

Iowa Rep. Todd Prichard

‘Integrity,’ ‘teamwork’ and ‘purpose’: New House minority leader brings lessons and values from military service to work in Legislature

by Ilene Grossman (igrossman@csg.org)

Long before he came to the Iowa House, via a special-election victory in 2013, Todd Prichard was learning valuable lessons that would serve him well in an elected position that demands cooperation, teamwork and trust.

The Iowa native has been in the military for 23 years, and has been deployed overseas multiple times during that time — to Kuwait, as a rifle platoon leader in the U.S. Army during Operation Desert Spring; to Egypt, as part of an international peacekeeping force with the Iowa Army National Guard; and then to Iraq, as company commander in the guard’s infantry battalion.

“The military teaches teamwork,” says Prichard, now a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve. “Military leadership teaches people to collaborate, getting groups of people to work together for a common purpose.”

He has a similar task in his new role as House minority leader, leading a caucus with members who represent “different parts of the state” and who have “very different perspectives,” Prichard says.

He grew up in the eastern Iowa town of Davenport, where his parents owned a carpet-cleaning business and his father was involved in local politics.

While attending the University of Iowa as an undergraduate student, Prichard joined the Army ROTC — as a way to serve his country and help pay for college.

Following his graduation, Prichard became a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. He later returned home, joined the Iowa Army National Guard, graduated from law school, opened his own practice in the small town of Charles City, and then served as an assistant county attorney. When a legislative seat opened up in his rural district in northeast Iowa, Prichard decided to enter elective politics for the first time. He won that special election in 2013 by a 10-point margin; he ran unopposed this past year.

In a recent interview with CSG Midwest, Iowa’s new House minority leader discussed his views on leadership, the rewards and frustrations of legislating, and his goals for the state. Here are excerpts.

Q: What made you decide to run for leader of your caucus?

A: When the position opened up, I had worked with people from all parts of our caucus, and with people across the aisle in a bipartisan way. I think my colleagues recognized that as a strength. We recognize that we need to do better as a party in more rural parts of the state, and I think that as a rural Democrat, I have that perspective.

Q: What do you view as some of the qualities and characteristics of an effective leader?

A: First and foremost are integrity and honesty. Your word is your bond, and people need to be able to rely on what you say. It is also important to understand other people’s perspectives. Even if you

Bio-sketch of House Minority Leader Todd Prichard

- ✓ chosen minority leader in late 2018; first elected to House in 2013
- ✓ lieutenant colonel in U.S. Army Reserve
- ✓ military service in the U.S. Army and Iowa Army National Guard, with deployments that included a tour of duty in Iraq
- ✓ attorney with undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Iowa
- ✓ he and his wife, Ann, have three children



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disagree, you should understand that they have legitimate concerns, which should be respected when you draft or consider legislation.

My focus [as minority leader] is to find what motivates people to serve — what their passion is for being in public office and for coming to the Legislature — and then give them opportunities to work in those areas. I think when people have that kind of passion, that is when you are going to get their best work and their best ideas.

Q: The Iowa House, Senate and governorship are all controlled by the Republican Party. How do you get legislation passed in the minority?

A: Well, there is no doubt that it has been tough. But we need to signal to the majority that we are here to move the state forward, too, and that we also represent a significant portion of the population. The message is that you will do better if you take into account the minority’s perspective on issues. We are here to work and collaborate in a bipartisan way when we can, and to stand on principle when we can’t.

Q: You have a number of new members in your caucus this year. What is some of the advice you have given to them?

A: First, to watch, listen and understand the process. That includes understanding different points of view before you make a decision. Second, guard your reputation for integrity, and third, find those issues that you care about, that reward you, and then work on them.

Q: What are some of the greatest rewards and frustrations you have had from being a legislator?

A: The greatest reward is when people from my district, or even from around the state, bring an issue or problem to me, or to the Legislature, and then we’re able to use the power of the Legislature to help them solve that problem ... The most frustrating thing is when you run up against those partisan walls, when you know there is a better solution and you can’t get beyond the old way of thinking. When a good idea dies, whether because of partisanship or just inertia, that is frustrating.

Q: Since joining the House in 2013, what are some of the bills that you have been most proud of sponsoring?

A: In my first year, I wanted to provide funding to veterans in the state who had suffered brain injuries. I got legislation passed that opened up the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund for that type of treatment. I also worked on legislation, which passed last year, that dealt with “lunch shaming.” Some schools in Iowa publicly called out children who had delinquent lunch accounts or forced children to discard their meals if they couldn’t pay. Finally, I am working on a bill this year (SF 86) called Logan’s Law, which was named after a constituent, a teenager who died in an ATV accident. ... The bill would include an option for applicants for hunting and fishing licenses to become organ donors.

Q: What do you see as the biggest challenge for Iowa over the next 15 to 20 years?

A: Our biggest challenge, but it is also an opportunity, is to foster growth in rural Iowa. That will require us to make investments in education, job training and business development, and to make sure those investments have impact in rural communities like mine.