

Political melt down easy to detect

How can you tell when a political campaign is melting down? Easy. When you see candidates pick their noses in search of issues. And that best explains the current situation as it affects the Democrats.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Bill's wife, is trying to attach the 'elitist' tag on Sen. Barack Obama for a comment he made about bitter small town folks. He probably was more right than wrong in what he had to say, but it was the way he said it that seemed to have rekindled the fire under the seats of the Clinton campaign.

It's a non issue.

Calling Obama an elitist, in as serious a fashion as she could muster, made Clinton look like she was auditioning for Comedy Central. Here is a lady who, in concert with her husband, made \$109 million dollars over the past seven years they've been away from the White House.

\$109 million? And she's trying to play the role of the good old girl, just one of the gang?

Pardon us for chuckling.

The bickering between these two camps has to be music to the ears of Sen. John McCain's presidential ambitions. He's running free. No media. This gives the Arizona senator a chance to continue working on fence mending instead of being bogged down with silly questions from a corps of reporters who have not the slightest hint as to what day of the week it is. Or what plane they are on. Or who they are covering. It's a blur, the side effect of a campaign that has lasted far too long and that, in the end, could spell total disaster for a party once thought to have a solid grip on increasing their control of both the House and Senate.

When the Democrats finally convene in Denver in August, what will we hear:

"Obama! Obama! Obama!"

Or,

"They're b-a-a-a-c-k!"

—Tom Dreiling

Sure, bitter is part of the picture

Much has been said of Obama's supposed "slam" towards people in small towns in the Midwest. It is obvious those who view the statement as an affront are unfamiliar with life in rural middle America.

His comment was, "... like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's replaced them." He continued, "And it's not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."*

Those of us who live in small towns know the jobs have been leaving for over 25 years. The population in Norton County between 2000 and 2006 declined 6.2 percent. I remember in my growing up years each store-front had a business inside.

Saturday nights one couldn't find a place downtown to park and Sunday mornings the three, yes three, drug stores alternated being open to serve the public. The train between Denver and Kansas City, the Rocket, went through Norton twice daily. It is sometimes hard to believe the progressive economy has improved our lifestyle.

Have we become bitter in small town America?

Well, ask those who have lost their jobs or their business or been bought out by a larger company who has little concern for the small town patron. Building after building on small town main streets are empty. Ask those who would love to return to Norton to raise their children in a safe environment about the lack of well paying jobs.

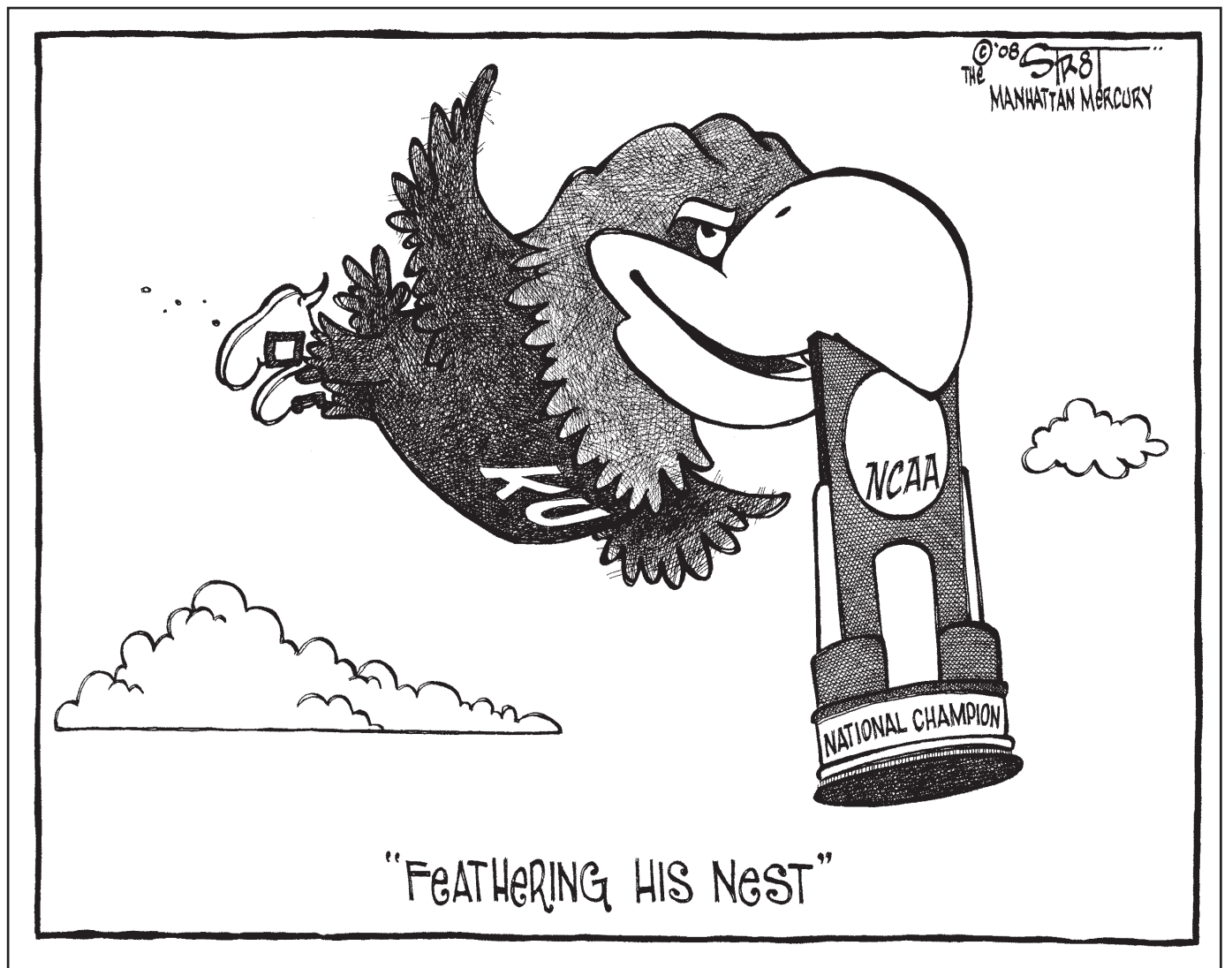
Some would argue we have jobs and we do, however minimum wage jobs will not pay the rent, buy the groceries and the gas to keep a family going. Norton County had 11.8 percent of its population living in poverty in 2004 as well as 43.1 percent of its students in 2007 receiving free or reduced lunches. (The state average is 39.7 percent).

Would you call Norton suspicious of those unlike themselves? Minorities, whether religious, racial or sexual orientation, often find it difficult to live in small towns. Do we cling to what we know and understand because as we walk on the narrow edge of economic disaster or because of narrow mindedness? When our lives are going well we tend to feel we have control, whether we do or not, on what will happen to us. Often even faith is viewed differently when the economy is flourishing. God is seen as a positive in our lives rather than being the reason for our suffering.

Obama was right when he said we become bitter and frustrated about the course our lives are taking. But one thing we are not frustrated by is life in middle America. The county's 2005 high school graduation rate 97.7 percent, compared to the state's rate of 90.60 percent. While high paying jobs are few and far between the employment rate in 2005 was 96.3 percent. Our schools excel in many areas.

We have a medical clinic and a hospital. We have churches and farms, but most of all we have people who work together to help the community grow. Obama or whoever the next president will be will work to improve the economic plight of the area, but we are the ones who have made and will continue to make a difference right here in our little corner of the world, in the center of Oz.

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



We should be heading home by now

After this next week, I'll be fully qualified as a cruise ship activities director. On board a ship I've heard that every waking moment is scheduled. As I planned a week-long trip to see family and friends, I don't think I've spared one single minute.

I almost forgot to save time for sleep.

We had promised my cousin Barb, that we would help her and her husband, Art, move to western Kansas from Alton, Ill. They live only two hours away from where Jim's son, James, is, so we made plans to see him.

And of course, since we were practically in the neighborhood, we decided to visit dear friends in central Wisconsin.

If you know anything at all about geography, you know that Wisconsin is a long way from southern Illinois.

After studying our route on the map, Jim said, "I feel like a billiard ball ricocheting off the side of the table."

-ob-

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



It was good to see my cousin after all these years. The last time we saw each other was at my mom's funeral.

I can't believe that after 10 years the first words out of my mouth to her were, "Oh my gosh. You look so much like your mom." To which she replied, "I think you look like G'ma Davison."

It's true for both of us. The family gene pool runs deep and strong.

We laughed and talked and ate. Our husbands hit it off and talked sports. I think we're going to have great fun.

Barb keeps reminding me she's a city girl. More than once she's asked me, "Are

there any snakes out there?"

"Yes, but none in town," I answered her.

No sense telling her about the rattler sightings last summer. She also doesn't need to know about the occasional skunk or raccoon that wanders into the city limits.

She'll learn soon enough.

-ob-

By the time most of you see this in print, we will have Barb and Art's belongings loaded on a rental truck, and headed west.

The first day we'll drive to my brother, Jim and Linda's home. The next, we'll come the rest of the way.

Hopefully, we'll have them settled in their new home by sundown. So, if you see a nice looking man and a woman who looks like my Aunt Bernice taking a walk with the biggest chocolate Labrador retriever I've ever seen, stop and say, "Welcome to town."

Remember, your freedom is also involved

Guest
Column
Gregory L. Schneider

This column's title, shamelessly borrowed from a Mr. Goodwrench ad campaign of a few years back, is indicative of where we should be headed in the health care debate as the end of the state legislative session draws to a close. Health care reform should be concerned with creating a system which promotes personal freedom, choice and fiscal sanity designed to improve health care for everyone.

Health care has been hotly debated the past month in Topeka and the compromise solution being proffered in both the House and the Senate, subject to the inevitable reconciliation between the two bodies which will be worked out in April, is not in the best interest of maintaining free choice and expansion of consumer-driven alternatives. Rather the Kansas legislature is on the verge of expanding the state's role in health care in a manner damaging to fiscal responsibility and consumer choice.

Last year the Kansas House agreed to a compromise bill — Senate Bill 11 — which empowered the Kansas Health Policy Authority to explore a number of reform options and to report back to the Governor and Legislature by Nov. 1, 2007.

The Kansas Health Policy Authority was asked to consider consumer-driven alternatives as part of its package of reforms; however, it failed to consider any and failed to include leading advocates of such reforms in its deliberations.

The major stumbling block, aside from the smoking ban and increased taxes, was the idea of premium assistance. Premium assistance was a measure introduced as part of SB 11 by Sen. Jim Barnett (R-Emporia) to assist in the purchase of private insurance for individuals under 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Line (around \$22,000 per year in income). It was to be phased in, beginning in 2009, to help those under 50 percent Federal Poverty Line (around \$11,000 income) to purchase private health insurance. At least that's what many legislators understood premium assistance to mean.

What it meant for the Kansas Health Policy Authority was something different — an expansion of Medicaid to cover those individuals under 100 percent Federal Poverty Line not currently covered by Kansas Medicaid (which only provides coverage to those 35 percent or less Federal Poverty Line).

The fiscal note on the proposed expansion of premium assistance was too large for many legislators to consider; in the Senate, lawmakers stripped premium assistance from their bill (SB 541) in favor of an expansion of HealthWave

to 250 percent Federal Poverty Line (to fund children whose parents make under \$44,000 yearly income). The problem with this is it does nothing to help low income Kansans and expands Medicaid for the middle class population.

The bills are not nearly considering enough of the consumer-driven alternatives to more government run health care. How can needy individuals purchase private insurance which is cost effective and allows for them to take control over their own health care spending? There are cost effective insurance products, such as Health Savings Accounts and Section 125 cafeteria plans which could do this without inevitably expanding the government's role in health care.

The original House bill (HB 2934) introduced in February by Rep. Jeff Colyer (R-Overland Park) contained many of these provisions and some are still alive in SB 81.

But we need more action on these measures or the government's role in health care will expand; in the end that affects not only the health care of Kansans but their freedom as well.

(Gregory L. Schneider is a Senior Fellow with the Kansas-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy. A complete bio on Dr. Schneider can be found at www.flinthills.org/content/view/24/39 and he can be reached at greg.schneider@flinthills.org. To learn more about the Flint Hills Center, please visit www.flinthills.org)

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Thumbs Up

To... Mrs. Holly Puga, and her team, on the fine work for 'Week of the Child,' we appreciate your dedication to children. (e-mail)

To... Norton's Walk Kansas participants, you're doing great, according to the story in Friday's Telegram. (called in)

To... the Kansas Jayhawks, congratulations on your national basketball championship. (called in)

(To include your salute in this column, simply e-mail tom.d@nwkansas.com, call 877-3361, fax 877-3732, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654 or drop by the office. Thanks for your continuing input. - td)