

from our viewpoint...

Arizona shooting may calm rhetoric

Everyone watches and listens to hear the latest on the recovery of Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords who was shot in the head two weeks ago, and how she is doing as she has arrived in Texas to begin the lengthy rehabilitation process.

Tonight as President Barack Obama makes his second State of the Union speech the combined House and Senate will not be seated in separate sections by party. Instead many of the Representatives and Senators have accepted invitations to sit with someone from the opposite party. The move was suggested to show more unity between the elected members of Congress, and to show people the shooting has brought more calm to the political rhetoric to show a different picture than has been seen in the past year or more.

President Obama will undoubtedly mention the effort to dampen the rhetoric and Rep. Giffords as he talks to Congress and the American People. The President will probably make mention of the efforts to change the tenor of discourse. Politics is always an adversarial process, but for in the past year the two sides apparently forgot the underlying principal of democracy is both sides should be working for the same thing. Both Democrats and Republicans are elected to represent the people of their state or district, but as a body they should to work together for the overall improvement of the country.

Over the past year or more the rhetoric has become more strident on both sides of the major issues. Hopefully the tenor will be toned down, but it is a shame six people had to die and 14 others get wounded to make the point.

The other apparent outcome of the shooting is a call to rein in the size of gun clips to the size under the assault rifle ban passed in 1994 that was allowed to expire in 2004. It is doubtful anything will happen on this with the new split of power in Washington. The idea behind the clip measure would have cut the amount of ammunition in the shooter's gun from 30 to 10 rounds. It would not have meant he could not have shot and killed people in Arizona, but could have reduced the carnage to half of what he was able to do with the 30-round clip.

A bill to cut the size of ammunition clips has been introduced, but nothing is expected to happen with this piece of legislation that would be a small step forward in reducing violent attacks without curbing anyone's right to own and bear arms.

As was expected the House passed their "repeal" of Health Care Reform on a mostly party line vote. The Republicans kept saying last year they had no input in the health care reform process despite the more than 50 amendments they proposed, and 37 of which were accepted and put in the bill before the Republicans voted against what they had helped draft.

When the repeal was brought up no amendments were allowed, and the Republicans issued the rules setting the limit on debate. So much for the new open process promised.

As the House proceeds to waste time and money in the effort to repeal health care it is hoped some of those who have tried to reach across the aisle will find ways to compromise and work on ways to fix and improve the health care reform process.

President Obama's speech tonight will be his halfway point in his first term, and a lot of attention will be paid to how he plans to address the top two issues facing the country — the economy and increasing jobs to reduce unemployment and help move the economy forward. — Tom Betz

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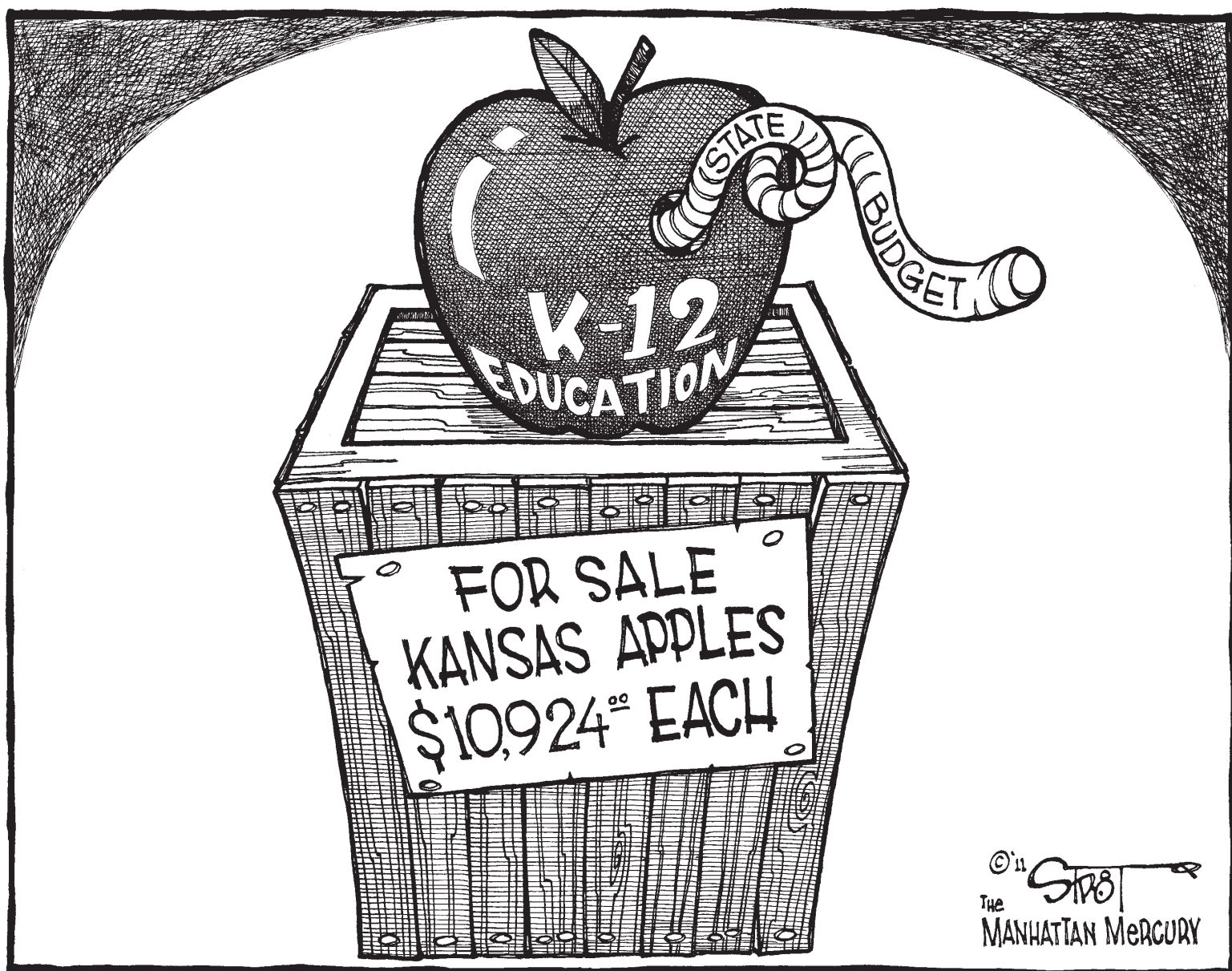
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Here's how I got to travel to Japan

And how did I end up in Misawa, Japan?
 If I use the word "military" you got your answer.

Yes, I was stationed at the Misawa Air Base, north of Tokyo along the Pacific Coast in a mountainous region.

When I was there for a two-year assignment in the late 1950s, Misawa itself was a community of probably 20,000. However, if you chased out all the girls from other parts of the country who flocked to Misawa to make sure none of the military guys there would get homesick, the town would probably have had a handful of people.

Today, Misawa, a modern city with its share of casinos, hotels and the like, has a population of nearly 43,000. I wonder if some of those gals of my time, are still on the same mission now only catering to senior militarians who stayed behind for reasons I would never reveal.

I ended up in Misawa after finishing my studies at Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Miss., where, as a member of the USAF Security Service, I was taught the art of putting words to ...s and ---s. Yep, dots and dashes, Morse Code. It was a challenging study, for me anyway. I think the course was probably 7 or 8 months long.

After successfully completing the course, I was sent to Travis AFB in San Francisco to await orders to Japan. Misawa, Japan. I was one of the lucky guys who got to fly over with stops in Hawaii and Midway Island (I believe). And from there to Tokyo, and then north to Misawa. The unlucky guys had to travel by ship. It took days and days, and the stories they tell were precious — to us who flew, not those who were being tossed around by the waves (waves you notice in lower case).

The trip from Tokyo to Misawa was on a coal-fired train that honestly was the dirtiest thing I'd ever traveled in. The soot was absolutely so thick you had trouble seeing the person sitting next to you. And the trip took more hours than I could count. Eventually, we arrived in Misawa looking forward to seeing the beauty of the land in which we were to live for two years.

What a disappointment that was! I suppose you could call it "beauty" if the eye of the beholder was damaged. There wasn't a fancy bus waiting to take us from the depot to the base. The transportation consisted of military trucks with some kind of covering over the bed to shield passengers from the weather; they had wooden benches to sit on.

I can't go into detail as to what specifically I and the other 70 or 80 airmen were assigned to do behind that guarded compound on base. While our course of study at Keesler was an indicator of what our mission would be, what we actually did was enough to blow your socks off. The responsibilities placed on our shoulders were nothing short of mind boggling. (Shhh, I know a secret...)

I will tell you what town life was like when



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• time out with td

we were given passes to go in and stay the weekend. Again, our transportation involved those military 400-ton trucks. Okay, an exaggeration but the ride felt like that's what we were in and not driving on a road but in the ditch next to it. It was, however, a good way to sober up on the trip back to the base. And the drivers, Japanese guys, didn't help the ride any either.

My favorite place — and a favorite of some of my buddies — was the Kansas Bar. Yep, that's right. Some of the bars were named after states, and they contained accommodations for wholesome activities designed to keep the military crowd from crying for their mummies! It didn't take the ladies in the bars very long to learn all of our names. I'll never forget this one gal asked me, "Where you from, GI?" And I told her I was from Hays, Kansas. "College town, huh?" she replied. Stunned, I said, "Yes, but how did you know that?" She smiled as broadly as a yen (that's the name of their money) and said, "You just told me." She and the other girls had a good laugh over that. I always called them the clever little mistresses of midnight.

When my buddies and I had downed a few bottles of Japanese beer, we headed for a restaurant. The little waitress, not all that familiar with the English language, asked what we wanted. We were in agreement we all wanted chicken fried steaks with french fries. It was a long exchange for the poor waitress, but eventually she said she thought she knew exactly what we wanted. Well, she was close; we each had a plate on which there was a steak and some fried chicken. I guess that other mess was the french fries. I really didn't want to eat it because it looked like it could get up and walk away.

Because the hour was late and the last truck had departed for the barracks, we decided to bed down at a hotel. Fancy it was not! We rented a room with two beds to accommodate four GI's. The lady at the desk took us up to the third floor to our room. While we were preparing to jump in, one of the guys looked for the thermostat to get a little bit of heat into the freezing room. The clerk said, "Heat? No have!" She said we should climb in bed and she would bring heat up to the room. Heat? Part of room service? It consisted of a towel in which there was a heated brick of some kind. She placed one by each of our feet. She said she would check back occasionally during the night to see if we needed more. We did, again and again.

There was no shower, no bath tub, no nothing to prepare for a new day. When we got back

to the barracks, those fortunate airmen who opted to stay on base instead of in town said we looked like something the rats chased out of a sewer line. In town, incidentally, sewer lines were a popular sight. They were open lines along the side of the streets and when the need to use them beckoned...well, you did your thing in the company of many others. Sanitation wasn't a big deal. You can only imagine the odor! That's just the way it was and had been for a long time.

There were times we would venture into the little towns near the base to see what they were like and what the people were like. English was not their thing. Funny how we and they were able to put together what we were asking and they were answering. I liked those little villages. We saw people, real Japanese people who worked in the fields and some in the towns that only had a handful of little stores.

The two years went by relatively fast. I was a bit misty eyed when we climbed into one of the Flying Tigers' aircraft for the trip back to the states. During the time in country I learned a lot that books couldn't tell me. And what I thought at the outset was a land of nothing, I learned was a land of plenty — plenty of proud people going about the business of survival.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend a reunion of the veterans who served in the USAF Security Service at Misawa Air Base. It was held in Philadelphia on June 24-27, 2010 and it was for those serving from 1949-1979. It would have been nice, but some times aging gets in the way.

Enlisting in the Air Force was not on my agenda. Period. I was studying at Fort Hays Kansas State College (now university) after high school. As luck would have it, a classmate moved to Aurora, Colo., with his family about a year after our graduation from what is now Thomas More Prep-Marian in 1953. He invited me to come to Denver for a visit. So I did.

While we were fooling around in downtown Denver, classmate Herb (Schmidt, who now lives in the Overland Park area) spotted a sign on a store front that read, "Air Force Recruiter." We went in and to make a long story very short, the next morning we were taking physicals, other testing, and then readying for a train ride to San Antonio, Texas and basic training at Lackland AFB.

The night before all of this, I called my mother and told her what happened. She was stunned, to say the least. After all, when I left for Denver via the City of St. Louis passenger train, I told her I'd see her in a week or two or so. Now I had to tell her that time would be greatly extended. But she got over it.

This trip in my arsenal of trips, took me from Hays in Kansas, to Aurora and Denver in Colorado, to San Antonio in Texas, to Keesler AFB, in Mississippi, to Travis AFB in California and then to Misawa Air Base, Japan.

I sure get around.

where to write

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