to offer a broad defense of Obama's presidency while trying to inspire independent voters who

GOP forum

Presidential hopefuls talk to Iowa conservative activists. Page 31

will be crucial in a general election less than a year away.

A key aim is recapturing middle-class voters feeling vulnerable from the economy and questioning whether Wall Street has benefited unfairly, an issue highlighted by the Occupy Wall Street movement and Obama's efforts to try to fund job creation and deficit reduction through higher taxes on the wealthy.

"To create true middle-class security, we can't just cut our way to prosperity. We must out-innovate, out-invest, out-educate and out-build the world," Emanuel said.

"President Obama believes in an America where hard work pays off, where responsibility is rewarded. He believes in an America where everyone, from Main Street to Wall Street, does their fair share. He believes in an America where we don't have two rule books — one for those at the top and one for everyone else to play by."

Emanuel fired up the crowd with shots at the Republican presidential candidates, most of whom were also in town.

"Their debate was called the Thanksgiving Family Forum," Emanuel said, "which is fitting because I have never seen such a collection of turkeys."

Following the Obama's campaign lead of singling out former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney for criticism, Emanuel blistered the GOP candidate. The mayor said Romney has a history of siding with the wealthy at the expense of the middle class.

"Middle-class Americans cannot afford Mitt Romney's leadership and values," Emanuel said. "They cannot have a leader who

turns a blind eye to their daily struggles."

In contrast, Emanuel recited several promises Obama made to Iowa voters four years ago, ranging from health care reform to finding Osama bin Laden.

"That is the change we believed in. That is the change our president delivered," he said.

Emanuel was a "real catch" for Iowa Democrats trying to build enthusiasm without the benefit of a caucus battle, according to David Yepsen, former political columnist for the Des Moines Register. Republicans will be able to build on their fluid presidential fight to assemble the networking at the precinct level for next year's general election.

"Democrats have to look for leaders like this in their next generation," said Yepsen, director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. "(Emanuel) has some credibility on the left, but he's had to cut budgets and offend unions. ... People are going to look at his (budget) solutions and say, 'What he's doing? Can this be a model for us?'"

Although Emanuel has pooh-poohed the notion of using the mayor's office as a stage to run for president, any prominent politician who comes to Iowa in a campaign year — even if not seeking the job — generates a great deal of buzz. "The Iowans will start that (presidential) chatter," Yepsen said.

But Republicans used Emanuel's visit to question the mayor's role as chief of staff in the efforts by the White House to award \$535 million to the solar-technology firm Solyndra, which subsequently went bankrupt. Emanuel has said he does not recall playing a role in the Department of Energy's loan to the firm.

rap30@aol.com

Sexting case back with a vengeance

Outrage in Lake Forest that principal kept job after 2009 conviction

By DUAA ELDEIB
AND LISA BLACK
Tribune reporters

As a Lake Forest principal stands accused of withholding details about vulgar text messages to a college student, parents are expressing fear and disgust over revelations that hit close to home in the wake of the Penn State scandal.

Deer Path Middle School Principal John Steinert, 40, was placed on paid leave Thursday while Lake Forest District 67 officials investigate the circumstances of his 2009 guilty plea to a misdemeanor charge of harassment using a district phone.

Superintendent Harry Griffith said he will recommend at a school board meeting Sunday night that Steinert be fired.

Steinert's case involved a 22-

year-old college intern — circumstances dramatically different from the allegations against the former Penn State football assistant accused of child sexual assaults. But in both cases, parents allege systemic wrongdoing in which people looked the other way.

"How am I supposed to teach my kids what's right and wrong if there are no consequences and it's dusted under the rug?" said Sarah Metzger, a Deer Path parent.

After learning of the intern's complaints to Gurnee police in January 2009, Griffith obtained the police report available at the time, which didn't specify the explicit nature of the texts or that one was a photograph of Steinert's penis.

As a result, the principal was disciplined but not fired.

It's hard to imagine that parents would have been less outraged had Steinert's behavior been revealed before the Penn State scandal broke.

But former FBI agent Kenneth

Lanning said that case has "heightened awareness of what institutions should do when they become aware of (a sex-related) incident and what their responsibility is."

Steinert, a well-liked principal who earns nearly \$170,000 in salary and benefits, admitted he sent the texts in 2008 and 2009, and has said he is remorseful. The woman who received them was an intern for the Lake Forest Police Department who visited Deer Path while shadowing a school resource officer. She ignored some of the texts; other times she asked Steinert to leave her alone.

Lanning called it "embarrassing" that the school district was unaware of the particulars in Steinert's case.

"It would just make common sense to me that if you have a school official that has been arrested for a crime (with a sexual component) ... you want to get the details," he said. "If the details aren't available at that point, you don't just say OK and go on

whistling."

Parents echoed those sentiments during a Friday meeting with Griffith, questioning why officials did not conduct a more thorough investigation two years ago.

"When such scandals break, it moves the issue to the forefront of many people's minds, said Char Rivette, executive director of Chicago Children's Advocacy Center.

"When something like this comes to light in the media, it makes everyone's radar go up," she said. "I'm not surprised that more of these sort of (cases) are coming out, even old ones that maybe weren't taken seriously before."

With the country collectively grappling with the fallout from the Penn State allegations, "parents are up in arms, really nervous and apprehensive," Rivette said.

Freelance reporter Susan Berger contributed.

delaideib@tribune.com
lblack@tribune.com

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BY MARY SCHMICH

Sunday, November 20, 2011

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