

### Deciding in which party my loyalty lies

When I left my place of birth, Kansas, nearly nine months ago, I brought all of my baggage with me to Colorado, even one piece I've thought of tossing out because there seemed to be no further need for it. Well, I never got around to trashing it and I'm glad now that I still have it.

So, what's so special about that piece of luggage? It's full of paperwork that traces my years of political interest, telling the struggles I had with party loyalty, or lack thereof. For a very long time I was a registered Democrat. Yea, I know, a Democrat in Kansas? I always said that Kansas raises two things very well: wheat and Republicans!

I was sort of active as a donkey jockey, thanks to my oldest brother, the late Norbert R. Dreiling, who was chairman of the Kansas Democratic Party for many years, actively involved in the successful presidential bid of John F. Kennedy, a delegate to many Democratic national conventions and he spearheaded the successful election of Robert Docking to the governorship for four consecutive two-year terms. That was a first for the Sunflower State.

I continued my loyalty to the Democratic machine until the early 1970s when South Dakota Senator George McGovern was tagged to be the party's presidential nominee. My young political mind told me he didn't have what it takes to sit in the oval office. Apparently my mind was right, he lost. And the shambles the party seemed to be in was also of great concern. If memory serves me correctly Mr. McGovern delivered his acceptance speech when nobody was awake, I think it was like 2 a.m. Needless to say that was the first time in my life I voted Republican. I was one restless young man, and what's more I had to confront my wife Jeannie who was Democrat from head to toe. "You voted what?" she screamed. A few nights on the couch in the front room was enough; I apologized.

From that time on, my voting pattern showed the political uncertainty I was fighting. I traded off voting Democrat sometimes and Republican at other times. All the while I remained in the Democratic ranks. It was in the mid-'90s that I decided to put an end to this nagging "what to do" problem: I registered as an Independent; no guilt over whatever I did in the voting booth.

Now that I am settled here in Aurora, Colo., and my intentions are to call this home going forward, I again struggle. Will I register as a Democrat or as a Republican? Before I go any further into that I need to explain my background. My mother and father were Democrats. Dad more active than mother, he held a couple of elected offices as Ellis County Clerk and as Hays City Commissioner, allowing him to serve terms as mayor. They had nine children and we were raised Democrats - period! Mother spent her time, besides being a noted seamstress throughout the area, teaching us Democratic cheers! "Give me a D, give me an E, give me an M, give me an O, give me a C, give me an R, give me an A, give me a T. What does it spell?" We would just look at one another. (Family should enjoy that little note.)

Ellis County, back then, was one of just a few counties in Kansas to enjoy a Democrat majority. We lived and breathed Democrat in our household. But as time went on we siblings began peeling off the family's political landscape. We moved to different states, for most part, to begin our new lives. Who would have ever thought Rich and Mollie Dreiling would have a child or two or maybe three that were no longer Democrats. Heaven forbid! That was worse than getting caught peeking under the carnival tent when we were kids to watch the girlies do their thing. Yikes! But today our parents are gone as are three of our siblings. So, of the six remaining, two are Republicans and three -- and that's in question at this time -- are Democrats. I am currently still the Independent.

We all graduated from either St. Joseph's Military Academy or Girls Catholic High School, now the combined names of Thomas More Prep-Marian. Only one sibling remains in Hays, Dolores (Tootsie) Schlyer; Don lives in Overland Park; Dean lives in Corpus Christi, Texas; Gene lives in Tulsa, Okla.; JoAnn Jayjack lives in Schererville, Ind.; and I now live in Aurora, Colo. Everybody is retired.

With the presidential election beginning to pick up a little steam, I have decided that I need to get back under a political tent and maybe become a little bit active. Active? Me with a cane, bad eyes, hearing aids, diabetes, neuropathy of both feet, unable to drive? I sound like I'd be more suited as a mannequin for a mortuary.

I still have a little bit of time to secure the necessary forms to make me once again a proud member of a political party. The deliberation is underway. I'll be glad when the decision is made, the paperwork filed and I can say, "Give me an....?"

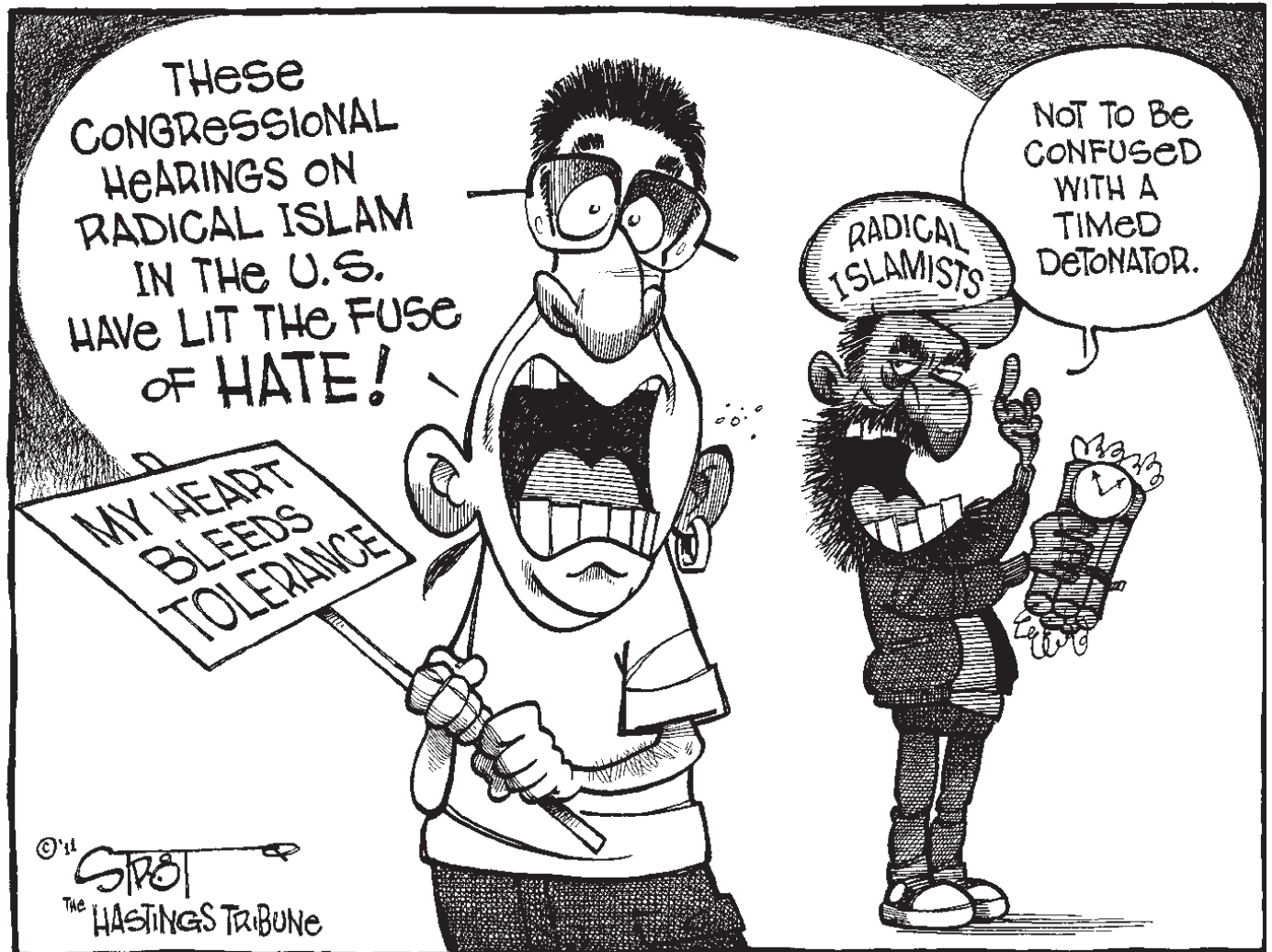
I am amazed at the names of potential Republican presidential candidates arriving in my e-mail each day. The number is now standing at 20. A few familiar names are no where to be found, but a couple of "who are they?" surfaced. For those of you in the reading audience that haven't taken part in the poll, please do. Simply e-mail me who you would like to see get the nomination. That's it, all that simple. Then e-mail me at <mailto:milehitom@hotmail.com>milehitom@hotmail.com

I didn't watch Chris Matthews' documentary on Bill Clinton "President of the World." That would mean Clinton is again president of the USA. I betcha if Monica Lewinsky watched it, she dashed out to buy a pair of the fastest running shoes she could find on the market - this time to get away! Hold your fire, just an honest observation.

I will have the straw poll numbers in my next column, as well as more comments from you readers.

Tom Dreiling is a retired journalist, now living in Aurora, Colo. He edited and published newspapers in Kansas and Wyoming during his 44-year career.

Stop  
Look  
Listen  
Tom Dreiling



### From Kansas to Mexico and back

By the time you read this we will have been in Mexico, built a house and be on the way home. If the Lord's willin' and the creek don't rise.

My oldest daughter's parting words before we left Dallas were, "Mom...DO NOT talk to anyone with a machete or a machine gun. Turn and walk the other way. Promise me."

Yes, yes, I promise. Unless, of course, the person with the gun knows where to buy the Red Rooster brand of Mexican vanilla. I have orders for several bottles and I don't dare come home without at least two cases. I've tried other brands before and the Red Rooster is, by far, the best. Machine gun or not...I'm gettin' it. Step away from the vanilla and no one will get hurt.

-ob-

We left Kansas inches ahead of a blizzard last week. By the time we reached Dallas we had to turn on the van's air con-

Out Back  
Carolyn Plotts



ditioner. Feeling smug, we called friends back home to "rub it in" about how we had eaten breakfast on the veranda and were basking in the sunshine. Our friends informed us we had nothing on them: the snow was melted and it was 60 degrees. And, I had such hopes of actually missing some of winter's wrath.

-ob-

It's been such a whirlwind pace since we left on this mission trip that building the house in Mexico might actually be a chance to rest up before we run a repeat

performance on the road home. When we're with our kids we stay up too late; eat too much; and shop more than we should. But, of course, we wouldn't trade it for anything.

Our high school age granddaughters are both focusing on medical careers; one as a registered nurse, the other a forensic pathologist. Our sixth-grader has chosen her classes for next year; our oldest granddaughter, is already in nursing school; and the four-year old just wants us to watch her jump on the trampoline.

Our little great-grandson is eight months old and trying to get up the nerve to take a step. He pulls himself up but, when he lets go he "fall down go boom". All too soon, he will be toddling, then walking, then running, then there will be no stopping him.

### Fire is very essential to our ecosystem

Insight

John Schlageck

Every spring, this ritual continues. Viewed up close or at a distance, prairie fires are riveting. Across the vast, open grasslands we call the Flint Hills, fires can be seen for miles. The flames lick at the blue Kansas sky as the brown, dry grass crackles, cracks and bursts into orange.

But these fires aren't recent phenomena and they aren't strictly for the viewing pleasure of those traveling up and down our highways. Long before civilization invaded the prairie, fires were ignited by lightning storms and the prairie was charred to restore the health of the native grasses.

Native Americans were the first practitioners of prescribed fires. They used the fire to attract the buffalo for easier hunting.

The artificially ignited controlled burning of the tall-grass prairie in east-central Kansas is an annual event designed to mimic nature's match. It has become a tradition, part of the culture of the communities and the people who inhabit this region of our state.

Fire is an essential element of the ecosystem. Burning these pastures is one of the best management tools for maintaining the native prairie.

This annual pasture burning only occurs for a few days each year. It is not a procedure that is drawn out and lasts for weeks. However, weather conditions dictate the length of the burning seasons most years.

Not every cattleman burns his pastures each and every year as is sometimes portrayed. Instead, individual ranchers and landowners survey and decide each spring, which pastures will benefit

and produce a healthier, lush grass for livestock after burning occurs. Often neighbors plan and burn together, giving them more hands to ensure a safe, controlled burn.

"Forage quality and ecosystem health are both dependent on fire," says Steve Swaffar, Kansas Farm Bureau Natural Resources Division. "Without fire we have woodlands in the Flint Hills and the livestock industry loses a fantastic resource."

Spring burning is one of the easiest and most effective methods of controlling the eastern red cedar.

"There's nothing better for the control and eradication of this extremely invasive tree than to run a fire through the grassland every two or three years," he says.

Kansas State University experts recommend burning take place when wind speeds are between 5 and 15 miles per hour, relative humidity is from 40 to 70 percent and temperatures fall in the range of 55 to 80 degrees.

Landowners in all counties must have notification requirements to local officials prior to planned, controlled burns. This notification is a key to preventing prescribed fires turning into accidental wildfires and ensuring burning is allowed under the existing conditions.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) recently completed the Kansas Flint Hills Smoke

management plan. This plan is intended to help alleviate air quality issues in urban areas generated by prescribed burning in the Flint Hills region. Coupled with the associated web tools, it should give producers better decision-making abilities when planning and implementing prescribed fires.

Producers can now assess how the smoke from their burns may impact urban areas downwind, Swaffar says. This kind of information can make a difference in keeping ozone within acceptable levels and keeping regulatory restrictions from impacting ranchers. This new website is <http://www.ksfire.org/>www.ksfire.org.

The real crux of this plan is that actions to control smoke in the Flint Hills ranching community remain primarily voluntary. Copies of the plan can be found on Kansas Farm Bureau's website, <http://www.kfb.org/>www.kfb.org.

The farm and ranch community is tuned into ever changing weather conditions and will continue to keep prescribed fire in the tall grass prairies confined to a minimum time period. This process is part of the culture of the rural communities that dot the Flint Hills region.

Prairie fires help Mother Nature rejuvenate the grasses that carpet her fertile hills. That means good things for cattle-men, for agriculture, for rural communities and the Kansas economy.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

### Your political connection

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★ U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. roberts.senate.gov/public/ (202) 224-4774

★ U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, Russell Senate Office Building Room C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002. moran.senate.gov/public/ (202) 224-6521

★ State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Room 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612. ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us (785)

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★ U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. huelskamp.house.gov (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

★ State Rep. Rick Billinger, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka, Kan. 66612 rick.billinger@house.ks.gov (785) 296-7659

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