

President may be down but who do we vote for?

The president seems to be down and nearly out, as much of a one-hit wonder as Jimmy Carter three decades ago or George H.W. Bush in the '90s.

But can the Republicans nominate a candidate who will unite the nation and attract enough support from independent voters – who hold the balance in any national election – to make a change in Washington?

And then, with majorities in both houses of Congress and a new person (man or woman) in the White House, can the GOP lead the nation to solving some of our most pressing problems?

All that remains to be seen. In politics as in weather, things can change overnight.

The president clearly is in danger. No one has been re-elected to his office with unemployment over 7 percent since the Great Depression. His administration seems to have stalled and even his vaunted health-care plan seems to be on the rocks.

Republicans don't like his policies, and Democrats increasingly seem to think he's strayed from the true course of liberalism.

Yet all that amounts to just wishful thinking if the opposition can't rally around an electable candidate. And remember, it's not the party hard-core or the "tea party" on the far right that will make the decision. It's those Americans in the vast middle who swing one way or another.

The same people opted for change four years ago and voted for Mr. Obama as George W. Bush wound up a tumultuous eight years.

Hardly anyone wanted more of the same.

Now, the economy is in tatters, worse possibly than when the president took office. The "recovery" is as slow as the recession was deep. Unemployment remains above 9 percent. Business coughs and sputters as it tries to get geared up. And after four years, it's hard to keep "blaming Bush."

Then, one of the big credit-rating agencies downgrades the government's standing, something that's never happened. The stock market behaves like a yo-yo, and people are scared.

And scared people don't invest. They don't create jobs and they don't spend money.

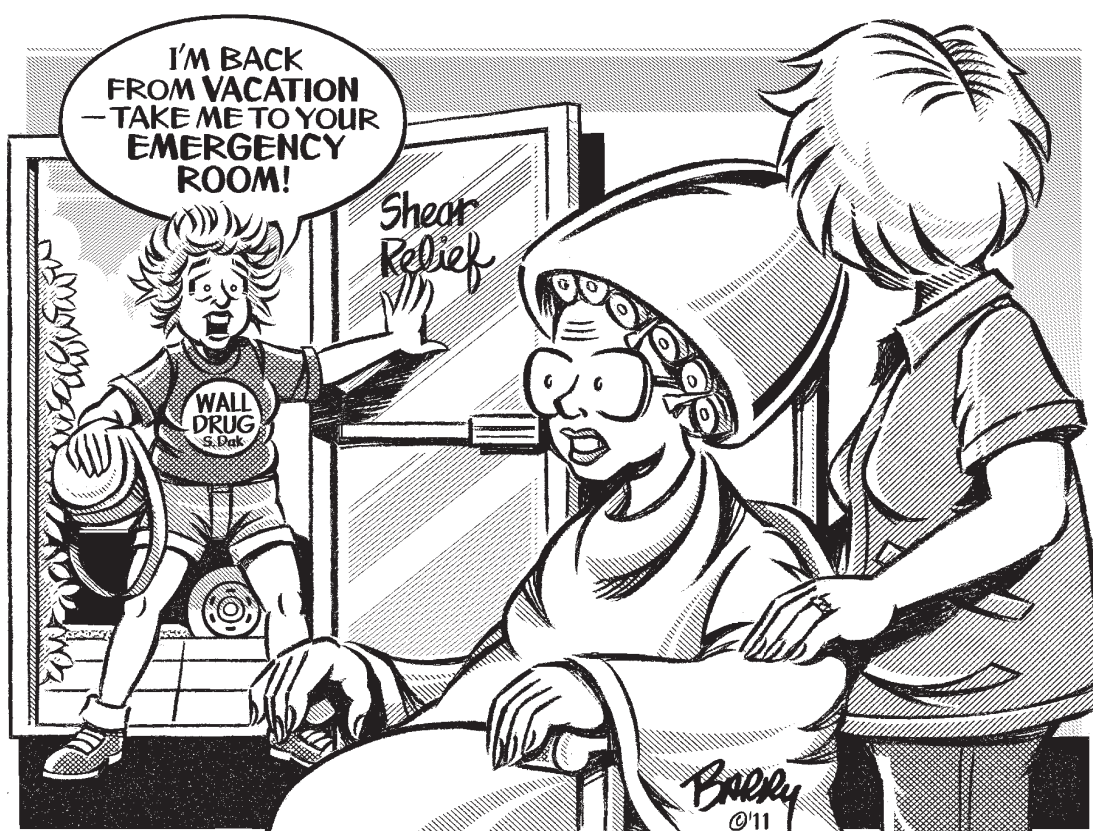
By all rights, Mr. Obama should be done.

But so far, the GOP has no one who can stand up and lead the party to victory. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney comes off as competent but uninspiring. Tea party favorite Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota, like her backers, may be too strident to attract independents. And former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin seems to wander without purpose.

It's not that the tea party is wrong, by the way. We owe the movement a great debt for focusing debate on the federal deficit and the national debt. But the voters who swing elections are not that devoted to principle.

What the Republicans need is a leader, a problem solver, someone the nation can believe in, yes, but someone who can knock heads and get things done, dealing with both sides of the aisle.

And so far, we haven't seen him – or her – on the campaign trail. — Steve Haynes



Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



mccormickcasey@rocketmail.com

Have you been to a point in life when you've fallen and can't get up? Actually, it may feel that way, but from somewhere comes a will and fortitude to rise up and continue in the game of life.

It's that sort of will and fortitude I want to discuss.

Our nephew, Tyler Larson, is no longer a Marine recruit. Last week he graduated from boot camp in San Diego, Calif.

But it was not an easy road for this young man and his fellow "leather neck" wanna-bes.

At one point in his training his group had to make a long march in the Southern California heat of the day. Unfortunately Tyler wasn't hydrated enough and he succumbed to the conditions. But, despite a temperature of 104 degrees, he tried several times to finish the march. He finally obeyed an order to stay put.

As his head drill sergeant saw him loaded on a vehicle going back he told Tyler he was impressed with his persistence. Several other recruits quit who were

not suffering from heat stroke.

So hats off to Tyler for finding what it took to become a Marine. He joins the ranks of the other Americans who have been able to put their country before an easier way of life. Because of people like him, the United States might go down a little bit from time to time, however we will be back in the fight.

Across the County

Stressed Lawns May Be Going Dormant ... or Dying

By Marty Fear



If central U.S. lawns are looking faded or patchy and increasingly wheat-colored, that's because most area homeowners grow cool-season turfs – tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass. Unless irrigated regularly, those turfs normally go dormant in summer.

But, July's weather has been so extreme that even some well-watered lawns are now slipping into dormancy, said Rodney St. John, K-State Research and Extension turfgrass specialist.

"Lawn management needs to be in survival mode, not problem-fixing mode. Excess thatch or compacted soil may be making the situation worse, but it can wait until fall. Right now, we need to concentrate on keeping grass alive," he said. "What that means in terms of watering, however, depends on how ready the turf was for little to no rain and triple-digit heat."

This is the second year in a row Kansas lawns have faced a stressful summer, he said. Ironically, the stress has been hardest on lawns that homeowners babied through spring.

"If your lawn is strong and healthy when it enters dormancy, you can quit watering the weeds. That kind of turf can go up to a month between waterings and still keep its crowns alive," Mr. St. John explained. "But, if you or the weather watered the lawn incorrectly through spring – too much or too often – shutting the turf off 'cold turkey' could cause damage and even plant death."

"That's what happened to many lawns last year. They had short-short roots, resulting from too-frequent spring rains. They weren't prepared for the

weather's rapid turn to high heat and drought. Their root systems couldn't supply enough water for plant growth and cooling – enough to allow the plants to enter dormancy gracefully. So, many turf plants died."

For homeowners whose lawn is suffering now, he suggests waiting about seven days after its last good drink and then irrigating.

"If the lawn still has some green then, you can continue watering, or you can ease it into dormancy – your choice," the horticulturist said. "If you decide on dormancy or your turf already looks dormant, you should extend the interval between waterings several days at a time until you're on a two-week schedule. Your lawn probably won't be tough enough to go any longer than that this year."

In general, he said, the rule of thumb for lawns in Kansas is to ensure they get an inch of water per week. But, that rule varies in line with weather extremes.

"Given this July's weather in most of the state, maintaining a green lawn and preventing dormancy required applying about an inch of water every three to four days," St. John said. "In contrast, when the weather cools

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in fall, that rate will decrease, eventually reaching an inch every couple of weeks."

Be slow to mow in hot weather

Mowing during extremely hot weather adds to lawns' stress, said Mr. St. John.

"When it's as hot as the weather has been this July, mowing will even stress out warm-season turfs, such as bermuda, zoysia and buffalo grass. But, their stress isn't nearly as severe as what happens to cool-season grasses," he said. "Fortunately, grass blades don't elongate much in hot weather, so you may be able to put off mowing until the temperature cools a bit – preferably into the lower 90s or upper 80s."

When homeowners do mow, they should set their mower at the high end of their turf's recommended cutting-height range, the horticulturist added. For warm season turfs, that height is about 2 inches. For cool-season grasses, it's 3.75 to 4 inches tall.

Contact the Cheyenne County Extension office at 332-3171 or cfear@ksu.edu with questions or comments. Until next week - Marty

GOD SAYS
Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse them not.
Romans 12:17

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STAFF

Karen Krien Editor/Publisher
Betty Winston Sports Editor
Tim Burr Advertising Manager
Lezlie McCormick Production Manager
Margaret Bucholtz Columnist

The Gardener

Kay Melia

vkmelia@yahoo.com

The long awaited tomato harvest season is finally here, at least a week later than normal it seems. But who in the world is counting weeks? When the fresh garden tomato harvest begins, we count hours and minutes until we pick that first beautiful fruit!

No question about it, the tomato harvest is the most welcomed harvest of them all, cantaloupe notwithstanding, and we are finally being rewarded with Mother Nature's true delicacy. And we must enjoy the bounty quickly, because the first frost of the season is barely 60 days away.

While most gardeners are enjoying our first fruit of the season, many of us who plant or transplant some of the early varieties have been picking for a week or so longer. The earliest varieties are usually producing in about 65 days, but the actual "first picking" date in Northwest Kansas is probably closer to 75 days. That's another reason most of us refuse to plant the old heirloom varieties because it takes at least 85 days

for harvest to begin.

As usual this year, I'm hearing a few bad stories about the tomato blights, just like I do every year about this time. The dreaded early blight or the equally fierce late blight seem to take their toll every summer, and there just isn't much we can do about it.

You'll recognize it of course when the plant is stunted, and the leaves turn an ugly brownish gray. I pulled my first blighted plant on Aug. 3, and there may be others before the season is over.

A friend of mine has now lost eight of the 12 tomato plants in his garden, several as early as a month ago. To say that it is discouraging is an understatement.

The blights don't seem to choose certain varieties; all are fair game. Despite the efforts of the world's most dedicated horticulturists, very little progress has been made to stamp out tomato blight.

Until now. Please welcome Dr. Randy Gardner, a botanist from North Carolina State University, who has released a new tomato hybrid called Mountain Magic. This small 2-ounce tomato is the result

of crossing a full-size tomato, with early and late blight resistance, with a grape tomato, with early blight resistance. Mountain Magic is said to be highly flavorful, highly productive, and with good combined resistance to both early and late blight! It marks the first blight breakthrough, ever!

Strangely enough, Mountain Magic seed was available in several mail-order garden catalogs this year, but I sure missed it. Dr. Gardner (that's his real name) has actually developed all the other "Mountain" named tomato varieties, including Mountain Fresh, Mountain Glory, and several others. As noted the fruit is small, but larger than most of the cherry varieties, including 4th of July.

My guess is that we will now soon see a full-sized tomato with good blight resistance. Dr. Gardner retired last spring, but continues to work privately to find greater blight resistance to everyone's favorite garden crop. Let's all put our hands together loudly for Dr. Randy Gardner, a true American hero!

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