

President Fred Thompson?

President Ronald Reagan was an actor who ended up in the White House. So why shouldn't Fred Thompson, former U.S. Senator from Tennessee, and also an actor, find his way to the same place?

Thompson said over the weekend that he is giving some thought to tossing his hat in the ring. One would wonder if there is enough room for one more hat in that ring. But those who study politics feel Thompson could be the candidate to bring the Republican Party together, a party that is showing cracks in its foundation.

Currently, Thompson has the role of Arthur Branch on NBC's hit drama, "Law & Order." Among his other credits is the movie "The Hunt for Red October."

Thompson was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1994, and left in 2003. He was chairman of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee. He was elected to fill the unexpired term of Vice President Al Gore.

The possible presidential candidate hasn't set any deadline. He is going to sit back and see how the situation unfolds.

Briefly speaking, the candidate in-waiting is pro life, opposes gay marriage, supports the decision to hike the number of troops in Iraq, and is against gun control. He also said on FOX News Sunday that he would pardon "Scooter" Libby now, White House aide, who was convicted last week of perjury and obstruction of justice, instead of waiting the appeals route. It needs to be mentioned that Thompson is a fund raiser for Mr. Libby's defense.

With Rudy Giuliani being haunted by his behavior when he divorced his second wife, and a few other issues in that arena, the road for the former New York City mayor just might get a bit too slippery for him to navigate. Giuliani currently leads the field at this early point in the campaign.

Sen. John McCain and former Gov. Mitt Romney are also prominently mentioned, as is Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback. McCain seems to have faded somewhat of late, but those who follow campaigns see this as nothing of significance. They do say, however, that Thompson needs to make a decision soon because the nominees of the two major parties will be determined by the end of February in 2008.

Also waiting in the wings is war critic Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, who said Monday he will make a decision on a presidential run later in the year.

No new names are surfacing on the Democratic side of the ledger. New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama are the front runners, with Obama continuing to chip at Clinton's lead. They are trading barbs generally reserved for a two-party battle — Republican vs. Democrat.

We've got a long, long way to go. Even if we know who the nominees are going to be a year from now, they will have another nine months after that to duke it out.

They say the fittest shall survive. We the people, the voters, must be the fittest.

— Tom Dreiling

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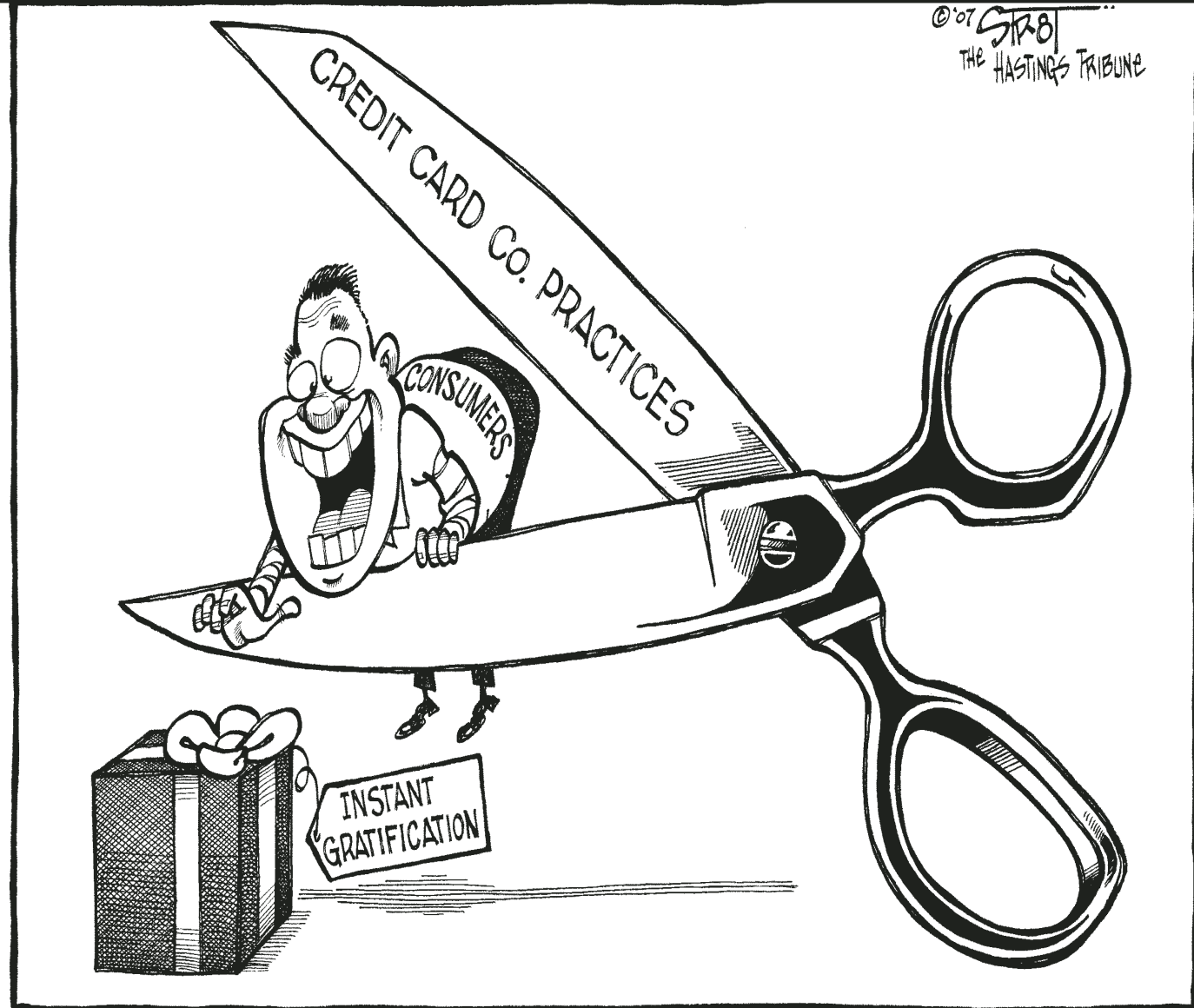
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Our 'old' car also part of our mission

Our friends worry that our old car won't last much longer. But, we just tacked on another 720 miles. The old girl already has more than 218,000 miles on the odometer, but we made the trip to El Paso, Texas without a hiccup.

Hey, it's paid for. And I'm not willing to make car payments while there are still a few miles left in her.

Besides, some would say she's just "broke in."

-ob-

We're in El Paso to cross the border on Sunday. We'll be building our 16th house this week with Casas por Cristo (Houses for Christ).

We wanted a sneak-peek at our build-

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



ing location so we crossed the border a day early. We also stopped at the Mercado (Market) where we ate chile rellenos and tacos and bought a case of vanilla.

We drove all over Juarez locating houses we have helped build over the years.

What a thrill to see how the help we were able to give has improved the lives

of these families.

Without fail, the families have improved on the houses. Maybe a coat of paint, maybe a fence of cinder blocks, or perhaps another room has been added.

We found two families at home and the reception we received was the equivalent of "red carpet" treatment.

Our Spanish is still not where we would like it to be. But hugs and kisses and tears need no interpretation.

-ob-

This installment of OutBack will be short. Daylight Saving Time has cut into my morning. We have to get ready for church, pack out of our room — and I'm already an hour behind schedule.

Dios de vindiga. God bless you.

Sunshine Week works to your benefit

Guest Columnist
Jerry Tidwell

This is a week of Thanksgiving. No, it's not November. It's March 11-17. That is when we give thanks that we live in a society where the people are presumed to be wise enough to govern themselves.

It's Sunshine Week, a time to remember that the government is us — and we have not only the right but the obligation to know what we are doing.

As president of an organization of thriving community newspapers, I have the opportunity to speak with journalists and their readers from Boston to Arizona and from states as red as my home state of Texas and as blue as New Jersey, where my friends, the Parker family, are deeply committed to covering local government.

It is rewarding to know that my newspaper friends AND their readers deeply believe in open government. Sunshine on government is the Vitamin D for democracy. It makes us whole and healthy. When we know what is going on, we are better able to make wise judgments on those few things that need to be confidential for a time in order let our public servants function.

Tom Brokaw, NBC News anchor, said this about Sunshine Week:

"If we present ourselves to the world as patrons of democracy, then we must be vigilant stewards at home of the oxygen that it requires — access to what our government is doing and the right to speak freely about it. The Greatest Generation fought valiantly to preserve and protect those freedoms. It is up to us to ensure

during Sunshine Week and all year that their sacrifices were not for naught."

I am proud that community newspapers provide their share of oxygen. Our immediate past president, Jerry Reppert, publisher of the *Gazette-Democrat* in Anna, Ill., for example, sued for copies of employment contracts for top officials of a state university, reasoning that citizens supporting higher education had a right to know how money was spent.

The *County Courier* in Enosburg, Vt., in an editorial in advance of Sunshine Week, made the point both visually and with words by "redacting," or blacking out, portions of the text.

"There's always room for more sunshine in our lives," he wrote. "When it comes to government, we just have to be willing to stand up in the darkness and demand it."

Newspapers in Kansas helped to test local governments' responses to requests for public records, and found a reasonably good response except from sheriffs. Two years later, it tried again and found remarkable progress: only four of 33 offices

failed to comply with the law.

The *Altoona Mirror* in Pennsylvania asked for information at 40 agencies. A reporter was surprised by confrontations and threats he met while trying to examine the public's business. Newspapers there have banded together in "Brighter Pennsylvania," a program designed to help officials better understand open government laws.

And just recently our friends at a small daily paper in Missouri, pursuing information at city hall, reported that the mayor said, "The way you come to City Hall will determine whether you are worked with or not."

Somehow, I have the feeling that isn't what our Founding Fathers (and Mothers) had in mind. I imagine some of our Founding Mothers might have washed that mayor's mouth out with soap.

That reminds me that community groups like the League of Women Voters participated in Sunshine Week last year, as well as groups as diverse as university journalists, local attorneys and even a fire department in Los Angeles.

I have two messages for newspapers and their readers.

One is: remind public servants that we trust them the most when we know the most about what they are doing.

The other is: read the newspaper. It's the best way to enjoy the sunshine.

Jerry Tidwell of Granbury, Texas, is president of the National Newspaper Association and publisher of *The Hood County News*.

LETTERS

The *Norton Telegram* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and daytime phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters.

Form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area are discouraged.

We do not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

Your letter will normally appear in the next issue of *The Telegram*.

Letters to the Editor are one way to share your opinion, or to take issue with our editorials and columns.

Questions? Contact the publisher: (785) 877-6908.

Reminder: Friday is 'Thumbs Up' day. Salute someone!