

Hillary arrives, Sam grilled, Wolf off base

Already we are sick of the 2008 presidential campaign and we haven't yet cleared January 2007. To date, reports tell us, there are 10 Democrats and 9 Republicans with hats in the ring. More are expected.

Over the weekend, Sen. Hillary Clinton made her first appearance in Iowa in more than three years. She received rousing welcomes with huge crowds gathered at all her stopping places. She started her appearances with "Let the conversation begin." And also, "I'm in it to win it." We will hear these phrases often during the next 640+ days.

There was some question about the reception she would receive in Iowa because of her absence from that state for so long. But that question quickly became irrelevant. The crowds were there.

Mrs. Clinton said she's "in it to win it." That's good sound bite fodder, but it's meaningless. We would assume she was in the race to win. And when your talk is sprinkled with sound bites that sound good, those are the things listeners remember.

Mrs. Clinton isn't the front-runner in Iowa. That honor goes to former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack, the first declared candidate. Favorite son should hold that distinction.

Sen. Sam Brownback, Kansas Republican, and also a presidential candidate, was grilled Sunday by Fox News' Chris Wallace. Wallace shot a lot of BB's that Sen. Brownback deflected. The interview gave us the feeling that the Kansas senator isn't a FOX favorite.

Sen. Brownback bills himself as the only true conservative in the race.

And we don't think CNN's Wolf Blitzer enhanced his standing much when, during an interview with Vice President Dick Cheney last week, he felt the need to bring up the situation as it relates to one of the vice president's daughters. Blitzer crossed the line. That's personal and has no place in the dialogue.

Already we are sick of it (the campaign) and there's still 640+ days to go.

—Tom Dreiling

Jobs, smoking, maintenance aired

Kansas Public Employment Figures: The biggest jump in employment figures in Kansas from November of 2005 to November 2006, came in government with the addition of 6,000 new jobs, leaving some to believe we are growing state government. The 2.8 percent total increase of government jobs includes employment figures for federal, state, and local units of government combined. Broken down for our state, this represents a decrease of 600 federal jobs (-2.3 percent), an increase of 500 state jobs (+0.9 percent) and a whopping increase of 6,100 local government jobs (+3.4 percent). Some of the additional state and local jobs were due to timing of the report with respect to the hiring of additional staff for elections in 2006.

•SB 37 ~ Smoking Ban: Modifications to the proposed smoking ban have already been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee with more debate to come. The definition of food service establishment was clarified to mean a place where more than 50 percent of revenue is derived from the sale of food for consumption on the premises. The bill was amended to not affect current smoking regulations in all adult care facilities and veterans' hospitals and homes. Lastly, the disbursement of fine revenue under the bill was amended from a 75/25 split between the community and the SGF as in the original bill to language divvying up the fine revenue in accordance with current law. The committee has not yet voted on the bill.

•Deferred Maintenance: On Wednesday,

Senate Doings Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer



day, Ways and Means heard from the three main players in the discussion of Deferred Maintenance. The hearing was mostly informational and no funding plans were proposed. Testimony was given by Reggie Robinson on behalf of the Regents, Dr. Ed Berger, President of Hutchinson Community College, on behalf of the community colleges and Dr. Jerry Farley, President of Washburn University.

Robinson provided an updated estimate for the committee of \$663 million backlog, down from the \$727 million previous estimate. He stated that a more detailed list from each of the institutions was due into the Board on Jan. 26. He said that will include a more comprehensive detailing of the specific needs of each campus. Berger, on behalf of the community colleges, detailed the needs at the 19 institutions with an estimated bottom line of about \$149 million. Farley estimated Washburn's needs at just under \$22 million. All estimates have been updated to exclude dormitories, athletic facilities and student unions.

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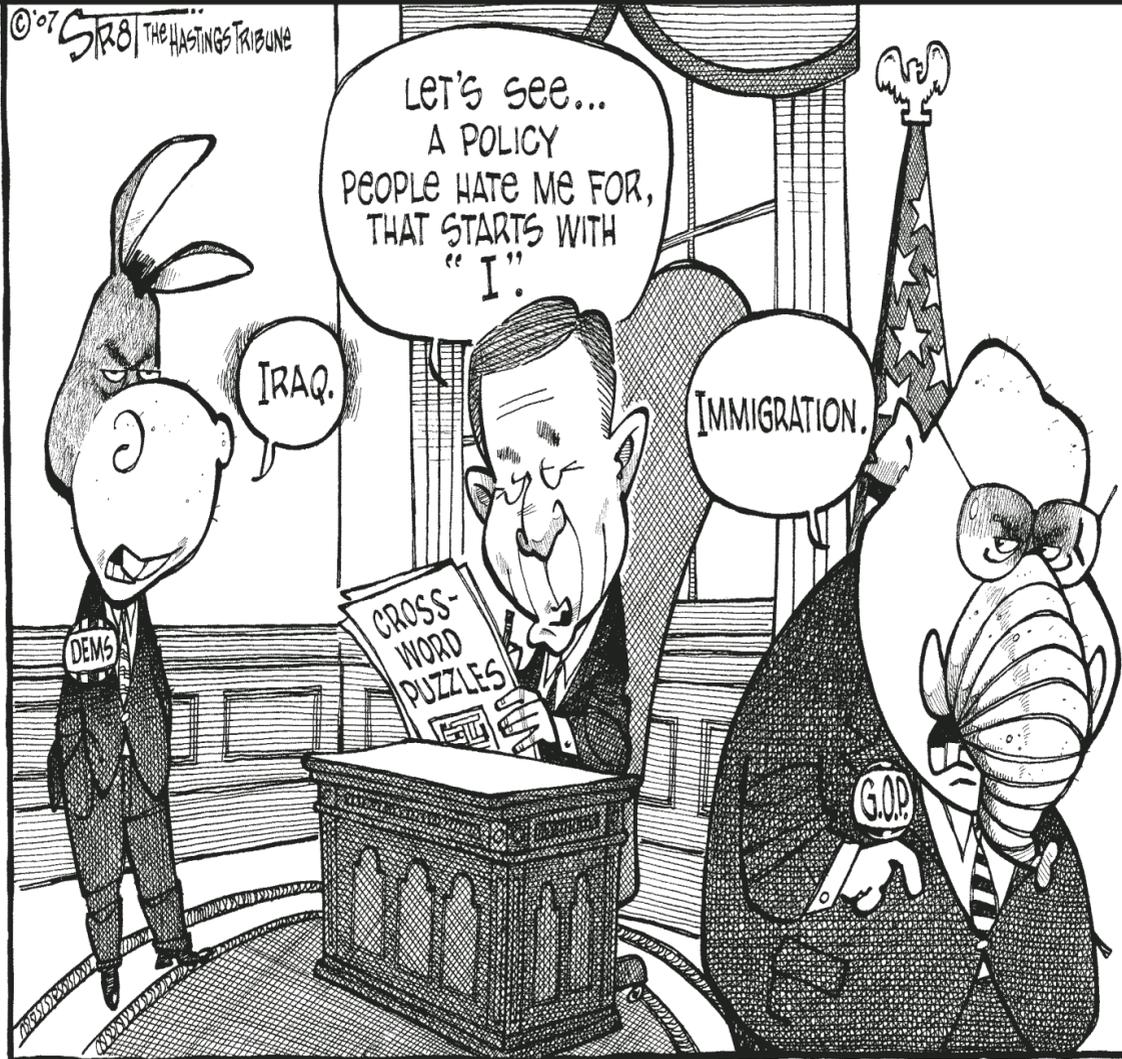
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Our house not ready for open house

Friends have asked when we're having an open house to show off our remodeled home. First, let's define "open house." The name implies that one, literally, opens their house to guests — allowing them to roam, at will, throughout your abode. Since there are still some hard-hat areas in our house, that is not an option, yet. We don't want anyone struck by falling debris.

It's going to be awhile before we install permanent floor covering. Until then, we're using carpet Jim salvaged from a job. The cats love it. There is a roll of carpeting leaned up in the corner of the kitchen. Sammy and Pete think we brought it in just for them.

They climb to the top of the roll then perch there like little spies. Sometimes they play a kitty version of "King of the Mountain" and knock each other off. They're so much fun to watch, we're talking about building them some sort of climbing post with nooks and perches close to the ceiling.

We are ready to make a big push on two

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



upstairs rooms. They both need the sheet rock finished and painted. Then we can bring the rest of the furniture over from the other house. That has to happen soon because we have rented The Sunflower Inn and the new occupant wants to move in March 1. But, that's just us. We work better under a deadline.

My other dilemma is where to hang all my pictures. We've been putting a few pieces up — ones without a decision required. Since I'm all about these rooms some pieces can only go in certain areas. The family room is "Cowboys and Indians"; the bathroom is "Sand and Sea Shells"; the kitchen is "Sunflowers, cobalt blue and yellow"; the powder room

is "Outhouse"; and so on.

That leaves me wondering what to do with my collection of windmills. They don't seem to fit in anywhere. My friend, Kathy, also a windmill collector, probably has a suggestion. But, I'm not ready to turn them over, yet.

-ob-

I dialed up my youngest daughter's home phone over the weekend and her sister, Halley, answered.

After the usual pleasantries, I asked, "Where's Adam and Kara?"

"They went skiing," she said.

My next question was, "So, is Taylor staying with you while they're gone?"

"Are you kidding me," Halley said, "they barely trust me to watch the dogs. Do you really think they would trust me with their daughter?"

-ob-

A Sunday School teacher asked, "Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the ark?"

"No," replied little Johnny, "how could he with just two worms?"

Thoughts of spring help the cause

Back Home Nancy Hagman



I'm beginning to realize why spring cleaning was necessary back in the "old days." Cold wintry days do not inspire me to do even the tiniest bit of house cleaning. The Christmas boxes sit in the south bedroom because it's way too cold to go into the attic. To cut down on some of the after-Christmas clean up, I am leaving the nativities out until Epiphany. Don't tell me it is already past!

I decided to leave my angel collection on display also. They can double as cupids for Valentine's Day, don't you think? Then, I might just throw some green into the mix and pretend they are leprechauns!

About the only thing I feel inspired to do is cook. I am trying to fight that urge off. Fresh baked bread sounds good, but some of these days I believe my kitchen has been too cold to allow dough to rise.

So how do we survive until spring? Reading is a good winter pastime. I read Liza Deines' column about home economics. It made me laugh. I wonder if we had the same home ec teacher! I decided to make biscuits. I learned to make biscuits in 4-H. They always seemed to be passable at home, but just try to get a blue ribbon at the fair on cold biscuits. I don't think it can be done.

My mom dropped her biscuits directly onto the baking sheet. Of course, for the fair we rolled and cut. When I was young it seemed sloppy to make biscuits Mom's

way. Time changes everything — now it seems charming! Plus, if you add just a scant tablespoon of sugar, crumble the biscuits then top them with strawberries and cream you have your dessert all made. A true strawberry short cake! (But that is really more of a spring dish, not a winter one, ya gotta have fresh strawberries from the strawberry patch!)

I made chicken and noodles to go with my biscuits. It almost got me thawed out enough to want to put the Christmas decorations into storage!

The computer can be a good winter companion, as long as the electricity stays on. We were finally able to get high speed Internet. There was some discussion as to whether this was a necessity. But I do so enjoy sitting in front of a roaring computer screen, playing Spider Solitaire and listening to a Blue Jay sporting event. The guys who came to hook "Lightning Jack" up had never seen anyone so excited about

getting KQNK radio.

I have also been doing some counted cross stitch but all the other projects I have do not seem to interest me at all.

Pretty as the recent snow looks from my window, and happy as we are to have the moisture, it is easy to get sick of "winter." Enough, I say! Although at least now I get to wear the winter coat I bought a few years ago.

When the thaw comes, I will be more than ready to open the windows, beat the rugs, wash the curtains, scrub the floors and give the woodwork a good polish. On The Weather Channel they advise those with seasonal allergies to keep their houses shut up tight and invest in an air-conditioning system with a good filtration system. They add that a side benefit is you will not have to do "spring cleaning" ever again!

I know I'm old-fashioned but that is not the way I want to live. We usually have our worst winter weather in February and March so if we need something to hold on to until spring comes, we will just have to think of crocuses, tulips and daffodils. Think of a new Easter dress. Think of fresh strawberries from the garden. Think of spring cleaning!

No matter what The Weather Channel may think — a good spring cleaning is necessary for our houses and our hearts! I look forward to it.

Remember, Friday is 'Thumbs Up to...' column day