

MEREDITH ON ROADS

Speech of E. T. Meredith, Democratic Candidate for Governor, Delivered at Atlantic, May 31.

"Let's have it settled once and for all that so far at least as the Democratic Candidate for Governor is concerned he is not urging paving."

"There is no disposition to force an improved road upon any community that does not desire it—the people must order it by their vote."

"The taxpayers should absolutely contract expenditures of funds and no program should be entered upon until the people have given express authority by their vote. I am for conserving Iowa's millions of tax money in more permanent work and not for increasing taxes."

"The people should receive a dollar's worth of roads for every dollar they pay."

"I am for progress in Iowa and I believe good roads are highly necessary to our progress."

"I believe in the conduct of our community, county and state affairs the same business principles should be followed as in our personal affairs."



HON. E. T. MEREDITH.

I have been advised to talk in general terms when discussing road matters, the argument being that if I went too much into detail some would object to some feature while if I talked in general terms voters would take no offense because I would really not have said anything.

I have also been advised to say nothing regarding roads until after the primaries when I would know who my opponent was and I might then desire to say something different. I do not see that whether one man or another is my opponent can change what I think about roads, so why not go on record one time as well as another? I am consequently going to talk roads tonight and not wait for the Republican Primaries. I am also going to talk as plainly as I know how, that you may know exactly where I stand rather than to talk in general terms and when I get through have you wondering what I really think about roads. I believe this is what you would wish.

Before entering upon a discussion of the road problem itself I wish to call your attention to some of the false assertions that are being made, or at least false impressions that are being very generally circulated.

There is an organization known as The Tax Payers League, the membership of which I believe to be largely made up of honest patriotic Iowans but who have been misled by scheming, unprincipled men, whom I fear have some selfish purposes of their own to serve. I find, for instance, in a recent call for one of their meetings, the following:

"Organize for your homes. Hard roads will mortgage our homes and place a debt upon our children that will be worse than the war debt of Europe. Let us swear political death to all grafters and all candidates that favor the paving of our public highways. Let us fight for our homes."

In another notice, I find this: "These tax eaters, if we don't stop them, will get a law compelling the farmers to pave their cow lots and pasture lands to keep the cattle off the grass, on account of sanitary necessity."

I quote the following from Mr. Harding, candidate for nomination as Governor:

"Because I am opposing a proposed issue of \$100,000,000 in bonds to pave the highways of the state I am branded as an advocate of bad roads."

Now I would be pleased to see any authoritative statement from any candidate or others who are urging paving or a \$100,000,000 bond issue. I am not asking that our roads be paved and I have not found others who are. Let's have it settled once and for all that so far at least as the Democratic Candidate for Governor is concerned he is not urging paving. I do wish you to understand, however, that I am for better roads than we now have in Iowa. I am not appealing to you for votes on a mud platform or making an effort to be elected governor of Iowa on a re-actionary or do-nothing policy.

I am for progress in Iowa and I believe good roads are highly necessary to our progress.

In Campaign to Serve Iowa.

I am sensible of the great honor bestowed upon one when he is elected governor of this great state. I am not in this for honor, however. I am in the campaign to serve Iowa if I may and I would feel that by standing for those things which mean progress, and being defeated, I have served Iowa to a far greater extent than by trimming my sails to the wind, standing for no progress, even though by so doing I might be elected; and I would also feel that possibly as much honor had come to me if defeated on a platform of service as would come to me in my election on a platform of reaction. Let me repeat as sincerely as I know how that I am not unmindful of the honor attached to being governor of Iowa, but let me say just as frankly, and you accept it as just as sincere a statement that whether I am elected governor of Iowa is really not so vital a matter to me. I do feel, however, that it is vitally important to the tax payers of Iowa that some one should be elected who has some interest in their welfare, and will apply business principles to the conduct of the state's affairs; some one who will stand for what he thinks is right before any and all audiences and compromise himself on no proposition just to get votes. I am sure we understand each other and that if after a full discussion of what I think the state needs you agree with my views, then you are with me. If when you know what I am for, you do not agree with me as to policy, then you are against me; and that is the basis upon which the campaign should be made.

All for Good Roads.

Now with this preliminary, I wish to call your attention to a statement I find in another call for one of these tax payers' meetings. It is as follows: "We believe in good roads the same as every one in Iowa does. We want the best roads we can afford."

I take it that this statement is an authoritative one and that we can agree that every one in Iowa wishes good roads and appreciates the value of them.

Some say that dirt roads are all that are necessary, but I believe the number who will urge that our Iowa roads during the larger portion of the year are all that are necessary are but few and the agitation over the road question is because the fact is generally recognized that dirt roads in Iowa are not enough.

Iowa is away behind other states in the matter of good roads. Why is this true? The records in all the states show that Iowa tax payers pay more each year in taxes for bridges and roads than any other state in the union with two exceptions, and that twenty-six other states have more miles of improved roads than Iowa for a smaller amount of money spent. Surely there is something wrong. Surely we have not been getting value received for our money. Surely this would indicate that if properly spent we could have the improved roads on our present expenditures. Twenty-six other states have them for the same or less money than we have been spending.

Minnesota and Missouri on two sides of us each have three times as many miles of hard roads as we have, yet they raise less money each year. Wisconsin has five times as many miles, Ohio and Indiana each have ten times as many miles of hard road as we have and all on less money than we pay for mud.

There is no one of us who has not seen many times in Iowa when we could not visit our neighbors because of the bad roads; could not get our produce to town; could not with any degree of comfort on occasions attend church, and have seen buggies, wagons and automobiles mired in our roads. Just the other day some men stole an automobile, got ten miles from town, mired in the mud and could get no farther. Upon inquiry of a farmer for a team to pull them out, they were arrested. This is at least one time when an impassable road served a good purpose, but it illustrates the condition into which our roads get at times because if anybody ever tried to get through them these men did. There are but few who will argue that our roads under our present system are satisfactory. I would say that ninety-five percent of the people in the state of Iowa are demanding better roads, and, as the tax payers' league urges, "want the best roads they can afford."

Hills Should Be Cut Down.

I am going to take it as an accepted fact, then, that we want better roads. This granted, I am sure that all will agree that one of the things necessary to give us better roads in Iowa is the cutting down of many of our hills. All will agree that a hill cut down now will still be cut down a thousand years from now and that money spent for this purpose will not be wasted. We will agree that the first thing to do is to cut down these grades, and if we are going to do it, to do it now, if it can be done without extra expense, that we may not for the next several years be climbing up one side of these hills and rolling down the other side. I believe all will agree that in many counties by putting on a proper outfit, letting a contract of considerable size to a good Irish contractor, it would cost the tax payers less money to handle the dirt on some of our big hills than by our present piece-meal method with inferior outfits. It is so apparent that cutting down our grades would add greatly to our roads that I am going to accept this as generally agreed upon as desirable, and make the cutting down of our hills the first plank in our good roads platform.

Subdrain the Roads.

The subdrainage of hillside roads is one of the most neglected parts of our entire road system. The water seeping out of the hillside or rising from below keeps many of the slopes in bad condition much of the time. Under this defect the more the road is traveled the worse it becomes. In places such as these, tile should be laid under the road to sub-drain and carry this water off rather than have it come to the surface. There are many long stretches of flat-road where tile should also be laid. This is an important matter and we will make it plank number two. I know you will agree with it.

Road Beds Graded and Rounded.

I am sure that all will agree our road beds should be well graded and rounded so the water which falls as rain will not stand in the middle of the road in puddles to soften the road bed and result in cuts and ruts. Every tax payer in Iowa will agree that the grading up of our roads so as to shed water is desirable, so we will make the third plank in our roads program "Road beds to be graded and rounded."

If the water is turned to the side of the road, I am sure again that all will agree this water should be disposed of and not allowed to stand in pools and ponds along the road to soak up our grades, so the fourth plank in our good roads program will be to have the roads well drained with ditches at the side leading into streams or culverts and carrying the surplus water away.

These are generally recognized as fundamental propositions, but I wish to state them and get common consent to the program as we go along.

Bridges Should Be Permanent Structures.

Another necessity that all will recognize are bridges and culverts, and practically every farmer and tax payer of the state of Iowa will without exception agree that these bridges and culverts should be permanent structures, preferably concrete, that we may to a very large extent cut out repairs. It is in this item of repairs and maintenance of temporary bridges that we put a large portion of our tax money. This is our big leak and we should stop it. It is not necessary to urge upon Iowa tax payers that we build permanent bridges so I am going to make plank number five, "that all bridges and culverts, so far as is practical, should be of permanent construction. Such structures will last for the next hundred years with practically no repairs."

Now we come to the proposition of whether or not we shall have any surfacing on this road upon which we have cut down the hills, have graded up the road bed, have drained it in good shape and upon which we have erected permanent bridges. I take it as a foregone conclusion that the tax payers of Iowa will be glad to have a graveled road bed if it would pay them to have it, if it is enough to make it a good investment. Just as they put their money into silos, tractors, cream separators, etc. Millions of dollars are spent for these articles because they pay. I take it that if the program I have outlined with the surface graveled really does make a better road and yet costs no more, no tax payer in Iowa will object to getting the better road for the same money. No one here will object to having a road such as I have described with a graveled surface from his farm to town if it costs him nothing—in other words—does not increase his taxes.

Granted all this, there are but two propositions left:

First, Is the graveled graded road and better than our present ungraveled road? and,

Second, If so, how can we get the better road without spending any more money or without any increase in taxes?

Are Graveled Roads Better Than Dirt?

While the first proposition does not permit of argument, it being so apparent that the graveled road is at least to some extent better than the dirt road, I wish to refer to a few concrete facts to support this. Let us have the whole problem in mind and the facts all before us.

A stretch of road on the Lincoln Highway near Nevada, Iowa, has been improved with a reasonably hard, graveled surface. Before improvement, it took 100 pounds average draft to pull a load of one ton over this road. After the road was improved, it took an average draft of 75 lbs. to pull the same load in the same wagon over this road. In other words only 70% as much power. These figures are from the United States Department of public roads which made a dynamometer test of that particular road. In other words, the United States Government with their instruments determined just how much of a pull it took to take a load over this road.

The saving in this pulling power was found to be 30% when the farmers used the harder surfaced road.

Now it is apparent if the largest load a farmer could haul over this road before it was improved was 40 bushels, and if it took 30% less power to pull the 40 bushel load after it was improved, he could increase his load when hauling over the improved road. That is if 70% of his power would pull 40 bushels 100% or what he expended on the old road to pull 40 bushels, would pull 57 bushels on the improved road. He can now pull 57 bushels with the same team and the same wagon he previously pulled 40 bushels. His hauling is done in 30% less time and therefore gives him 30% of his time previously devoted to this work to devote to other

work. He saves 30% of the wear and tear on his horses, wagons, harness, etc. If his time and service of his team and the wear and tear on the wagon, harness, etc., is worth 30 cents per load per mile—and the United States Government says it is—he would save approximately 10 cents per load per mile. Estimate the number of loads you take to town, the loads you bring home of coal, lumber, etc. Multiply this by 10 cents per load saved on one mile, multiply this by the miles you live from town and figure for yourself what the better road means to you in actual dollars and cents. It is easily demonstrated that in actual dollars and cents so far as your own time is concerned, and the wear and tear on your team, wagon and harness, you are many dollars ahead. Suppose it is \$50.00 per farm, and it is all of this. With 200,000 farmers in Iowa, this would look like a saving of ten million dollars per year, in actual cash, to say nothing of the advantages of this road over which you may travel every day in the year to church, public meetings, county fairs, for the doctor, etc., all of which is thrown in as extra. You men who own automobiles, and there are more cars in the country than in the cities, stop and consider what the wear and tear on your car and tires is on a rough, bumpy mud road as compared with the smooth graveled road, to say nothing of the gasoline used—and gasoline costs money nowadays. How many of you have burned out a clutch or wrenched your car trying to get out of a mud hole?

Market Crops When Prices Are Highest.

There is another big item in your favor. Prices of farm products some way seem to be highest when you cannot get to town on account of mud. This condition is taken into consideration by grain speculators. They gamble on the assurance that you cannot haul your crops to town in the spring. What would it mean to you if you could market your crop when you liked, to catch the higher price? Many hundred of thousands of dollars to the farmers of Iowa, and this loss is just as real as though you had the extra money in your pocket and then burned it up.

Let's be honest with ourselves and recognize the times we did not go to town with wheat or corn or oats because the roads were bad. No manufacturer would put up with such a condition in the marketing of his products if he could help it. He gets cars when he wants them or finds out why. Farming is the biggest business in Iowa and should have proper facilities.

Do you know it costs more to get your crops from the farm to the railroad station than it does from the railroad station to market? We complain about an increase in railroad freight rates of a small amount, and possibly justly, and overlook an opportunity to cut down an already existing expense in an amount that in many cases would go a long way towards paying the total railroad freight rate. I was taught early that it was not what you got that counted but what you saved—not what the volume of a business might be that was all important but what portion of that volume was net—in other words, that expenses were as important as income. Good roads will actually make money in the money they save. That is why I am for them—not for joy riding. Let us make them pay and get the joy riding, the visiting, the larger community life as extra dividends.

Residents On Improved Roads Are Pleased.

Within the last few months, I wrote a large number of farmers living up on improved roads, in several states, asking them how they were pleased, whether they would take back the money the roads cost them, and go back to the old conditions; and I pledge you my word that without exception there was no man living upon an improved road who would take his money back and go back to the old road (and in many cases they paid out of their own funds a large portion of the cost of the road without recourse to general taxation, the burden of payment being proportionately greater) and every farmer reported that his land had advanced several dollars an acre, the average being \$13.00 from the four hundred farmers heard from.

Now if it is agreed that the better road with the hills cut down, the road graded and graveled, with permanent bridges is really better than our present dirt roads, which are at many times of the year practically impassable, the next proposition is how to get this better road without costing any extra money or without the increase of one dollar in taxes.

Bridge Problem First.

First, we will apply ourselves to the bridge problem. A certain county I have in mind, and it may be your county, has paid \$179,000.00 for bridges in the past three years, an average of \$60,000.00 per year. A very large portion of this has gone for "repairs, maintenance, etc." To be exact, \$130,000.00 of this \$179,000.00 went for repairs and temporary construction. Think of it, \$130,000.00 for repairs or for temporary bridges that would soon need repairs, out of a total of \$179,000.00. A survey of the county I have in mind shows that nine to ten hundred thousand dollars would bridge every stream in the county with permanent bridges. These bridges and culverts ought to stand for the next one hundred years if put in properly and the maintenance would be practically nothing. Now on the basis of the money spent for bridges for the past three years (and I might as well tell you that it is Cass

County I am talking about) you would in 30 years pay in enough money to put in these permanent bridges, including all the interest you would pay at four and one-half percent. You ought under present conditions to get the money at four percent and at that rate you would discharge the whole debt and pay all the interest in 27 years.

I wish to emphasize that this is on the basis of your average for the past three years. On the basis of what you spent on bridges last year (1915) you could pay off all your bonds and interest in 21 years. On the other hand on the basis of what actually went into permanent bridges last year it will take you 143 years to get permanent bridges in Cass County because so large a portion of what you paid in bridge taxes went into repairs.

I also wish to call your attention to the fact that Cass County was not especially selected by me but I got the figures on Cass County because I was requested to come here and talk this problem over with you. You will agree that with the Nishnabotna River, Indian Creek, Camp Creek, Walnut Creek, etc., more bridges are necessary in Cass County than in many of the other counties of the state or counties not having so many streams. You have, in fact, one of the worst counties in the state so far as the number of bridges necessary is concerned. The average county will need to spend but two-thirds to three-fourths as much for bridges as Cass County will need to spend, and their bonds will therefore be paid off in a proportionately fewer number of years. The tax payers of the other counties of the state should have this in mind in considering these figures.

Permanent Bridges Save Repairs.

After you pay off the principal and interest on the bond issue that would give you permanent bridges over all your streams you are big money ahead because you save the large amount you are now spending for repairs. In other words, the tax payers would spend no more than they are now paying and in a few years will actually pay less into the bridge fund, and instead of putting a burden upon your children you actually relieve them of the burden of repairs.

Some of your present bridges are in good condition and you would of course not take these out but for the present would borrow only sufficient money to put in permanent bridges in place of the temporary bridges that must be replaced and then next year or in two or three years borrow another amount to replace other bridges that have outlived their usefulness and then in another period replace still others instead of "repairing" them. Surely no one will object to this program so far as bridges are concerned, because the plan does not contemplate paying into the bridge fund a single extra dollar but does in fact cut out the repairs that you would be obliged to make during the years to come on temporary bridges. It occurs to me that the only way you can be sure that your taxes are not going up is to follow this method.

Build Bridges As You Do Schools.

I wish to call your attention to the fact that if you were going to build a school house you would get together and determine on how much that school house should cost you. No one of you will propose to pay in taxes enough this year to build that school house. No one of you would urge that all you could do this year would be to dig the cellar or furnace room, next year put in the foundation, the year after put in the first floor, the year after that put in the second floor and in the fifth year put on the roof, and all these years be without the school building. No, you would agree among yourselves that during a period of years you would under your present rate of assessment pay in a certain sum in taxes to the building funds which could be applied to this particular building and that you would borrow the money and build the school house and move into it at once, paying interest and principal from your taxes as paid in. This is exactly the system proposed for our permanent bridges. We will borrow the money, build the bridges and have the use of them now, cut out all repairs because they will be permanent bridges; and then use our funds as they come in to retire the bonds.

There are counties in Iowa that have been settled for sixty years that did not have a single permanent bridge when the Highway Commission was created in 1913. Cerro Gordo County, on the other hand, which began building permanent bridges ten years ago, will be completely bridged with masonry in the next five years and will have no more use for a bridge fund except a very small tax to keep up the maintenance on bridges that should last one hundred years. Cerro Gordo County spent \$4337 for bridge repairs in 1914 and \$6700 last year, an average of \$5,000, even though they are not completely bridged with permanent bridges, while the average for the whole state was \$25,700 per county for repairs and temporary construction.

Harrison County, has been paying as she goes, and has practically no permanent bridges, and last year spent for repairs alone \$51,000. Shelby County had seventy-five old system bridges washed out in the spring of 1913 while not a single bridge designed by the State Highway Commission has been lost in the entire state during a period of three years.

I believe anticipating revenue to build permanent bridges will appeal to you as practical. We do not ordinarily expect to pay for expensive bridges in a single season.

Shall the Roads Be Graveled? With the hills cut down, the road

well graded, rounded, drained, with permanent bridges, and having agreed that gravel helps the road, the next question is to put a surface on the roads that will make them passable every day in the year.

Our State Geological Survey reports gravel deposits in 70 counties in the state of Iowa. There are in the average county in Iowa 160 miles in the county highway system. These county highways will very largely serve all the residents of the county and are all and more than could be reasonably expected to be graveled at this time unless certain districts wish to get together and gravel other roads.

Greene County's Example.

Greene County has more graveled roads than any other county in the state. They are one of the more fortunate counties in having gravel accessible. They find their average cost for graveled roads \$140 per mile, on the basis of one half the roads having one course of gravel and the other half of the roads having two courses. They paid for their road fund last year \$38,847. Averaging \$11.00 per mile for grading to permanent grade, which has been their experience, they have a total cost of \$2,500 per mile for permanently graveled road. They have 132 miles of county highway and on the basis of present revenue a county similarly situated could by borrowing the money at 4 1/2% interest without increased revenue grade and gravel all the county system and pay off all the bonds in 23 years.

This is allowing \$100 per mile each year for maintenance, which will give them as good if not a little better road at the end of the 23 years as they have when first completed.

Clay County.

Clay County roads need but little grading and gravel is plentiful. Engineers estimate the expense of grading and graveled their county road system at \$2000.00 per mile or \$280,000 for their 140 miles. On present valuation their road tax raises \$28,000 and their portion of automobile tax brings their total fund to \$46,000. Their road maintenance the past three years has averaged \$6000 per year. In three years, they will raise \$120,000.00 and allowing \$20,000.00 for maintenance have \$100,000.00 to apply on their total expenses of \$280,000, leaving them in debt after the grading and graveled of their 140 miles is done \$180,000.00. Allowing \$100 per mile per year for maintenance on the 140 miles or \$14,000, which deducted from the income of \$40,000 will leave \$26,000 to apply to the bonds. The entire debt and all interest would be discharged in nine years.

Buena Vista County.

Buena Vista County has 167 miles of county road. To completely grade, drain and gravel every mile of this county road, will cost \$315,000. If it is done in three years, one-third each in 1916-1917 and 1918, they will on the basis of present revenue after allowing \$12,000 for dragging, \$22,000 for draining, \$10,000 for repairs and after paying all interest, at the end of 1918 when the work is all done be obliged to borrow \$220,000 to pay what was not paid out of income. Considering their income will remain the same as at present and setting aside \$10,000 per year for maintenance, they can pay all interest and principal at the end of the seventh year. They can travel the graveled roads all the time they are building and paying for them and then have them forever for maintenance alone with no increase in their taxes in the meantime. Does that not look like good business?

Buena Vista has 372 temporary bridges in the county. It will cost them \$252,000 to replace them with permanent structures. If these bridges are built while they are building their roads, they will have \$102,000 to apply from their bridge fund leaving \$150,000 to pay. If they borrow this, the entire debt and interest can be paid from their present bridge fund in 12 years after they are finished and they cut out repairs not only for the 12 years but for the future. Can you find any burden in this and does it not appeal to you as good business?

Tama County.

Tama County is a county not so fortunately situated. They estimate their grading at an average of \$1300 per mile for 210 miles in their county system, or a total of \$273,000 for grading. They estimate graveled to cost \$3100 per mile or \$651,000, a total of \$900,000. In Tama County, valuations have increased 3% per year for the past twenty years and their county engineer in making up his estimates has allowed the same rate of increase in values for the next twenty years. He has also allowed a twenty per cent increase in automobile money for the next five years. The proposal of their engineer is to bring all county roads to permanent grade in three years and gravel fourteen miles each year so the graveled would all be completed in 1930. As fast as the roads are graveled an expense of \$100 per mile is deducted from revenue for maintenance. Now on this basis they will take care of this whole \$900,000 improvement from revenues as previously explained and discharge all interest and pay off the entire debt at the end of 1938 or in 22 years from now.

It will cost Tama County \$1,430,000 to build permanent bridges for their entire county and township systems, estimating 3% increase in revenues from increased valuations and building bridges at the rate of \$50,000 in 1916 and \$90,000 every year for the next 15 years, they will find in 1931 or 15 years from now they are completely bridged.

Allowing a maintenance of \$5,000