



Free Press  
Viewpoint

Partisanship aside,  
Congress must act

Congress simply has to act this fall. Otherwise, the nation could plunge off the “fiscal cliff” created by failure of the two parties to compromise on important tax and spending issues – straight into a new recession. Each party blames the other for the chasm, but in truth, both are to blame. The Senate is so tied up in party infighting that it has not been able to pass a budget in more than three years. Neither party has the votes to push through its bill, and neither has been willing to back down. The Republican-controlled House has plenty of solutions, but the Democrats aren’t buying any of them. The betting is that the two can get together in the “Lame Duck” session after the election, when political posturing will no longer mean much, and pass some compromise bills. It’s either that, or the Bush and Obama tax cuts will expire, along with a lot of other legislation, and billions in automatic, across-the-board spending cuts will go into effect. The impact on the economy could be more than \$600 billion. Combined, experts say, that could shrink the U.S. economy by 3 percent next year, plunging the world into a new recession. U.S. unemployment could jump to 9.1 percent. That’s just what a shaky economy needs, with Europe already in crisis and the economy just plodding along. The approaching “cliff” already is making investors nervous, holding back the stock market and probably the housing industry as well, the Associated Press reports. Beyond that, investors are worried about a possible round of tax increases if the president is re-elected, which appears more and more likely. Without a deal, which could take some bloody infighting to achieve, the consequences are too great to ignore. But Wall Street observers predict that twists and turns in negotiations themselves could send the market into fits and starts, plunging and climbing on the daily news from inside the Beltway. Be that as it may, the parties know they have to come together this time. It’ll be mostly up to the Senate to come up with a compromise, then to sell it to the more conservative House. That means a lot of wrangling before the end of the year. If the markets falter, it’ll put even more pressure on the parties to get together. And that eventually should produce a recession-saving bill. Then, if Europe can keep its economy afloat, maybe we’ll see continued recovery next year – and a return of prosperity. If not, well, we don’t want to go there. Neither, we suspect, do the incumbents, who stand to lose their seats to a voter reaction that’ll make the Tea Party look like an ice cream social. We think voters are tired of posturing and delay, and they won’t be happy if it wrecks the entire economy.

— Steve Haynes

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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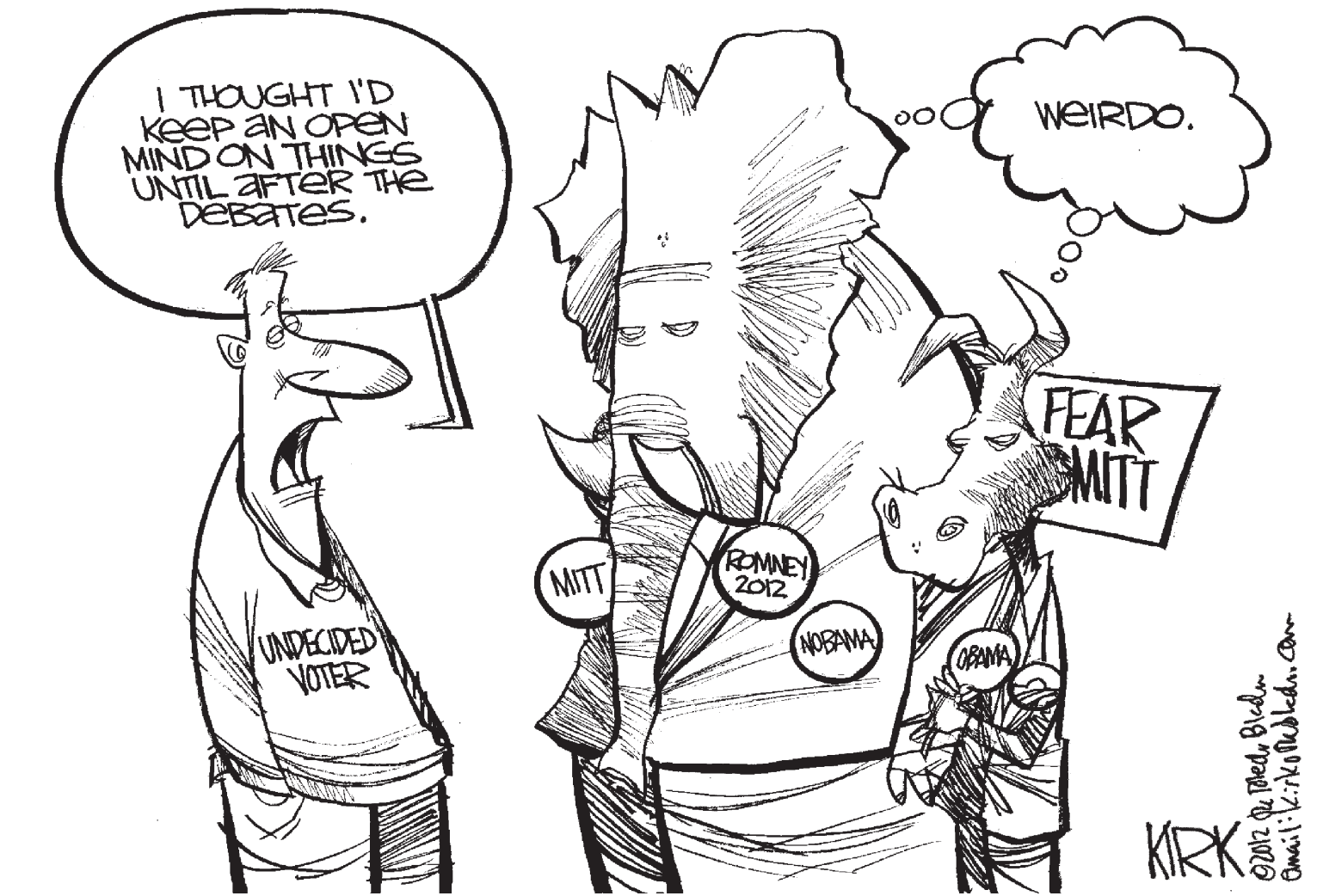
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Aging writer keeps contributing

Her hair is longer than it used to be, and the face has a few more lines, but her fingers are still on the pulse of the community, and if you want to know what’s going on, you just need to visit her neat little cabin on a side street.

Mary J., we call her. She’s one of the few Marys I know who doesn’t use a middle name.

She doesn’t get out much anymore. She’s in a wheelchair and she said she’s left her home just 10 times in the last five or six months. Each time was a doctor’s visit.

She still remembers when Steve hired her to work for the paper. That was back in the mid-1980s. She said he just hired her to do a couple of stories, and here she is, nearly 30 years later, still writing for the paper.

Steve needed someone to cover the City Council the day Mary walked into the office. They got to talking, and before she knew it, she was working for the paper.

“I thought I was retired,” she said with a twinkle in her eye.

Before coming home, she had gone to work for Walmart in southwest Missouri and won a prize for the speed at which she could run the check stand.

She said she met Sam Walton just a few days before she was to retire. She had no clue who he was when she met him in the break room. He asked her to stay on because she was such



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

a good checker, but she told him no.

She didn’t seem to be the least awed by one of the greatest businessmen in the world, but then very little awes Mary J.

After her retirement, she returned to Creede, Colo., the tiny mountain community she had adopted as her own in the 1940s, when she arrived in the middle of winter to find the snow up to her knees and the thermometer at 40 below.

Now at 89, she still writes for the paper. Not like she used to, but enough to keep her busy two or three days a week. She’s been doing a column on her memories of those days back in the ’40s, when she got off the bus and wondered why she had ever come to this cold, snowy place.

But, she told us, her store of memories – and her supply of old notebooks – is getting slim. She figures she’ll have to turn to her friends for ideas. She noted that she is one of the youngsters in the group, since Margaret is 92

and Edna and Nell both are 91.

She noted that Margaret lives just across the street now. She gets up at 8 and turns the light on and goes to bed at 10 and turns the light off. Her son comes by every day to check on her.

Mary checks on her, too. If she doesn’t see that light come on at 8 in the morning, she calls the son. Poor Margaret never gets a chance to sleep in. Mary makes sure of it. But then, a 92-year-old woman who lives alone needs more than one person to watch out for her.

We had a nice visit with Mary and we hugged her thin frame as we prepared to leave. The hospice worker saw us out. Who knows, this may be our last visit. Maybe not.

About a year and a half ago, Mary left the state veterans’ nursing home she had been moved to when she had broken both legs. She wrote that she was going home “for the duration.” She says she’s had a good life, and she’s ready to move on, to see her beloved Ed.

Now, she’s watching the birds at her feeder, checking on the neighbors and keeping her finger on the pulse of her tiny mountain town, just like she has for the last 30 years.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor’West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Veterans Affairs puts bureaucracy first

While we continue to see and hear stories about America’s veterans receiving subpar medical care, the bureaucrats charged with overseeing the health needs of our brave men and women in uniform are apparently sparing no expense in taking care of themselves instead.

As a member of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I take seriously our responsibility to provide oversight of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. So this summer when it came to light that the department spent more than \$50,000 on a video featuring a General Patton impersonator, we demanded to know more. We feared it was just the tip of the iceberg. And the tip of the iceberg it was.

Our own internal digging uncovered the first shock: at least \$2.5 million spent last year on the “National Veterans Golden Age Games” held at the luxurious Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu.

While on paper the Golden Age Games seem like a noble cause to provide senior veterans with an Olympic-style sports competition, is it really a prudent use of our taxpayer resources and theirs to have held this event at one of the top – and most expensive – vacation destinations in 2011? Nope. With so many wounded warriors and homeless veterans, was it right for Veterans Affairs to spend more than \$1 million on an event planner who works in Alaska? Of course not. Was it right to spend thousands of dollars on floral arrangements, polo shirts and a Polynesian outrigger canoe exhibition? Doubt it.

How can these bureaucrats look our veterans in the eye with straight faces when they are swiping the taxpayers’ credit card like there is no tomorrow?

No doubt the cost of airfare and lodging was cost-prohibitive for many veterans who in the past traveled to centrally-located places like Leavenworth in 1997, Topeka in 2000, Des



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

Moines in 2010, or St. Louis this summer. But, of course it was not cost-prohibitive for Veterans Affairs to send 178 employees. The taxpayers picked up the tab for them. Sounds like a nice work trip, right?

In the meantime, we filed a congressional inquiry with the department to get more information about the conferences. And then we waited. And waited. A few weeks later, the department’s chief financial officer testified before our committee and ultimately admitted that in 2011 Veterans Affairs spent \$100 million hard-earned taxpayer dollars on conferences – including \$80 million just for bureaucrat travel alone.

Finally, nearly a month after our initial request, the department delivered a list of its 2011 conferences including details about the numbers of participants, the purported reasons for the conferences and the admitted costs.

According to these data, the department held 373 conferences in 2011 with a total cost of \$67 million. Top destinations included Texas, Nevada (Las Vegas), and Florida. About one-third of the total amount spent on conferences was spent in one of these states.

But also, perhaps even more shocking (but not surprising with this administration) was that about \$5 million was spent on training unions on how to comply with the labor agreement they reached with the department. As part of the labor contract, the taxpayer-funded department is required to pay for workers to learn more about the labor agreement. Who

would have thought that these 25 five-day conferences would be held in such fun destinations as Atlantic City, Las Vegas, Nashville and San Juan, Puerto Rico?

As if it were not enough that the department continues operations like this when our veterans are suffering, they are doing so amid Obama’s trillion-dollar plus annual deficits and a massive \$16 trillion in debt. When American businesses were forced to tighten their belts, many did away with conferences and expensive travel for their employees. Washington, on the other hand, just kept spending – even when America’s brave veterans should have been the higher, and certainly nobler, priority.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp, a Fowler Republican, represents the 1st District of Kansas. He serves on the House Agriculture, Budget, and Veterans’ Affairs committees.



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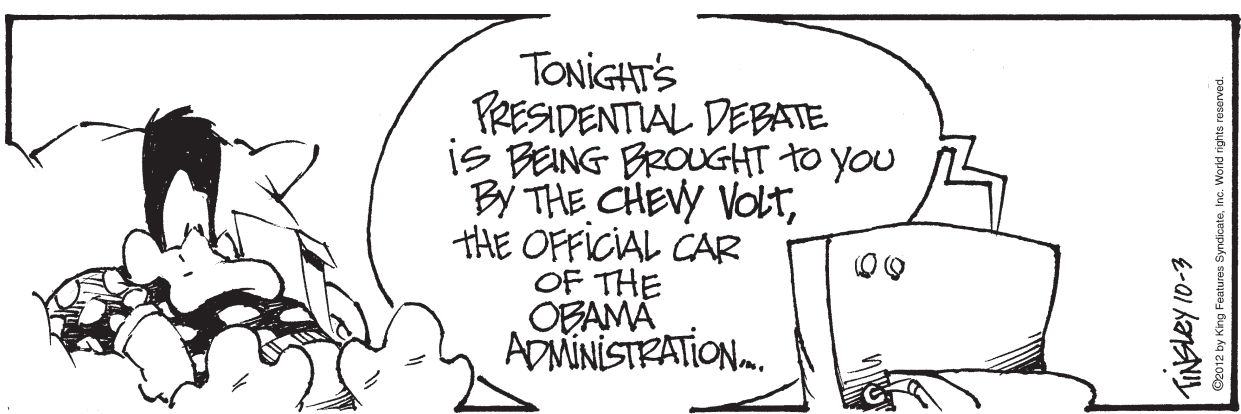
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