

from our viewpoint...

GOP horse race really begins today

The horses have reached the starting gate, and are about to break for a fast start heading down the straight away with the preliminary goal in eight months and the finish line in 11 months.

The airwaves have been overburdened by all the Grand Old Party presidential candidate debates over the past year with the Iowa caucuses today being the starting gate.

As the debates have gone on and the candidates have performed well or goofed and stubbed their toes the front runner has changed at least seven times. The pollsters have been busy trying to keep up with the changes in potential voter opinions almost on a daily basis.

The process has become an ongoing game with the talking heads working overtime to find some new dramatic piece of a sound bite to dissect and pronounce as the latest reason one of the candidates is surging or is falling flat on their face.

The art of politics has been something to watch and wonder about for generations, but in past years the candidates could not count on the millions of dollars to spend on television spots to try to influence the potential Republican voters who gather in the next four or five months to decide who will be the party nominee.

Iowa is the opening gate, and being a caucus state the results will be from the Republicans who attend their local party meeting and following the Iowa party rules they will decide who gets the majority of delegates. From the local meetings the numbers will follow up the line to the Iowa state Republican convention where people will run to be delegates to the national convention to be held in August.

Democrats are not excited about Iowa this political season as President Barack Obama doesn't have any apparent opposition for the party nomination for a second term.

All the Republican candidates are battling each other to win enough delegates coming out of the gate to try to gain momentum for the primary races and hope to find enough support to win at least one of the early primary contests.

Iowa opens the gate and the race will quickly move to New Hampshire and then on to Super Tuesday where many states have primary elections on the same day. By Super Tuesday the Republican race may have a clear leader heading into the convention.

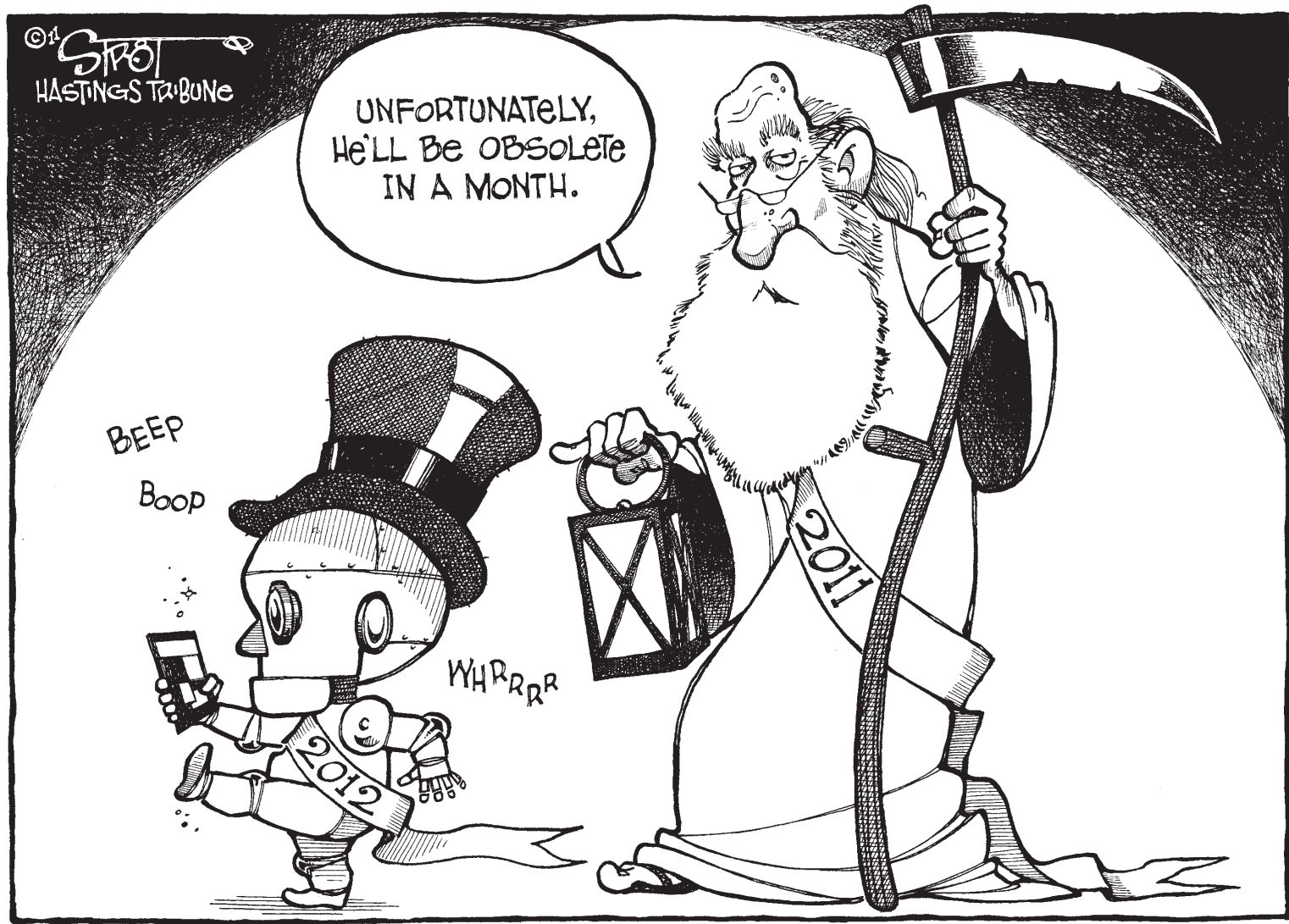
Watching from the sidelines the Republican candidates represent a wide spectrum of positions, but in the primary races these people are trying to convince less than a majority of American voters to make them the winner.

The smoke may clear in the next few months, but the political rhetoric will become more of a roar as millions more dollars are poured into the Republican race, and then once both parties get to the "real" campaign season from Labor Day to Election Day the din of rhetoric will be worse than trying to talk over the noise of a screaming jet engine.

This is an important part of the American political process and the country will survive no matter what happens or who wins in November. The biggest thing to remember in the political process is when the smoke clears the question is can the winners manage to work together to actually govern and deal with the many issues facing our country.

The Republicans will be trying to put together a coalition of the moderates, conservatives and Tea Party factions to develop a winning combination.

The winner of the horse race will be the American people if the best candidates are nominated and elected. — Tom Betz



Can the U.S. Postal Service survive?

It's hard to tell whether the U.S. Postal Service will kill itself off before the Internet gets it, or the venerable agency will survive to serve the nation for another century or two.

Ben Franklin, revered as the first postmaster general (among other things), was one of the founding fathers who realized that a young nation connected mostly by ocean transport would need a means to knit its populace together. That's why the post office is the oldest federal agency, predating the Constitution.

But in the last five years, the service has fallen on hard times. First-class mail volume has dropped by 40 percent, the agency is losing \$9 billion a year and there's talk it might not make it.

A nation without mail? How would we survive?

If customers across the nation are anything like the ones who turned out for a regional public meeting last month in Colby, though, you can rest assured, people want postal service. And they can see what the Postal Service is doing to itself in its rush to cut back.

These people were not fooled by promises that somehow, taking all the mail into a few big cities for sorting will either solve all the Postal Service's problems, or even work. They know what "service" is like when mail has to go through those big-city sorting plants today. They can't see the need to haul in-town mail to Denver for processing before it comes back.

The Postal Service can. It has to cut costs, and labor is its biggest expense. It has to cut every hour it can, even though union contracts make that difficult. Postal managers envision a world where every letter is sorted down to "walk sequence" by big machines in the city offices, then placed in trays for shipment out to carriers.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Carriers, who today spend an hour or two "casing," or sorting, mail in the office would just put the trays in their trucks and go to work. Offices would be consolidated, routes lengthened and employees trimmed. Just in mail handling, the service hopes to get rid of nearly 35,000 jobs. That after it has slimmed down from 880,000 workers five years ago to 559,000 today, nearly one-third of the workforce, all without any layoffs.

The only way this scheme will work, however, is if the service can use its big sorting machines 18 to 20 hours a day. Now, they run six to eight hours, sorting overnight. It wants to run them from 8 a.m. to 4 a.m., sorting all that mail down to delivery sequence. But to do that, it must give up the idea of overnight delivery to nearby addresses, something consumers have come to expect.

On the surface, it makes no sense to send a letter to my neighbor to Denver for sorting, but it would cost money to sort that letter here. Someone would have to handle it, the carriers would have to deal it into his or her trays and all that would take time — and money.

Only presorted mail like newspapers and, perhaps, some advertising would be exempt.

So, despite the cries of protest, it's most likely your mail will be taking a trip by sometime next year. It may not be to Denver, however. Roy Reynolds, the postal manager from Omaha who ran the meeting last week, seemed to pick up on the notion that depending

on trucks to get mail from Colby to Denver and back is not a good idea.

"West is not the way to go," one resident said, "unless you want to go skiing."

It's even money that the service will realize that Wichita, which currently sorts most of our inbound mail, would be a better bet. Mr. Reynolds admitted it's likely no one at the Postal Service has thought of weather when they decided our mail should go to Denver. It's 50 miles closer than Wichita; that's all.

It remains to be seen, however, whether anyone will use the mails after service slips from overnight to three days for a cross-town letter. One postmaster at the meeting, Darrel Evans of Quinter, said, "We are shooting ourselves in the foot for \$14,000 (the estimated savings from the Colby move)."

Others said they'd heard banks and businesses would bail out if their bills have to take an interstate trip before delivery.

"It doesn't look to me that cutting back service will save you any money," one said, considering the prospect of losing even more business.

Apparently, no one thought to study the mail and see if most of it goes east or west from this area, which could affect the cost.

Mr. Reynolds assured everyone that, strapped as it is, the Postal Service has made no decisions and wants to hear our thoughts. If you have any to add, you can send them to the district office, addressed to "Manager, Consumer and Industrial Contact, Central Plains District, Box 199504, Omaha, NE 68119-9504.

Your letter will go straight to Omaha, after going to Salina to be sorted, then to Wichita, then, well, you get the picture.

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Celebrating the public sector

To the Editor:

How many times have you heard a statement like one of these?

- My mom was a teacher for thirty years — she taught someone from every family in our town.

- I'm so proud of my son — he joined the Marines so he can follow his father's footsteps.

- My cousin can help you solve that problem — she works for the county office and deals with those issues all the time.

- You probably know my brother — he works for the police department.

People have always been proud to have family members serve in the public sector. When we come together as communities, we decide to pool our resources and provide services like schools, roads, safety ... things we can't provide on our own unless we are incredibly wealthy. Things that reflect our values and our commitment to each other.

We honor those who choose to serve our



karen godfrey

• commentary

community in those capacities, often for less pay than they could make in the private sector. Why? Because we know our communities are better places to live with their service.

As our communities become more prosperous, we often increase those services. We decide our community would be enriched with libraries, parks and theaters. And again, we pool our resources, often in the form of taxes, to improve the quality of life for all. We are proud to support a vibrant community.

So why recently have we heard from some policymakers such determination to shrink the public sector? Has our commitment to our shared values and to each other diminished?

where to write

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Letter Policy

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