

Now here's a hard habit to kick

The government is trying again to get people to use coins rather than printing more dollar bills, even though the last three attempts failed miserably. The new dollar, featuring four U.S. presidents a year, is a noble effort to get people back to using coins, but probably no more popular for spending.

Americans cling to their coins, it seems, though a dollar today is worth just 15 cents in 1960 money.

Back in those days, we carried five sizes of coins in our pockets and pocket-books: pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters and half dollars. The bulky silver dollar, even then, was little used, seen mostly at race tracks, casinos and the like, but you could get them at the bank.

The mint last issued big "silver" dollars around 1970, a "sandwich" coin like the quarter containing no silver and bearing a likeness of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Those never caught on, nor did the Susan B. Anthony "silver" dollar, a smaller coin designed for vending machines a decade later.

People didn't like the Anthony coins because they looked and felt too much like a quarter, experts said. Businesses had long since converted cash drawers to just four kinds of coins and claimed they had no place to put the dollars.

Never one to stand back from a challenge, despite repeated failure, the Treasury Department came up with another attempt, the small-sized Sacagawea dollar, themed to the Lewis and Clark bicentennial and tinted gold.

Despite cash-drawer support from Wal-Mart, the results were pretty much the same. Bank vaults filled up with dollars which people wouldn't spend or carry.

This time, the mint took a hint from the wildly successful state quarter program and decided to issue a series of coins, featuring four presidents each year.

Of course, the government hopes that millions of people will collect the coins. That won't improve their circulation, but it will make money for the government — as the quarters have — as long as they can be produced for less than face value. Will Americans take to their new 15-cent coin?

You'd think so, given the low value of the dollar bill today, but history suggests otherwise.

Americans don't accept new coins or currency well. They rejected the \$2 bill when proffered as an alternative to the lowly dollar, and never have accepted dollar coins, at least not in this century.

Heck, we won't give up the little penny, now worth just .15 of a cent in 1960 money, only a little more than the "mil" tokens once given in change by some stores.

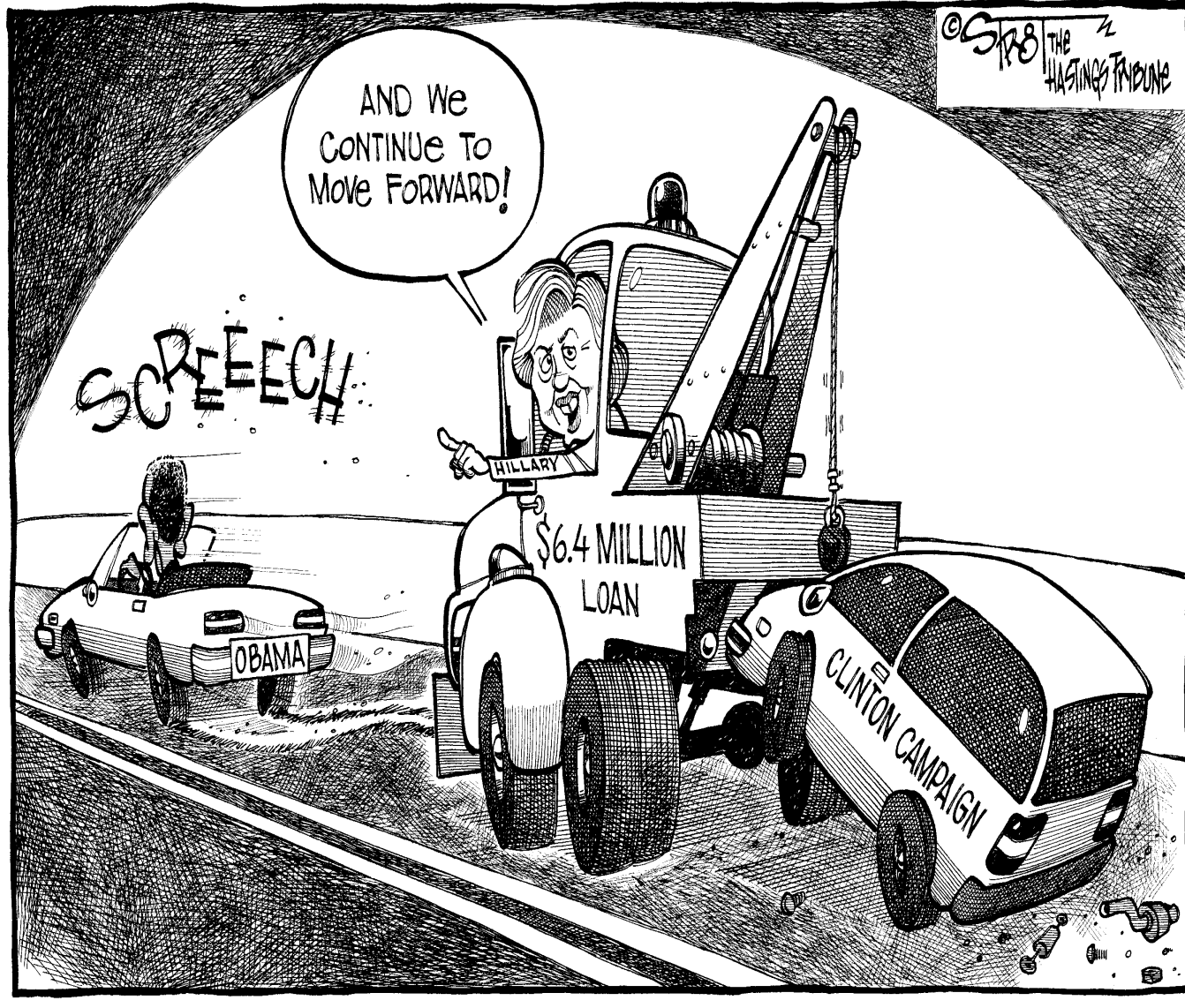
Any suggestion to get rid of pennies meets with a chorus of jeers, but they're worth so little, you wonder why we bother. People seem to think they will be cheated if transactions take place in five-cent increments. And maybe they're right.

But why should the government spend billions making such a worthless coin? And why won't we carry the convenient little dollars, worth less than the quarters many people grew up with?

Go figure. Seems like a waste of good paper printing all those \$1 bills to me, but Americans just don't seem to like change.

On the Prairie Dog

Steve Haynes



Uncle Lester was my spaghetti mentor

Uncle Lester, my mother's older brother, introduced me to spaghetti. He was quite a guy. A retired insurance salesman, he spent many of his retirement years traveling around the country visiting his five surviving brothers and sisters. He was a handy guy to have around. He helped my dad build the bathroom addition on to our old farmhouse.

In hushed tones, my mom used to say the reason he spent so much time away from his own home in Joplin, Mo., was that he "annoyed" his wife, Adah Mae. She was a little bit of a fuss-budget — and Uncle Lester was more of a free-spirit.

Back to spaghetti. I was about 15 during one of Uncle Lester's visits.

One day he announced he was going to make spaghetti for supper. He started making his sauce early in the morning. "Had to simmer all day," he said.

I imagine my mother wouldn't have considered salad, spaghetti and garlic bread a "real man's meal." She probably had a couple of steaks on stand-by, just in case she thought my dad didn't have enough to eat.

We didn't have a strainer big enough to handle the enormous pot of spaghetti

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



noodles Uncle Lester proposed to cook. So, he took a three-pound coffee can and punched holes in the bottom with an ice pick, making his own sieve.

When everything was proclaimed "ready to eat" I think the whole family attacked it with anticipation. It must have been every bit as good as I thought it would be because spaghetti is one of my favorite meals to prepare and eat.

I have to admit I don't spend the whole day simmering a sauce like Uncle Lester. Opening a jar of Ragu or Prego is acceptable to me. Oh, I'll brown some hamburger to add in, but I'm no purist.

When my girls were young, our family lived in Kansas City. Their father and I wanted to take them to an authentic Italian restaurant to sample the cuisine. Both girls ordered spaghetti but upon

tasting it, they declared, "It's not as good as yours, Mom."

My youngest daughter, almost choked to death on spaghetti when she was about two years old. She had taken a mouthful about the same time her father made her laugh and she inhaled the whole bite. Still in a high chair, her dad tried to get her out but fumbled with the mechanism. She was not able to breathe and he began pounding on her back.

Somewhere in my memory bank was the Heimlich Maneuver. I positioned myself behind her high chair, put my arms around her and gave a quick push on her little abdomen. Out popped the blockage and she started crying. From that moment on, she would not eat spaghetti unless it was cut up. In fact, she does not let her own daughter eat spaghetti unless it's cut up.

This week I heard a news story about a little girl that was choking in her school's lunchroom. One of the dietary aides came to her rescue — gave her "the hug of life" and saved her. When the news crew interviewed the little girl's friends about the episode, one said, "Suzie was choking and Mrs. Smith gave her the Heimlich Remover." Works for me.

Thumbs Up

To... **Gene Wiltfong**, on your selection as a member of the Kansas Teachers Hall of Fame. (e-mail)

To... **Doris Clydesdale**, on the occasion of your 90th birthday. (e-mail)

To... **Bryce Marble, Justin Lee, Hannah Hawks and Stanton Nelson**, on your induction into the Northern Valley National Honor Society. (e-mail)

(To submit a name of names, please e-mail tom.d@nwkansas.com, call 877-3361 or 877-6908, fax 877-3732, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654 or drop by the office. Thanks for your continuing input. -td)

Your political connection

★ **Governor Kathleen Sebelius**, 300 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-3232

★ **U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; fax (202) 224-3514

★ **U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

★ **U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; fax (202) 225-5124

★ **State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, Room 262-E, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7399

★ **State Rep. John Faber**, 181 W. Capitol Building, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7500

After earlier April visits to Aberdeen, S.D.; Junction City; and Lincoln, Neb., we went exotic and toured Baton Rouge and Lafayette, La., deep in the heart of Dixie in the latter part of the month.

I had two wishes for my visit to Louisiana: I wanted to see a swamp, hopefully with alligators, and eat red beans and rice with sausage.

Steve wanted red snapper. Aswamp tour near Baton Rouge I found online was out of the question. We only had Wednesday evening and Thursday morning and early afternoon. We had to be in Lafayette for dinner.

We used the time we had on Wednesday to find a nice restaurant that sold red snapper. It's kinda hard to find in Louisiana, where redfish is the local favorite.

We took a walk along the river dike and made plans for Thursday. It was great looking out over the Mississippi at flood stage by lamplight.

After breakfast, we walked down to the USS Kidd, a World War II destroyer tied up on the levee. This wasn't on Steve's original list, but what boy can resist a big boat?

I took a quick tour and hit the gift shop.

After the Kidd, we visited Louisiana's old statehouse. It looks like a medieval French castle with acres of stained glass — gorgeous, but more like a big court-

Open Season

Cynthia Haynes



house than a capital, and way too small for modern government. It's where colorful, controversial Huey Long presided as governor in the early 1930s before he built the new 34-story statehouse north of downtown. He later ran for the U.S. Senate and was assassinated in 1935.

Our last stop on the way out of town was the Bluebonnet Swamp, created by road building in area almost 300 years ago by German settlers. The park features a series of nature trails over boggy land and water on a series of long wooden bridges.

The first wildlife we saw, though, was from the bridge at the entryway.

I spotted a turtle on a log about 100 feet away from us. Then we saw a half dozen heads swimming towards us. As they drew closer, we could tell they were turtles with their shells underwater. I got the feeling that if we stayed, we might be mugged. They were in formation and they looked like they meant business. We moved on to the visitors center.

On the trail, we saw birds, including

some baby owls just out of the nest hole, lots of bugs and a large snake, but no more turtles or any alligators until we returned to the nature center. There, giant snakes, poisonous spiders and baby 'gators are on display. We even got to watch the handlers feed crickets to small turtles. The ones outside probably thought that we had crickets on us, too.

OK, so it was time to leave for Lafayette, about an hour away in the heart of the French-speaking Cajun country, and we had accomplished Steve's dream and half of mine.

At the Louisiana Press Convention, the reason for the trip, we got to try most of the local delicacies — crayfish, shrimp and rubber chicken (hey this was a convention, remember).

The programs ended early Friday night, so we escaped with several other convention goers to downtown and the Festival International de Louisiane, an extravaganza of food, music and arts. We listened to bands on four stages — they had acts in French and English, from as far away as Paris and Quebec — and bought a few small souvenirs and I got my red beans and rice with sausage and chicken. Steve had fried shrimp, but was tempted by the fried alligator chunks.

We left Louisiana on Saturday feeling like we had touched and tasted the state without ever going near New Orleans. And I still hadn't seen my alligator.