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May 1, 2016

This is a letter of recommendation on behalf of Dolores M. Mertz, who I nominate for the honor of receiving the Women of Influence Award. Your due consideration of her candidacy is greatly appreciated.

Dolores was thrust into public service upon the sudden demise of her husband, H.R. (Pete), who was serving on the Kossuth County Board of Supervisors. She became the first female elected to the Kossuth County Board of Supervisors. Dolores served on that board for five years and her Iowa and U.S.A. leadership prowess took off when she was elected Vice-Chair for two years.

Dolores became the longest serving woman in the Iowa House of Representatives when her 22 years of public service to Iowa ended, on her own volition, in 2010. She served as a legislator between the ages of 60 and 82. Surviving as a widow farm operator with seven children and winning 11 elections as a Democrat in a predominantly Republican district is not a surprise. She is also known by the physicians throughout Iowa as the “Miracle Baby from Bancroft” as she survived being born on May 30, 1928 weighing only 1 pound and 6 ounces.

* Perseverance is Dolores mainstay. Nothing is impossible to be tackled and solved by Dolores.

Dolores legislative service was embodied around knowing the values of her 30,000 constituents and sticking to what she knew was in their best collective interest. As a Democrat who embraced predominantly Republican values of being fiscally responsible, pro-business and pro-agriculture, it can safely be said that she was one of Iowa’s first Blue Dog Democrats. During the last four years of her Iowa House of Representatives tenure, she and five other Democrats, three males and two other women, became known as the “Six Pack.” It was during this time period that the Democrats held 56 seats in the Iowa House of Representatives while the Republicans held 44 seats. Hence, a voting block on certain key issues by the Six Pack could create a 50-50 tie; Dolores leadership influence with her Six Pack peers came at a crucial time in Iowa’s legislative history.

Dolores leadership service for the American Legislative Executive Council (ALEC) was unique as this national organization is comprised mostly of Republican legislators. Respect by her legislative peers in our 50 states was evident when in 2007 she was elected the National Chairman of ALEC.

Dolores was the first women to Chair the Agriculture Committee in the Iowa House of Representatives and served as its Chair for four years. She served on this predominantly male committee for 22 years.

Dolores has also served in leadership positions with the Council of Catholic Women, Great Lakes Economic Development Corporation, Iowa Farm Bureau and Department of Natural Resources Farm Advisory Board, to name a few.

In 2011, Governor Branstad appointed Dolores to the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission and she is currently serving on Iowa’s Gaming Commission. Both appointments were approved unanimously by the Iowa Senate.

Dolores has always paid attention to women’s issues. As she has said, “it appears that women were a little more vulnerable and they deserved added attention.” She assisted women obtain help from the Department of Human Services. Dolores was on several panels trying to empower women to run for political office, whether it was for school board, city council, country supervisor, state legislator or Congress. She assisted many females with their political campaigns by door knocking, putting up yard signs and writing fund-raising letters. During Dolores service in the Iowa House of Representatives, she helped with legislation for women going into agriculture or agri-business. And she was Chair of a Health and Human Services Task Force for over six years

Dolores influence has been quite evident by raising her seven children (all received college degrees) as a female head of household while operating a large grain and livestock farm. Her influence at the city, county, state and federal level is also remarkable and noteworthy. She is a woman of values, faith, optimism and perseverance and serving others way before herself.

What started out as a 1 pound, six ounce baby who fit in a shoe box and many believed wouldn’t survive to an 87 year old woman with accolades that any person would settle for just 10 percent of her accomplishments, Dolores M. Mertz is deserving of receiving the Woman of Influence Award.

Thank you for your due consideration of this nomination. Thank you for serving on the selection committee. Best wishes during your selection process.

Sincerely,

Doris J. Kelley

District 60, Iowa House of Representatives, 2006-2010

Executive Director, Chair & Vice Chair, Iowa Board of Parole, 2011-2014

2010 Cedar Valley Woman of the Year