

from our viewpoint...

## Party conventions a costly redundancy

Political conventions in the United States have become an expensive and useless redundancy, and the two political parties should consider ending the practice completely.

Consider the 2012 Election. Were there any surprises at the Republican National Convention. Were there any surprises there? Mitt Romney secured the nomination months ago when most of his competitors withdrew. Ron Paul, even though he has very vocal supporters, was never a threat despite not withdrawing from the race.

The choice of Rep. Paul Ryan for the vice presidential nomination was announced weeks before the convention. The speeches were nothing the American people – or rather the 30.3 million watching the convention – hadn't heard before: a condemnation of everything the president and the Democratic Party has done in the past 3 1/2 years.

Even the delays due to Hurricane Isaac were entirely predictable.

The Democratic National Convention starts tonight, and will likely be equally boring. There hasn't been anyone crazy enough to challenge a sitting president in the primary since 1980 when Ted Kennedy challenged Jimmy Carter. He didn't win, but then again neither did Carter. President Obama had a smoother road to renomination.

So, will anything surprising happen at the DNC? Probably not. The Democrats will spend four days this week touting the president's record and bashing Republicans. Turnabout is fair play after all.

The Democratic National Convention of 2008 was very nearly exciting. The battle between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton came down to the wire, but a brokered convention – the term given to a convention where there is no presumptive nominee before hand – was avoided when Clinton rolled over and threw support to Obama. It was a shame too, because it would have been incredible to see a floor fight instead of well-rehearsed pageantry.

The only good things about the conventions these days are how much money they generate for businesses in the host cities. Charlotte is expected to rake in \$150 million from something like 35,000 visitors. Before the Republican National Convention, CNN had a headline story about how Tampa strip clubs were expecting a huge boom.

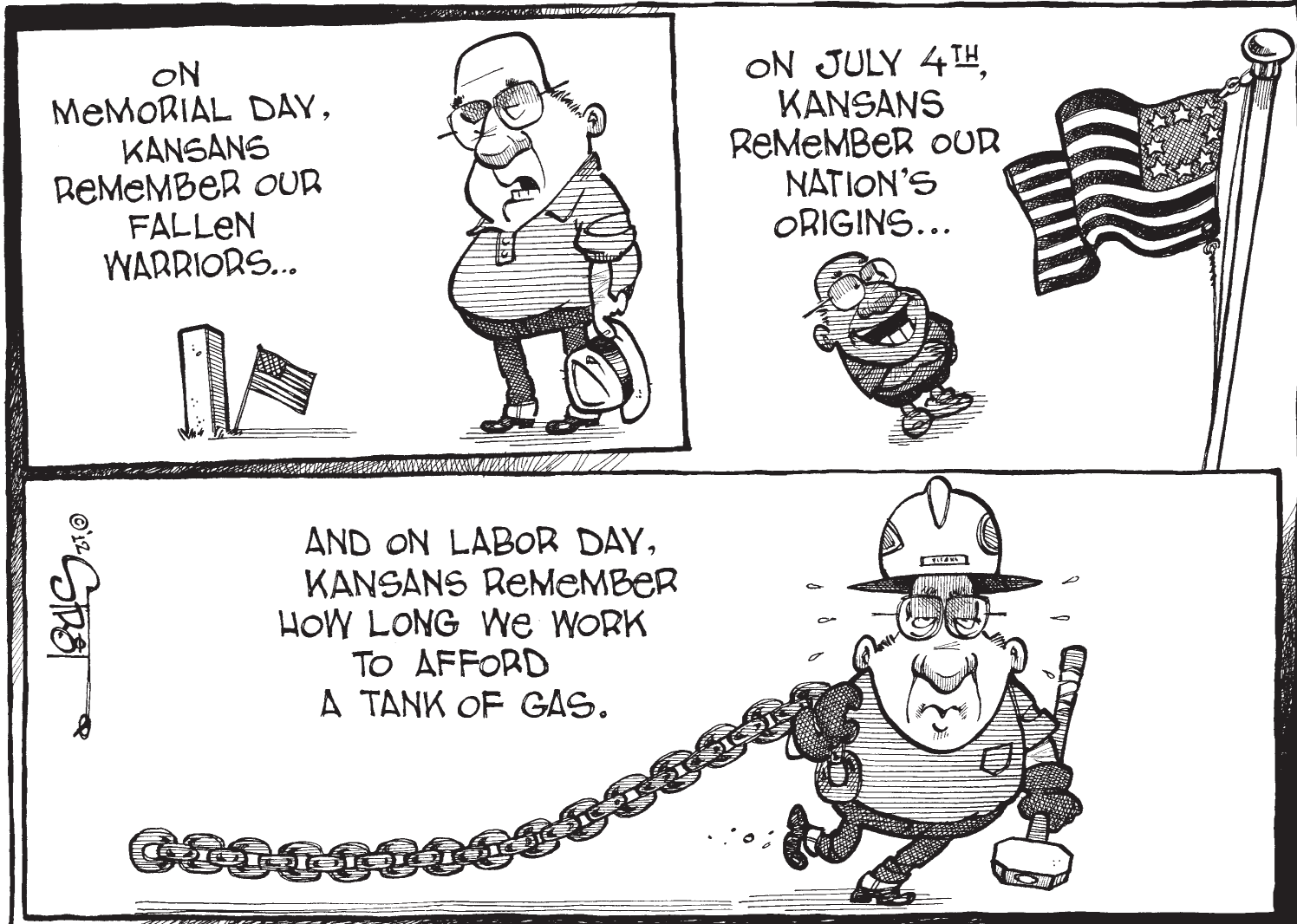
They also serve as a good venue for protests, not that anything besides a few arrests ever comes from it.

Conventions used to be exciting. Until 1936 almost every convention was brokered. In 1924, the Democratic Convention went to 102 ballots, being so divided between prohibition advocates and opposers that a compromise candidate had to be found.

But those days are long behind us. These days it is all carefully planned speeches and boring balloon drops. With almost every candidate speech leading up to the convention available on the internet, covered by 24-hour cable news and picked to death by pundits, it isn't hard to find out where the candidate's stand. The parties will continue to insist on spending millions of dollars on four-day infomercials. Why? Because of the four- to six-point bump they get in the polls.

But that bump is temporary. By the time the election rolls around in November, does anybody remember what was said at the conventions? Politics is "what have you done for me lately."

So couldn't the money used to put on these conventions be better spent elsewhere? Or perhaps it would be better if it were never raised at all, so donors could keep a little bit more of their money rather than see it squandered on something which has only negligible impact. –Kevin Bottrell



## Honoring one of America's heroes

America lost one of its greatest heroes on Aug. 25. Although he flew 78 combat missions in Korea, it is fitting that we remember Neil Armstrong for his service to science and the betterment of mankind.

By all accounts, Armstrong was a quiet man who shunned the spotlight. Perhaps that made him a more admirable hero than most. He didn't run for office, even though he was asked many times. He didn't try to stay in the limelight, and in his case, he didn't have to. As the first man to step on the moon, his name will be spoken in every classroom, every documentary on space travel and written in every history book for centuries to come.

Neil Armstrong is, of course, the most recognizable name in space exploration. But as he himself would probably have said, his flight to the moon was the culmination of the work done by thousands of men and women. As we pause to honor Armstrong, we should also honor any who have labored in the pursuit of manned spaceflight.

I've always been fascinated by space travel. As a kid I loved space shuttles and science fiction. Though I opted not to try for a career in space exploration, it has remained a passion of mine even into adulthood.

Back about a year ago I wrote a column about another great astronaut, Harrison Schmitt. The point of the column is how collective memory fades, and how the names of most of the 12 men who went to the moon have receded from that memory. I wrote about how it was a shame that more isn't taught in schools about the Apollo Program, since I believe it to be the crowning achievement of human civilization to date.



**kevin bottrell**

• simple tricks and nonsense

Schmitt is an interesting person, being the only astronaut who went to the moon who was not a pilot. Rather he was a geologist, and had to work extra hard on learning to fly the spacecraft to catch up with his colleagues. He was the only scientist to go to the moon, and was the 12th and final astronaut to set foot on the lunar surface. Later he was a U.S. Senator, a professor, and more.

One of the reasons I picked Schmitt as the topic of the article was because of a personal connection. My dad was a helicopter crewman in the Navy in 1972, and his chopper was one of those that picked up Schmitt and his fellow Apollo 17 crewmen after they had landed in the Pacific Ocean.

When I wrote my column, I remember musing about what would happen if Schmitt read it. The odds of that were pretty low, but lo and behold he did. A friend from Colby happened to be on the board of an agricultural firm with Schmitt and gave him a copy of the article. Schmitt e-mailed me to say he liked it, and sent me an autographed copy.

After that I remained on Schmitt's mailing list, and last week he sent out a moving tribute to his friend, Neil Armstrong. In one portion, he remembered one particular thing from that

historic mission 43 years and one month ago.

"One of my many favorite Armstrong memories from Apollo relates to a spur of the moment decision he made late in his walk on the Moon. We all trained to focus on collecting the greatest variety of Moon rocks possible in the time available. But, having already quickly collected one of the finest sets of lunar samples, Neil thought the partially filled rock box needed something more. He rapidly filled the box with a large amount of the Moon's soil. This soil became one of the most important samples ever returned from the Moon. Neil's 30 minutes of sampling decisions at Tranquility Base remain the most productive half hour in lunar exploration."

Schmitt, being a geologist, would certainly be in a position to know what samples had been the most useful. He went on to extend his condolences to Armstrong's family as well as friends, colleagues and the legions of people influenced by Armstrong during his life.

"I had the great privilege to have known Neil as both a colleague and friend." Schmitt wrote. "His historical insights, good nature and extraordinary professionalism will be missed more than my words can convey."

Although Neil Armstrong has taken his final small step, we must still keep our eyes turned toward the heavens. Our history of space exploration did not begin with him, nor did it end when his boots left the dust of the lunar surface behind. We must fulfill his legacy and turn our efforts toward returning to the moon, and someday going even further. The best way to honor his memory, is to keep making giant leaps for all mankind.

## No hungry kids in our schools

With the advent of the new school year, there's apprehension some youngsters may be leaving the cafeteria hungry. This may be in part due to recent changes in this country's school lunch program.

No question, some of the changes in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act are good for our kids. These include more fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, more whole grains and more water instead of sugary drinks. Also included in the new changes are reductions in saturated fat, trans fats and sodium.

These efforts are well-intentioned. There is a real concern about the growing problem of childhood obesity and diabetes. The problem arises when you try to solve childhood obesity for some and you shortchange the more active children, particularly at the higher ages.

The new guidelines place a ceiling on the amount of proteins and overall calorie content of school lunches. While there have always been minimum requirement for calories, protein and other nutrients, the caps are new. They may be good for many, but some youngsters may leave the lunchroom hungry.

These new requirements for protein are slightly less than what the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends in its overall nutritional guidelines. It appears, however, that the real problem is there is no flexibility to provide fewer or greater calories depending on a student's age, body weight or activity level.



**Insight this week**

• john schlageck

All of these considerations are necessary to determine a youngster's nutritional needs.

Active, developing youngsters – especially those involved in athletic programs after school – require more calories. If you've ever had a daughter or son playing soccer, volleyball or practicing during summer and fall football, you know they burn these calories.

Parents I know, myself included, often pack additional food for their children that include protein, carbs and fruits. In some cases the youngsters complain about being hungry or require more fuel to keep up with their active lifestyles.

Young, developing bodies and minds need a healthy, well-balanced diet, however, every child is different and requires different amounts of fruit, vegetables, dairy products and yes, protein. This protein should include whole cuts of lean beef, pork and chicken, not processed, packaged, prepared food out of a box, but straight from the steer, hog and bird.

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