

Presidential candidates that are up for election

In the words of the carol, "fast away the old year passes." So what has the old year brought us?

In Washington, it's all about the election, believe us. Gridlock dominates as tea-party Republicans force the House farther to the right, and liberal Democrats and a few Republican friends pursue a big-spending agenda.

The president has proposed another increase in the debt ceiling – by \$1.2 trillion up to \$16.4 trillion this time. Congress may refuse it, but the president apparently can veto the refusal. That's a neat trick, since the Republicans can claim to have fought the increase, but the government won't shut down.

Score one there for the GOP.

Meantime, President Obama won points for pushing a two-month extension on the Social Security tax cut and extended unemployment benefits, giving Congress time to stall for another two months before coming up with some last-minute compromise.

He comes off as the champion of the middle class and the working man, trying to make things work, while Congress looks like the one holding up the works. Score that one for Obama.

While the economy is not great, it's slowly getting better. There's even talk that unemployment might slip below 8 percent by fall. That would be good news for Obama, since no president in recent times has been re-elected with unemployment above that level.

Voters may look at the economy next fall and, if it's improving, feel good about the president even though they suffered during his recession. His policies have hampered the recovery and helped keep employment down, but in politics, it's all about "what have you done for me lately."

The Republican candidates have jostled all year without anyone emerging as a strong contender. You might have thought Gov. Rick Perry of Texas would show some charisma, some leadership, but he fell flat on his face.

Former Speaker Newt Gingrich? Can you see women voting for someone who filed for divorce while his wife was fighting cancer?

Gov. Mitt Romney seems the solid candidate, the survivor, but solid is not very sexy. He's not viewed as much of a conservative and won't fire up the tea party wing. He's no great speaker. He's, well, solid.

Will that carry the day against the president with the million-dollar grin? (And don't ask what that man is smiling about!)

He may be part and parcel of the old Chicago machine, but President Obama knows how to polish his image. He's got that electrifying something that makes for excitement in politics – and the Republicans don't have a Ronald Reagan to trot out against him.

At midyear, remember, Washington commentator Charlie Cook said the Republicans couldn't miss IF they found an electable candidate. So far, everyone who steps forward falls out, except Mr. Romney.

And he's about as exciting as his father, George, a very nice man who never snared the nomination.

What will the new year bring? More of the same, or a savior for the GOP?

From here, the race looks like even money, but the year ought to be a little better than the last anyway. Stay tuned, as they say.



On the Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



Changing attitudes of gun ownership today

When I was in third grade my dad put a rifle in my hands, showed me how to aim and told me to fire. After I picked myself up off the ground, I said to my dad, "I can do this." For several years my dad and I went hunting and shot for nickels during target practice. I remember buying my first gun, a 22, when I was probably 10 or 11 from Horney's Appliance (and guns I might add). It was blonde wood with dark carving which looked like art work. I have since passed it on to one of my children hoping it will be a memory maker for his children like it was for me.

Things were different back then. Gun laws held little national interest in the 1950's. Guns were seen as sport, and, yes, security. My dad always carried a loaded gun in his pickup (I don't know if it was legal or not). He encountered a number of drifters and of course was an avid hunter. I grew up unaware of gun

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



laws. Guns were a natural part of our everyday life. I was unaware of hunting laws too. I learned as I got older stubble ducks were really pheasants.

The United States has the highest civilian gun ownership of any country; U.S. civilians own 270 million of the 650 million worldwide. Over three million firearms were sold in the United States during November and December, setting record sales numbers.

Representative Gabrielle Giffords, or Gabby, as she is lovingly referred to is a proud supporter of gun owner's rights and displayed a centrist attitude during

her time in Washington. As we near the first anniversary of the attempted assassination of Representative Giffords we are reminded of the multifaceted issues regarding guns. From mental illness to political rhetoric, from gun control to the ability to conceal and carry a weapon without a permit, guns carry a huge responsibility. Her shooter had an evolving history of mental illness, had been denied admittance to the military, had a history of marijuana use and yet he was legally able to purchase the firearm, conceal and carry it. Even with lenient laws his actions could have been thwarted and yet they weren't.

Gun safety is the responsibility of all of us, gun owners or not, from identifying those with mental illness prior to purchasing a weapon, to promoting a healthy atmosphere, political or otherwise, it is a shared task. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

Letting go of things from our past due to change

Happy New Year! We don't know what the New Year will hold but we do know there will be changes. For me a pending change is one I find freeing and yet anticipate with sadness.

Farewell old friend: You've entertained, informed, brought me laughter and tears.

It's been what; forty years? You've changed a lot; as have I. And I understand things change. But you, you have changed so much I don't even recognize you.

In our youth I thought of us both as hip and sleek! Now, I'm a fuddy-duddy. You are "edgy".

Our relationship was not just one sided. I've shared my thoughts with you. I taught my daughters to love you.

Friends have told me for years you were bad for me. I thought they were closed minded.

I imagined you didn't care about the impending break but I do have numerous written pleas as evidence to the contrary. I've thrown them away; I don't want to cave in a moment of weakness and take you back.

It's over. No more Newsweek at our house!

I've grown up. You are having a midlife crisis or a second childhood.

Some have claimed you were too liberal. It never seemed so to me, but then I have been accused of being a liberal so maybe we were a good fit. I believe in making informed decisions.

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



How do you do that if you only listen to viewpoints that reinforce your natural leanings?

The eldest daughter, a social studies teacher, liked Newsweek so much she used it in her classroom. But then she's a Democrat! The middle daughter also enjoyed it, but she also likes (gasp) NPR!

Now even my liberal leaning daughters are fed up!

Newsweek had developed a potty mouth and is filling its pages with soft porn. It's kind of like a cross between People and the Playboy advisor. (If that's what I wanted to read I'd subscribe to those magazines.)

A recent issue featured a story on sex addiction. Hard hitting journalism indeed! A photo of a scantily clad woman in a provocative pose accompanied the article. The story made a connection between porn and sex addiction! Apparently Newsweek can't decide if they are a therapist or an enabler.

The language has become more and more egregious. Early in the current editor's tenure, they just used the words in quotes. They disguised them

by using only the first letter and dashes or a euphemism.

In December, Newsweek used a shocking euphemism in a headline. I think it was a first but then I only give the magazine a cursory look these days. The story was about art. Of course the illustrations included nudes!

I submit if you can't find any way to make your point without shocking your readers, you aren't very interesting. Why are these people given a forum in Newsweek? Why are they writing for what was once a premiere news magazine? Are they just sloppy or out of control?

In the spring I voiced my concerns to the government teacher daughter. By the end of summer she was agonizing, "How can I use Newsweek as a teaching tool when I would send kids to the office if they used these words?" Or circulated pictures like those of male celebrities who have posed for full frontal nudity!

She dropped Newsweek in favor of a more serious magazine with fewer pictures. She reports it was an easy adjustment.

I'm done also. I'm not sure how long we've subscribed to Newsweek. I cannot remember a time in our married life when it was not in our home. I've had two letters printed in its pages. I was proud of that.

But it's 2012. Time to move on! Things change and sometimes that is good!

Wishing you and yours
the very best in 2012!

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