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King of Iowa

Daniel Brown
Iowa State University

Jessica Bartemes
Iowa State University

Jeff King

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Our congressman—Steve King—is known in the media for saying some outlandish things, but who is the man behind the words?

BY DANIEL BROWN
DESIGN JESSICA BARTEMES
CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS
COURTESY OF JEFF KING
“If [Obama] is elected president... al-Qaida will be dancing in the streets in greater numbers than they did on September 11... his middle name does matter,” our Republican Congressman Steve King erroneously predicted in early 2008. But while often making national headlines for such inflammatory statements, little is known about his upbringing and background and how his experiences have influenced his political convictions.

Born in 1949, he was raised in a family of seven in the small town of Goodell, Iowa. In 1961, the King family moved to an acreage two miles south of Denison. “There was some farming that went on, but it was not primary,” says Jon King of Guthrie Center, younger brother of the congressman. “My first jobs were all Ag related and I assume Steve’s were about the same.”

The congressman often spent his free time hunting, fishing and playing chess. He ran track, but did not play other sports. “My mother was dead set against sports. She was afraid he would get hurt,” Jon says.

Although now a Catholic—his wife is Catholic—he grew up a Methodist. The family went to church every Sunday. Profanity was rare and was not tolerated from the kids and “if dad said ‘damn,’ you’d better be listening because he’d been pushed over the top and ‘damn’ and ‘hell’ was all I heard Dad say,” Jon says.

Their father, Emmet, who ran the police station radio “didn’t have any issues about being in charge of things. He had ideas about the way things should be and that’s how he implemented them—He had rules and expected you to obey them.” At the same time, “he was always fair,” Jon says.

Their mother, Mildred, was a stay-at-home mom. They were “like Ozzie and Harriet,” Jon says. “Dad worked, mom stayed home. Dad came home, supper was on the table. Mom was there for the kids—always.”

After King dropped out of college, he worked briefly in Omaha, Nebraska then moved back to Iowa. It was around this time that the congressman married his wife, Marilyn, who would eventually become a teacher at a Methodist church. For the first three years of married life, he worked construction in Denison. Then in 1975, he started his own business—King Construction.

Over the next 20 years, before running for the Iowa Senate in 1996, King would slowly grow his business—although it has never had more than 10 employees—and start a family, eventually having three children.

His youngest son and campaign chair, Jeff King of Wall Lake, says his most prevalent memory of his father was “him coming home from working construction with jeans and blue button-up, short-sleeve shirt.”

The first few years of business were rough—a bulldozer broke down and King was busy preparing for the birth of his child. The 1980s were tough as well thanks to the farm crisis. In the mid-`80s, two men vandalized and destroyed one of the congressman’s bulldozers and scrapers, totaling $140,000 in damage. His insurance policy did not cover vandalism. Although he won a settlement against the vandals, they paid him only $60. “Things like that—they inform your worldview,” Jon says. “It kinda hardened him,” says the congressman’s son.

He had other experiences that shaped his political convictions. One occurred when he was working on the pipeline as a college student—he noticed there was a union steward who worked little but earned the same wages as everyone else.

The congressman’s experiences with King Construction likely shaped his fiscal policy opinions the most. “He counted 42 or 43 state and federal regulations that he had to comply with,” Jeff says.

Overall, Congressman King is a small business owner and a man who has never lived outside of rural Iowa or any town with a...
population over 15,000, except briefly—less than a year—in Omaha. King grew up experiencing little diversity in a traditional and religious household. His political beliefs, rhetoric and campaign contributors seem to reflect this.

He is pro-life and anti-gay marriage. He is anti-union and pro-corporation. He is against amnesty for illegal immigrants and against ObamaCare. He also believes in strictly following the constitution and that Iowa should remain a leader in wind, ethanol and biodiesel production.

His biggest campaign contributors are mostly blue collar companies, such as Mail Services LLC, Norsemen Trucking and Doll Distributing.

Overall, the congressman is most concerned with immigration and this is for two reasons, according to his son: one, there is no one else in the Republican party—now that former Congressman Tancredo is out of office—to spearhead the gallant fight against amnesty; and two, because amnesty is permanent and cannot be rescinded.

In fact, the congressman’s most recent headlining remark was made while arguing against the DREAM Act, which would grant amnesty to illegal immigrants who arrive as minors. He said that for every child of illegal immigrants “who’s a valedictorian, there’s another 100 out there who weigh 130 pounds and got calves the size of cantaloupes because they’re hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert.” Both his brother and son stood by this ratio of 1 valedictorian to every 100 drug smugglers.

But why does the congressman say such things? “He uses a lot of analogies,” Jeff says, and “some of this is on purpose to get people talking...but he always has a reason for saying [something outrageous].” As for his latest remark, “a border [patrolman] told him they could tell the normal drug-runners ‘cause their calves had gotten large.” Nonetheless it remains unexplained where he received that ratio and moreover why that ratio is relevant since it could be just as true for drug-pushin’ U.S. citizens.

In any event, the Annenburg Public Policy Center’s nonpartisan website factcheck.org states, “It’s probably not possible to check this ratio.” It said the evidence the congressman entered into the Congressional Record in support of his comments “merely said there had been an increase between 2008 and 2011 in apprehensions of 14 to 18-year-olds attempting...to cross the...border with the intent to sell drugs.” But “these aren’t the DREAMers,” the center’s website says. One U.S. Border Protection official even said that smugglers are not looking for a life in the United States. Most cross illegally to drop off the drugs and then return to Mexico.

Nevertheless, “[the congressman] is warm and not [hateful] at all,” and believes “we’re all created in God’s image,” Jeff says.

Responding, however, to whether or not King Construction hires people with large calves, Jeff just laughed.

“Some of this is on purpose so it gets people talking...”