Gore stirs up support in Iowa

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Senate Republican majority rejected before its August recess. "We have an obligation to help good people through tough times and these are tough times for Iowa farmers," Bradley said.

He also called on the Justice Department to launch an antitrust investigation of the meat-packing industry.

"Lack of competition has led to Depression-era prices for hogs while the meatpacking industry is making record earnings," Bradley said. "That is unacceptable."

Gore joined with Gov. Tom Vilsack to lead a discussion with farmers about their troubles.

The vice president called for revisions to the nation's basic farm legislation, the Freedom to Farm Act, as well as an emergency package of $10 billion in aid to farmers on the financial edge because of historic low commodity prices.

"There are in 1999, two Iowas," Gore said. "There is an Iowa with unemployment under 2.6 percent with an economy that's booming and a future that's bright, but there's also a farm economy that's hurting badly."

Gore was swinging through a series of small Iowa towns making his point, and was spending the night at a private home.

Meeting with activists in a Newton cafe, Gore departed from his farm theme to launch an spirited assault on Republicans and their "risky tax scheme.

"I think that is a reckless idea," said Gore, warning it would spark renewed deficits "at a time when we have just dug our way out of the hole they put us in."

Gore's motorcade was rolling through a light rain, with the vice president sporting khaki slacks and cowboy boots in keeping with his rural theme.

Gore made it clear he wanted changes in farm policy, "which is in serious need of improvement and change.

The Freedom to Farm legislation was a sharp change in farm policy, ending most traditional subsidy payments while also ending most planting restrictions.

With farm commodity prices well below the cost of production, there's pressure for change. The issue is a delicate one for Gore because President Clinton signed the measure into law.

"I pledge my support and all-out help to Iowans in both of those economies," said Gore.

Gore is the early favorite for the Democratic nomination, with much of the party's establishment quietly in his camp. He demonstrated those ties in opening his latest campaign swing, collecting the endorsements of a string of prominent Democrats like Des Moines Mayor Preston Daniels and six Democratic legislators along with prominent central Iowa Democrats like Polk County Attorney John Sarcone.

Most of the attention this week has been on Republican straw poll fight, with has drawn up to 600 journalists to the state. Both Gore and Bradley were seeking a slice of that attention. Gore was rolling through the central part of the state in his campaign bus, while Bradley was in western Iowa.

In his headline event of the day, Gore headed to farm outside Marshalltown to join with Vilsack and Iowa Agriculture Secretary Patty Judge to discuss farm woes.

The three perched on stools in the yard outside a rural Marshalltown farm to pledge aid to farmers, and hear worries from farmers in a 90-minute session.

Gore argued that farm legislation was inadequate to deal with tough economic times.

He also said he would resist using food as a weapon by slapping embargoes on foreign rivals, arguing that should be done only in "some exceptional cases.

Vilsack, a Democrat, has said he will stay neutral in the fight between Bradley and Gore.

Gore used his farm forum to hammer his backing for ethanol-blended fuels, noting that the administration is moving to provide incentives for ethanol use under Clean Air Act regulations. Ethanol production is an important market for corn farmers.

COURTESY PHOTO

THE CAST OF "MYSTERY MEN" includes Oscar nominee William H. Macy (far left) and the artist formerly known as Pee-Wee Herman, Paul Ruebens (second from right).

'Mystery Men' a good superhero spoof

BY CLIFF HICKS
Film Critic

If you've ever seen or read "The Tick," you know almost exactly what you're in for when you sit down to see "Mystery Men" - a parody about everything not-so-super in superheroes.

Films like "Batman," "Superman" and the such take themselves somewhat seriously, but the key to "Mystery Men" is that it doesn't. And while the film does have a bit of a slow start as well as an ending that comes far too fast, "Mystery Men" is a solid comedy that draws from the great cast to make a good film.

At the beginning of the film, three semi-superheroes – Mr. Furious (Stiller), Blue Rajah (Azaria) and The Shoveller (Macy) – attempt to defend an old folk's home from a group of criminals called The RedEyes. While they don't do very well, soon Captain Amazing (Kinnear) appears to save the day and our trio is relegated to second-fiddle.

But, alas, Captain Amazing has cleaned up most of the crime of the city, and, well, he's just not so amazing anymore. Endorsers are beginning to drop him. So he slips into the local asylum and recommends releasing Cassanova Frankenstein (what a great name for a character, although Rush underplays it a bit), saying that the man is rehabilitated. This is, of course, just an excuse for Amazing to have another public fight with a giant supervillain in an attempt to boost his ratings with the public.

(He's just lost his Pepsi endorsement, don't you know?)

All of Amazing's scheme goes drastically wrong, however, when Frankenstein actually captures Amazing, thus leaving other superheroes, namely the "Mystery Men", to pick up the pieces.

To swell up their ranks, they search for other superheroes and add Invisible Boy (played by Kel Mitchell, whose character's name is also an in-joke that only those with a good grasp on literature will get) and The Spleen (played by Paul Reubens). Then they hold auditions and get one more, The Bowler (Garofolo).

After going an having a small frontal assault on Frankenstein's limo (which needs to be seen to be believed), the group is attacked by The Disco Boys and saved by The Sphinx, the most mysterious superhero, well, ever.

Sound bizarrely funny? Well, it is.

Part of the problem with "Mystery Men" is that there's so much to it, so many characters, that a few fall through the cracks. Azaria and Garofolo don't get enough screen time, Reubens and Macy get a little too much. Director Kinka Usher lets the film sag a bit, when a few sharp one-liners could zip the speed needed back into the film.

There are a lot of great moments, from the confrontation between Mr. Furious and The Sphinx to the "Six Million Dollar Man" reference that a lot of people missed. Still, the brand of humor "Mystery Men" offers up isn't for everyone.

Like the "Six Million Dollar Man" reference, a lot of people won't notice how the set is a combination of "Blade Runner" meets "Batman," nor the score that seems almost Danny Elfman-ish.

Most of all, though, the humor is very non-sequetir, which means people unwilling to roll with the jokes are going to feel very disappointed.

This is a film for fans of the genre. What "Mystery Men" isn't is a film for people who have no interest in superhero films. Regardless, it's still a solid show, despite its shortcomings, and worth a watch from anyone with a funny bone.

The Facts

Title: "Mystery Men"
Stars: Hank Azaria, Janeane Garofalo, William H. Macy, Ben Stiller, Greg Kinnear, Geoffrey Rush
Director: Kinka Usher
Rating: PG-13
Grade: B (as "B" as a movie can get)
Five Words: Second-rate superheroes save the day

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