pinion



Free Press **Viewpoint**

McCain pros score with surprise pick

The McCain campaign pulled off a tactical coup, making the surprise announcement of a woman running mate for the Arizona senator just in time to boot the Democrats off of Page 1 on Friday.

It remains to be seen how well they can take advantage, but you had to admire the tactical skill of the McCain planners.

There was Barack Obama, basking in the glow of his welloiled convention when, bam, Sen. McCain had the spotlight. Every newspaper, every newscast, every website turned instantly to the Republican choice.

And what a surprise. Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska, a young (44), conservative, reform-minded woman who nearly everyone had never heard of. John McCain had, though.

Some thought he might be trying to snare the disgruntled Hillary vote, but that's not likely to fall his way in any great numbers. Clinton supporters are mostly orthodox liberal Democrats, and they're not going to vote for any Republican.

The best the McCain camp can hope for is for the Hillary diehards to stay home this fall, and they might just do that in droves. With their candidate gone, and the Republicans set to produce, quite possibly, our first woman president, what's there to live for?

That vote might be offset by the fact that African Americans may turn out in big members to vote for Sen. Obama this fall, but still, the Clinton votes are votes the Democrats will need, no matter how powerful the Obama ticket is.

Did we say Obama ticket? The selection of Sen. Joseph Biden hardly stirred any interest out here.

The Delaware Democrat at least looks sort of presidential, but in vice-presidential terms, about all he adds to the ticket is experience and racial balance. He's an older white guy with years and years in the Senate. He's big on foreign policy, if not on executive experience.

It's Gov. Palin who has the executive experience, in fact, as a mayor and governor. True, she ran a small town and a smallpopulation state, but it's more executive time than anyone else on either side.

So who is this mysterious woman from the far north?

She has family, an impressive political resume — she beat an incumbent and a former governor to take her present post — and a commanding presence that seems to work in her favor. She once was a beauty queen, winning a local contest, and

Detractors have tried to pull her into a scandal surrounding her sister's divorce from a state trooper, but it remains to be seen whether that will stick. Our guess is it won't hurt her with

Sen. Biden, however, has some serious baggage. He made a habit over the years to copy the work of others, stealing speeches and reportedly getting in trouble in law school for lifting five pages of a law-journal article for one paper. That's hardly the new standard Sen. Obama says he wants to set.

We'll see how this all shakes out, but this week, the points go to the McCain camp. Sen. Obama was the first candidate in years not to get a "bounce" in the polls from his party's convention.

With a hurricane disrupting the Republican show, Sen. Mc-Cain might not get much either. We'll see. — Steve Haynes

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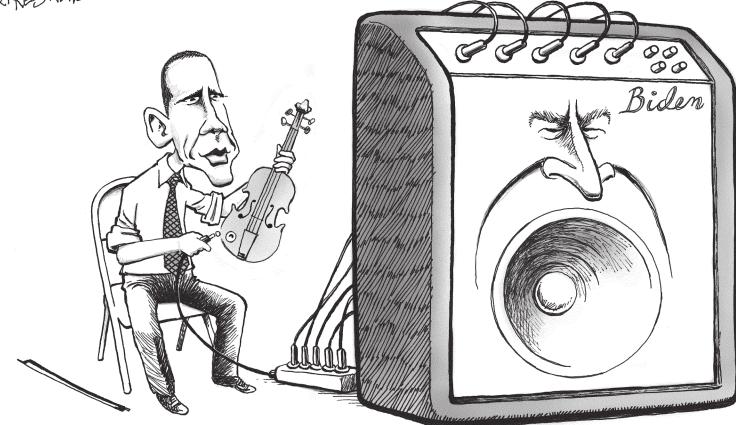
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Postmistress knows town's pulse

67523. That's the zip code for mail destined for folks who live in the small western Kansas community of Burdett.

Burdett, in Pawnee County, is home to 232 souls. It's about 43 miles northeast of Dodge City as the crow flies.

Like so many small towns in western Kansas, Burdett reached it's peak years ago - maybe a century ago. During the last couple of years, the John Deere dealership on the south side of K-156 folded. A farm supply service now operates from the same building.

This wasn't the first business to shut its doors, and residents of the little Kansas village know it won't be the last.

Still, Burdett sports a handful of businesses on Main Street: the post office, bank, insurance agency, beauty parlor and senior center.

Judy Wasko runs the post office and serves as postmaster, although postmistress would be politically correct. She's been at the helm in Burdett since Jan. 20, 2007. She started working for the postal service in 1996, working part time in nearby Hanston.

Wasko also farms with her husband Paul 13 miles west of Burdett. Three daughters help them run an 82-head cow-calf operation. They farm about 950 acres, raising corn, silage, soybeans, milo and wheat.

Like so many like her across the Sunflower State, Wasko works outside the farm to help pay the bills and subsidize the family income.

main mission. The post office is the familiar come complete with brass-plated combination reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge blond-brick structure seen throughout Kan- locks.

John Schlageck

Kansas Farm Bureau

sas. Standard silver government-issued letters read: United States Post Office Burdett, Kan. 67523. It's on the east side of Main.

Wasko opens the doors every morning at 8 a.m. and closes them at 4:15 p.m. Monday through Friday. The post office is open for just an hour on Saturdays.

A part-time clerk helps mainly during lunch and vacation. The Burdett facility also serves as the supply center for other small offices in western Kansas. When the supplies arrive, they are shipped out to the other post offices.

The Hodgeman County farm wife loves her

"I'm really at home here and I love the people," Wasko says. "I give them their mail with

That mail amounts to about three feet of letters each day and another two feet of flat mail, mainly larger envelopes. Some days, she sells someone \$100 in stamps.

Delivering and sending out the mail is her coming into the post office. These old timers farm in northwestern Kansas, and his writing

Walk-in traffic at 67523 varies from day to day, Wasko says. Most people show up every day to pick up their mail, but the lobby is never

"The best thing about our little office here

in Burdett is that no one has to stand in line to send a package or pick up registered mail," Wasko says. "Some days are busy, but it's always a gradual stream and never a rush." One of her favorite folks stops by daily to

deliver the weather. He's an older gentleman, and ironically his weather report is not local but rather from a different country every day. Wasko admits she's seen a decline in the

amount of mail during her 12 years in the postal industry in western Kansas, but it is not

'Few people use the Internet to pay bills in our little community," Wasko says. "Out here most people still correspond by letter. They pay their bills the same way."

And for the time being, that'll keep Wasko delivering and sending letters, envelopes and packages via the U.S. mail. At the same time, she has the opportunity to serve her friends and neighbors and visit with them daily. There's no place she'd rather be than bringing home the mail in Burdett.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau About 80 people receive their mail in small is a leading commentator on agriculture and ctangular metal boxes that line the right wall rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified and passion.

Speech shorter than trip home

Barack Obama had left the stage and the Democratic National Convention celebrating was nearly over as my wife and I started to work our way out of Invesco Field at Mile High about 9:30 p.m. Thursday.

We were able to get into the media elevator and down to the main level. We stopped on the way out to buy another Obama shirt, and called my sister, Lynn Seybold, to tell her where we were. Once outside the stadium, we had to wait for Lynn, who stopped to buy her husband, Chet, a shirt.

When we met up, we began looking for the parking lot we came in from, and looking for that small RTD handicapped-lift-equipped bus. We approached one sitting in the parking lot, but were told it was not available. A young man from the convention committee came over to ask what we needed. We said we were with the press and looking to get back to the parking garage. He said most of the buses in front of us were taking people to hotels, but he would see what he could do.

Lots of other people came up while we were standing there asking if there was a handicapped bus coming. We told them we did not know, and heard several stories about how they had been told to go to the other side of the stadium to get a bus. We got to the parking lot about 10 p.m. We had been waiting for more than half an hour as the busses loaded up and headed out, to be replaced by a second round

The young man came back and said he was having trouble getting a bus to take us back, but was still trying. He disappeared into the crowd and we continued to wait. About 11:30



Tom ${f Betz}$

Mountain Time

p.m. another man came over and asked if we were media. We said we were, and he said he would find a lift-equipped bus to take us back to the parking lot.

About midnight, a big tour bus from Ramblin Express of Colorado Springs pulled up and asked if we were waiting for a bus to the parking lot. The lady loaded Ava up in the back of the over-the-road coach with a lift that took her up to the seat level. We picked up another handicapped person, and with her and my sister, we got on the bus.

An officer on the bus from the Colorado De-

partment of Corrections kept the bus cleared of other people and directed the driver as she maneuvered the big bus out of the Invesco parking lot and got us back to within two blocks of the garage where we parked. It was strange to have four people on that big of a bus, but I know all four of us, and especially my wife and her scooter, were thankful for the effort of those people to take care of our situation.

We dropped the other lady off at her car at the Five-Points parking area down at 28th and

By the time we made it back to Lakewood, it was about 1 a.m. on Friday, and we were glad the day had come to an end.

Tom Betz is editor of The Goodland Star-News and a longtime observer of Colorado politics. He formerly was editor and publisher of the old Lamar Daily News in Colorado, which was run by his family for many years. A lifelong Democrat, he covered the party convention in Denver last week.

Where to write, call

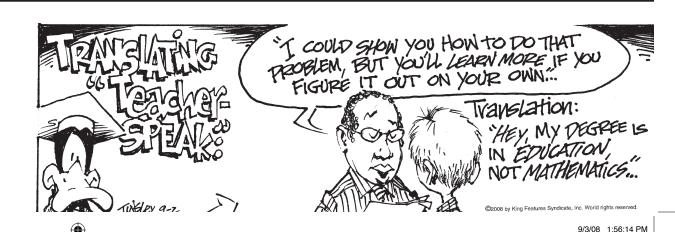
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