

from our viewpoint...

Olympics, tragedies and election results

Watching the presentation of Olympic Gold Medals to American athletes and hearing the national anthem swells pride in the U.S.A. and gives people a change of pace from the election politics, disasters and day to day events.

The winning smile and swimming of Missy Franklin was a bright spot for Colorado in the backdrop of the shootings at the Aurora theatre. Franklin's wonderful spirit and winning of five medals gave the city of Aurora a lift. This young girl begins her senior year in high school next week, and it was great to watch her classmates cheering her on to victory. Franklin won four gold and one bronze medal in London, and is one of the up and coming swimmers who can carry the U.S.A. torch in the future.

The "flying squirrel" Gabby Douglas became the princess of the games with her gold winning performance in helping the American "Fab Five" win the team title and then she went onto win the All-Around individual title. Douglas is one of the shortest team members at 4 foot 11 inches, and at age 16 it is possible she will thrill the crowds at the next olympics to be held in Rio de Janeiro in four years.

The medal count for Michael Phelps reached a record 22 with his record winning six medals in London. Phelps said this is his last olympics, and he went out in style winning four gold and two silver medals. Phelps has appeared in four olympics going back to 2000 and he won eight medals in 2004 and again eight in 2008.

He said he was impressed with many of the young people who are in swimming, and feels the American team will continue to do well in the future.

Many other American athletes have brought home gold, silver and bronze and more have a chance to win as the London Olympics continues through this weekend. On Wednesday the medal count showed the U.S.A. in second with a total of 71 medals behind China with 75. The U.S. had 30 gold medals, 19 silver and 22 bronze.

Back at home events continue to unfold in the Aurora theater shooting with the action moving into the courtroom for hearings about evidence and what defense the shooter may try to use. The story has a long way to go, and we will not give the shooter any more publicity. The stories of heroism continue to surface and we honor those who helped others through that horrible event.

The Olympics and distance has somewhat overshadowed the shooting at the Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis., on Sunday killing six and wounding three. The shooter had ties to a white supremacist group, and the FBI said he killed himself after being wounded by an Oak Creek police officer who was one of the wounded. The shooter apparently has a connection to Colorado from various school and police records.

Unlike the theatre shooting the temple story will not have a courtroom phase, but the families and other temple goers will have our sympathy as they try to make sense of what happened and find ways to cope. The temple shooter has been on a hate group watch list for several years and played in white supremacist heavy metal bands such as Definite Hate and End Apathy.

Closer to home the Primary Election results are in and we congratulate the winners in both the Sherman County races as well as the State Representative and State Senate races. We said earlier the state redistricting hurt northwest Kansas, and we will have to work on a more regional basis in the future. We are sorry to lose the services of Rick Billinger in the House. Maybe it is time for the counties in the northwest corner to consider developing a regional effort with a person to help carry our message to Topeka. Billinger would appear to be a great candidate for such an effort. —Tom Betz



Primary Election leaves uncertain future

By the time you read this, perhaps we'll know who won the fight to control the state Senate.

The results will determine a lot about the future course of state government, though the battle itself has been waged largely out of sight.

The Senate is the last bastion of the "moderate" wing of the Republican party, a group that by and large has run things in this state for many years. Moderates like to trace their heritage back to Gov. Bill Graves, President Dwight Eisenhower and Gov. Alf Landon.

Until recently, the faction controlled the leadership in both houses of the Legislature, the governor's office (except when a Democrat happened to get elected) and the party machinery.

Over the last decade, the party's conservative wing has been ascending, however. First the conservatives took over the House of Representatives, then with the election of former U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback as governor, the executive suite.

After this conservative surge, the forces that be on the right set their sights on the moderate leadership of the Senate, which stood in the way of many conservative goals.

Even so, the conservatives seemed to have their way, passing massive tax cuts and a budget that not only balanced, but included the required reserves to tide the state over any revenue shortages.

To understand all this, first you have to understand the "one/two/three party" system in



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Kansas politics.

In our state, there's really only one party, the Republicans. They've been in charge so long, dating back to statehood, that no one remembers why we have so few Democrats.

Second, while we have, officially, two major political parties, the Democrats seldom win a statewide office and almost never control the Legislature. A lot of people who would be Democrats in most states register and run as Republicans here.

With the Democrats on the outside looking in, the two Republican "parties" slug it out for control of our government. It's like having three parties, only one doesn't count. And the dominant party is split into conservative and liberal wings, the "moderates" backing bigger government and more spending, the conservatives wanting to put a stop to all that after years of moderate control.

A few exceptional Democratic candidates win statewide races, including the conservative Dockings, father and son, and the liberal Kathleen Sebelius, a superb political creature who grew up in the governor's office in Ohio.

But the main lesson of history is, if you want to hold office in Kansas, be a Republican.

No party can survive and be as dominant as the GOP in Kansas and maintain any semblance of unity, however. Nature abhors a vacuum, and in politics, unity is a kind of vacuum, to be filled by those with a lust for power.

It's not just principle that's at stake here, either; billions of dollars in spending ride on the outcome, and the potential recipients want that money.

This year, the conservatives, flush from huge victories, decided to take on the Senate leadership. The goal set by the state Chamber of Commerce, through its political action committee, and other conservative groups was in control of all three. Conservative House members were recruited to run against key Senate moderates.

Not surprisingly, the "mods" fought back, piling up a huge war chest from unions, including the Teamsters, and the teachers, who stand to benefit from bigger state spending. With them are the Greater Kansas City Chamber and the state's highway contractors.

Who will win? Your guess is as good as mine. My guess is the conservatives may have overreached. Their play of recruiting House members to unseat the Senate mods may seem too much like a power grab to voters. Plus, it prompted a heavy reaction from the crowd lined up at the public trough. But in recent years, the voters have been in a conservative mood, so who knows.

By the time this reaches you, though, the answer should be clear.

Train ride to Cheyenne

The horses, cattle and even the buffalo don't much care, but the antelope seem to enjoy racing us as we roll along.

Out the window, I can see a line of cars like a great herd of metal beasts rolling along beside us as we head for Cheyenne, Wyo.

Steve and I are headed for Cheyenne Frontier Days, a huge rodeo with parades, a carnival, food, demonstrations, food, artisans, craftsmen, outdoor cooks, an Indian village, folks in period costumes, barbecues and shops full of Western wear.

The best part for us, however, is the transportation from Denver to Cheyenne and back. We're going by our favorite mode — a train. And this isn't just any train; it's an 18-car 1950s streamliner pulled by a steam locomotive.

We leave from Denver at 7 a.m. sharp. If you're late, you don't go.

This year we're seated in Car 13, the City of Denver, named for one of those fabulous streamliners of yore. It's different from most of the others because it's a diner.

Most of the cars on the train have regular seats, with at least half a dozen dome cars. In the City of Denver, we sit around tables for six, but there are only four of us at this one. Katie, 10, and her dad are from Aurora, Colo. This is her first trip to the rodeo, and she's excited to see the horses. Her mom and two brothers have stayed at home, so it's just her and Daddy



cynthia haynes

• open season

together for the day.

We don't know what happened to the people who were supposed to be in the other two seats. There is a breakfast package of a banana, muffin and orange juice for each one, but nobody eats them, and the catering staff eventually picks the spare food up. Maybe they were late or maybe they had the date wrong or maybe ... who knows?

I'm enjoying watching the people out the window.

I don't think I'd be up at 7 a.m. on a Saturday morning to watch a train go by, but as we pull out of Denver and head down the tracks to Greeley, we pass by hundreds of people out watching, waving and taking pictures.

Since the tracks don't tend to go through the best parts of town, lines from "The City of New Orleans" go through my mind.

"Rolls along past houses, farms and fields. Passin' trains that have no names... And the

graveyards of the rusted automobiles."

I'm sure watching a real steam locomotive, Union Pacific 844, go by which is quite a sight. For one thing, it's huge — 454 tons of steel with 80-inch driver wheels capable of running at 100 mph.

According to the booklet for the trip, the 844 was the last steam locomotive built for the Union Pacific. It was designed to haul high-speed passenger trains like the Overland Limited and the Portland Rose. Delivered in 1944, it has never been off the company's roster of active locomotives.

The train is a fund-raiser for The Denver Post Foundation. The train was started by the newspaper in 1908 and ran through 1970, carrying politicians, favored advertisers, the high and mighty, all men. In 1992, the train was revived as a fund raiser and to help celebrate *The Post's* 100th anniversary.

Several years ago, we heard Publisher Dean Singleton promise to keep the train running.

"You give me a rodeo," he told the leaders of Cheyenne. "I'll give you a train." And give Steve and me a train, and we'll take a ride, even when at the end of the day, we end up right where we started — in downtown Denver — tired, sunburned and satisfied with our ride and day in Cheyenne.

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