



Most of the voters work; cannot attend meetings

One of the strongest traditions in American government is the daytime county commission meeting.

No one seems to know why, but custom has a life of its own despite the fact that most voters have to work and can't take time to attend these important public meetings.

Across most of the country, commissioners meet during the day to talk with department heads, decide public business and hear requests from taxpayers. Nearly all these meetings start in the morning, and in some counties, they last all day. In a few, the commissioners meet more than one day a week.

Compare that to city councils and school board, both of which normally meet at night, doing what a county commission does in several days in just one or two sessions a month.

There are other differences. County commissioners usually are paid for their services and expected to put in more time than members of city and school boards. Few counties have a paid manager, while most cities and nearly all school districts have one.

Daytime meetings not only exclude voters interested in attending, they also keep many people from running for commissioner, since the daytime commitment conflicts with most work schedules.

Other than "we've always done it that way," is there any reason to perpetuate this system?

Or would taxpayers be better served by having county meetings in the evening, when more people could attend?

A small but growing movement is pushing counties to larger boards — three is the traditional number — night meetings and more professional administrators. Most change has come in larger counties, but everyone

might benefit from some change.

Why have meetings during the day?

For one thing, it's easier for county employees and department heads to attend during working hours, when they are on the clock. School and city employees have to attend night board meetings, however, and county workers could do the same.

County commissioners, as paid officials of the county, usually have more administrative responsibilities than city or school boards, it's true, but counties could have paid administrators. Many do already.

Some people commissioners meet with — salesmen and dealers, state officials, business people — might prefer daytime meetings. The same people, if they want to do business with the school district, will show up for an evening board meeting, however.

Against that possible advantage — and a century of tradition — put the fact that the taxpayers and voters — the people who hire commissioners and pay the bills — usually find it a lot easier to attend night meetings.

Spectators, while common at city and school meetings, are rare at county sessions. Commissioners work through their agenda mostly with county department heads and sometimes a reporter in attendance.

The cause of democracy might just be served by changing the county schedule, but we won't know until more counties try night meetings.

It's not that a lot of people would attend — people avoid government meetings like the plague unless they're upset — but then they could when something comes up they care about.

That's the advantage. The reason not to change is harder to see.

— Steve Haynes



Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



By Casey McCormick

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Happy President's Day!

I know I'm a couple days late, it being last Monday. But in case you didn't get the day off or didn't notice it, the holiday deserves a moment of thought.

Next year we will have a new Commander and Chief to add to the list of 43 past Presidents of the United States. Although our nation is still fairly young, by world his-

tory standards, the president holds a special office in our country.

George Washington set the bar high. He was both an outstanding military leader as well as a good choice for the first president. Our new experiment needed something different from a king, yet with the dignity and power necessary for the highest office of a democracy.

Over the years there have been other men who have done exceptional jobs in directing America. There have been others who either fell short or did not have a chance to meet their potential. With time, history defines what a president's lasting mark will be.

How would history have remembered William Henry Har-

ison, of Tippacanoe fame, if he hadn't contracted pneumonia and died a little over a month in office? What would have been the legacies of Garfield and Kennedy if they had not fell to assassins?

At first look, the field of candidates running for president may not inspire reflections of becoming the next Lincoln or Jefferson. Perhaps the next Madison or Reagan. Or maybe the next Roosevelt, take your pick.

But then that will be history's job to record their story for the ages.

Bad food — Why are we surprised?

We have the food system we asked for. There is a reason a burger at McDonald's sells for a buck. There is a reason the food is of such poor quality in places where healthy nutrition is most important: our schools, our hospitals and our nursing home facilities.

What we support prospers, what we feed grows.

If we support Wal-Mart, Wal-Mart will prosper.

If we demand \$1 burgers at McDonald's and surplus food donated from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in our schools, the cheap, imported, www.hsus.org/farm/news/ournews/undercover_investigation.html worm-out-cow meat business will grow.

When we demand cheap food, should we be surprised when our food is cheap? Should we be surprised when our food isn't healthy or shocked when we see animals being treated inhumanely or wonder why worm-out, close-to-death "downer" cows are being ground into our food supply?

We are getting exactly what we have asked for: fast and cheap stuff that hardly resembles food; garbage that, if tested, would often qualify as inedible and dangerous waste. This gut fill is so low in nutritional value, so high in harmful and unhealthy chemicals, and has been consumed by us for so long, that we are suffering from unprecedented levels of degenerative disease resulting in skyrocketing health care costs.

We have said goodbye and too bad to our local farmers and livestock producers, our local bakers, butchers, and corner food stores. And then we act shocked and surprised when someone discovers that when these vital businesses are moved out of our sight, out of our communities, out of our states, and out of our country, that bad things are happening. Weren't you surprised at how many kids across the nation one cow slaughter plant was

feeding? Didn't you wonder last summer how one spinach processor in California could make people sick in www.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2007-09-20-spinach-main_N.htm 26 states?

In this highly touted new global economy where big food companies dominate, searching the globe for the cheapest raw food materials in the most desperate, impoverished and hopeless places on earth, should we be surprised when someone with a camera shows us what we should have already known or suspected? How do we expect any reputable company to compete in a world of cut-throat unfair competition?

At the request by big food companies to self-inspect, we have allowed USDA to be removed from meat inspection, trusting that these companies will keep our food clean and safe. Inspection personnel have been reduced to paper shufflers. They have been spread so thin that they are seldom at our meat processing facilities. Without this oversight, should we really expect companies pressured with demands for unreasonable profits or smaller companies being crushed by unfair competition, to not cut corners? Most companies don't specifically tell their people to lie, cheat and steal, they just demand they make a profit — or else.

Monsanto BGH-treated, worm-out dairy cows are not just in California. The last precious drop of milk is being squeezed out of tired cows everywhere. The abusive market power of the large milk processors is driving dairies to extremes to survive. Highly stressed processing workers, lacking a living wage and essential health care, are treated like the animals in our industrial food system. Of course, they are continually asked to do more for less; they are at

their physical and mental limits, worrying about themselves and their families probably hundreds of miles away in Mexico or perhaps more distant. They are being severely abused and mistreated, and when used up, discarded like another piece of trash.

What is a farmer or a company to do when what they produce isn't cheap enough for the Wall Street-based, greed-driven food companies? They certainly can't sell locally. There are no marketing paths to the consumer left free of dangerous market predators.

We have learned to bargain shop, proud of finding the cheapest of everything; we drive the system of everyday low prices. We celebrate the \$1 price tag. And now we are upset when we find out what our children are eating at school? Fortunately, we are starting to become worried about our children's learning disabilities, their obesity, their high blood pressure, their heart disease, and their cancer, and whether we will have grandchildren.

For too long we have looked the other way at how cheaply things are produced. But, didn't we really know or at least wonder how it was possible for stuff to be so cheap and corporate profits so high? If only we could feel, or somehow sense and experience, the human, animal and environmental suffering that goes into our demand for cheapness, maybe we would act differently.

What has resulted from our dependence on imported oil? As with foreign oil, we are becoming more and more dependent on foreign food. From farmers and ranchers to packers and processors, our domestic food system infrastructure is collapsing. We are now a net importer of food. Today, foreign companies are buying our biggest food processors at deeply discounted prices. We import approximately 20 percent of

the beef we consume. Wouldn't our country be better served by producing and processing our own food as locally as possible?

If we want a healthy, safe and dependable food system in this country, we better wake up now. We have to demand it — and also support it. Let's bring our farmers, butchers, and bakers back to our communities where we can enjoy food that tastes good and is nutritionally satisfying. We then have the option to stop by and see for ourselves how they and the animals are doing.

Mike Callicrate
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Editor's note: Mike Callicrate is an independent cattle producer, business entrepreneur and political activist, particularly outspoken in addressing the rural and social impacts of current economic trends.

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