

commentary

from our viewpoint...

City, county going in circles on trash

The decision last week by the Sherman County commissioners to propose that the city keep the trash collection system and the county pick up the tab for sorting seems to be a simple answer, but it remains to be seen if the city will consider it a real solution.

To some who had proposed the county take over the whole collection system the new alternative is something of a step back. One of the main arguments for having the county run the whole system was that a single person would be in charge of all of the different pieces and could handle the problems that now days are tossed from one person to another.

At the public forum City Commisioner Curtis Hurd made the suggestion the county pay for the sorting and the city keep the trash collection. At the time it seemed to be too simple to work, and it was not something the other city commissioners would consider.

Several of those in the audience said they wanted to see the county take over the trash collection system, and did not feel the city should consider any other option. The city is expected to hear a proposal Monday from U.S. Waste Industries of Colorado Springs.

For those who attended the public forum and have been at the county commission meetings the bottom line is not having the trash taken out of the county system. They see the county running the whole thing as the best answer. The feel that having the county take over would keep the costs lower than an outisde contractor.

It has been nearly a year since the county opened the new landfill and began burying the trash rather than hauling it to Garden City.

Before the county commissoiners approved opening the new landfill they considered the costs and weighed the alternatives. Their decision was to dig the hole southwest of Goodland as the best longterm answer for the citizens of Sherman County.

Then questions began springing up about what could and could not be put in the city dumpsters with the regulations for the new landfill. Many citizens resisted any change.

The regulations for a small arid landfill are what the Sherman County facility is licensed by the state. And facing contamination problems at the old city landfill the commissioners were taking every precaution possible to ensure it did not face them at the new landfill.

As part of the program the city and county joined the recycling effort through the East Central Recycling program from Colorado. In the first year the citizens of Sherman County deposited 1,335 tons of recyclable materials in the special containers. About 980 tons of what was collected was paper, and because of that the number of paper containers has been increased to three at each site.

The people from the Colorado group said that in the East Central area which includes Burlington, Limon and the cities between, Goodland has become the largest recycler.

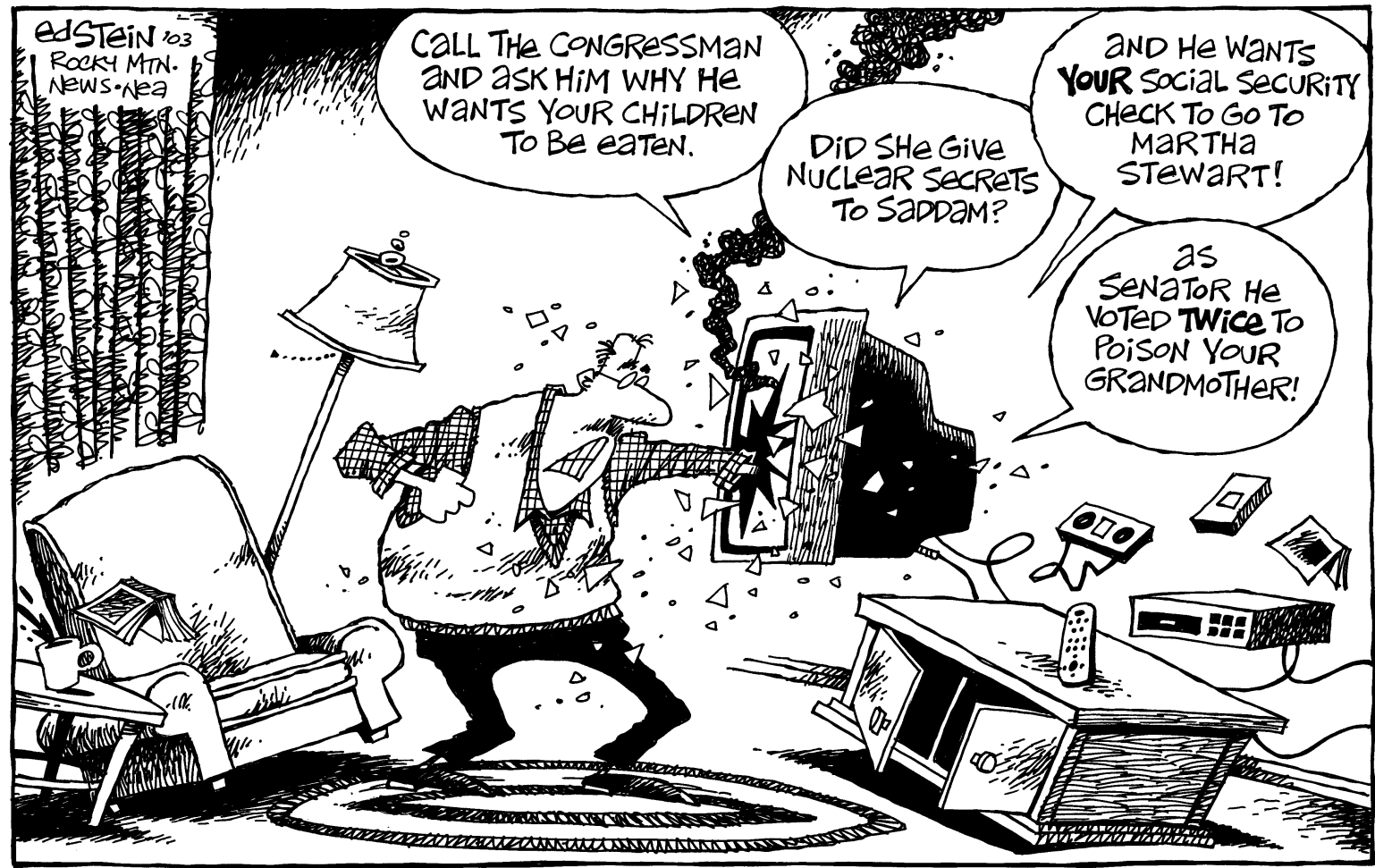
The county has established a household hazardous waste program and held the first collection in September. That was very successful, and the next collection is scheduled for April 12.

The commissioners want to get cardboard out of the system because it is about 40 percent of what ends up in the landfill. The county was looking at a bailer system last year, but stopped discussions when the city voted to contract out the collection. The bailer would extend the life of the landfill and handle the cardboard.

The city and county can work together to improve the system, but no matter what they come up with the people who throw the trash away are where the recycling and the contamination begins.

The city has a decision to make, and there are a number of alternatives for them to consider. After the U.S. Waste Industries presentation Monday we hope they take the time to review each one.

We are all citizens of Sherman County, and the best decision is one that is best for all the citizens. It is time to make a decision and move on to other issues that face the city and county. — *Tom Betz*



TOUCH-SCREEN VOTING

A real reality television series

CBS is planning a new reality series called “The Real Beverly Hillbillies.” It would move a poor, rural family into a Beverly Hills mansion and broadcast their fascination with garage-door openers and TiVo. The neighbors no doubt will be depicted as snooty and thoroughly appalled — otherwise where’s the fun?

In real life, of course, the affluent neighbors would wave enthusiastically from their driveways and mention their work with Habitat for Humanity while their lawyer scours the municipal code for evictable violations.

Reality television series are wildly popular, and the reason is simple: They bear no resemblance to real life. We know it’s not real when, in “Joe Millionaire,” 20 women gathered under one roof are duped for weeks by a \$19,000-a-year construction worker masquerading as a multimillionaire.

In real life, with a real group of single women, the guy would be unmasked and dismissed before the second round of cocktails.

The reality series I’d like to see is “Joe \$27,000.” In this show, California Gov. Gray Davis masquerades as a teacher in a fourth-grade classroom with 34 children. Viewers watch as Davis says goodbye to his aide, a casualty of budget cuts. (Because the custodian was also laid off, Davis will have to vacuum



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his classroom and empty the trash before he goes home! It’s a hilarious scene!)

More hilarity ensues when Davis, exhausted from explaining fractions and the solar system while keeping the kids in their seats, is told the children won’t be leaving for art and music classes after all. Both have been eliminated. Ha, ha! In the corner of the television screen, a clock ticks down the minutes until 3 p.m.

I’d like to see a more realistic remake of “Survivor.” In my version, a group of politicians is dropped onto the unfamiliar terrain of the Tenderloin in San Francisco. Each is given two young children to raise and a minimum-wage job at a Carl’s Jr., an hour’s bus ride away. Contestants use their wives to survive until the end of the month while paying rent, child care, utilities and groceries. The winner is the person who makes the fewest pleas to quit the game. First prize is a trip home.

In “Big Brother,” U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft discovers that his e-mail, phone

Crisis year for U.S. and Bush presidency

While politics and life proceed more or less as usual in America these days, they shouldn’t. That’s because the foreign policy challenges of the year are so grave, six months from now we may be living in a different world, for better or worse.

How the confrontations with Iraq and North Korea turn out — and whether terrorism hits the United States again — will alter America’s position in the world.

Not incidentally, the year’s events will also have a decisive impact on domestic politics. In effect, President Bush is betting his presidency on being able to safely navigate the nation through these multiple storms.

The best outcome in the face-off with Iraq would be a victory without war — or, perhaps better yet, a decisive victory in a short war with few casualties.

The scenarios for victory without war would be: 1) Saddam Hussein’s capitulation to the United Nations, including an agreement to reveal and destroy his weapons of mass destruction in return for staying in power; 2) his agreement to go into exile; and 3) his assassination.

The problem with the first option is that it is likely to be a ruse: he wouldn’t destroy everything and would still be in charge. The other options, too, have downsides. Saddam likely won’t accept exile for fear he would soon be brought before the World Court on war crimes charges, which would be entirely appropriate. And assassination might lead to a scramble for power among generals and the potential sale of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups.

The ideal outcome would be one in which U.S.-led forces scored a quick victory, cheering Iraqis greeted them as liberators, and scientists revealed vast secret weapons caches.

American policy would be completely vindicated. American leadership in the world would be solidified. And President Bush’s approval ratings would soar back to the 90s.

Optimistic military commentators like retired Gens. Barry McCaffrey and Thomas McInerney say that allied forces can win a war with Iraq within three weeks thanks to superior technology and assistance from Iraqi dissidents.

But pessimists fear that the United States could be bogged down in bloody urban warfare, get hit with chemical and biological weapons, and set loose regional turmoil that could lead to the toppling of friendly Islamic regimes.

The worst case would be the takeover of Pakistan by Islamic militants, furnishing the terrorist movement with nuclear weapons — exactly the outcome the United States is try-



morton kondracke

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ing to prevent.

Even absent that, there’s a possibility that Al Qaeda will launch terrorist attacks against the United States during an Iraq war to make it seem a war of the West against Islam.

If any such eventualities develop, it will fuel already-rampant doubts about U.S. world leadership overseas. President Bush would declare it was necessary for the United States to stay the course against a murderous foe, but he’d be accused by critics of provoking disaster.

Among Democrats running for president, success against Iraq would help those who backed Bush — Sen. Joe Lieberman (Conn.), Dick Gephardt (Mo.) and John Edwards (N.C.)

A disaster would discredit them among primary voters and help those who criticized Bush policy — Sens. John Kerry (Mass.) and Bob Graham (Fla.) and former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean.

Likely as not, though, the consequences of disaster — a dire foreign policy situation — would benefit Kerry and Graham most because they are experienced in foreign affairs.

There is a possibility that the Iraq issue will not be resolved this winter if France, Russia and other U.N. Security Council members somehow persuade the administration to stand down and let weapons inspections continue.

But this isn’t likely. Bush is sending 150,000 troops to the region. It’s unlikely he’ll let them sit there through the Middle East summer or, having sent them, bring them home. The chances of war this winter seem to be 70-30 or perhaps 80-20. Hopefully, Bush can win world support for the effort by revealing hard evidence that Saddam Hussein has been concealing weapons of mass destruction.

If he can’t do that, the U.S. will have to fight with Britain, Spain, Italy and a few other allies and discover the evidence after the victory.

Even if Bush succeeds grandly in Iraq, North Korea presents a crisis in the making. Bush’s hand will be strengthened by victory against Iraq, but North Korea still will present a challenge.

Russia has just proposed a trade to North Korea — it gives up its nuclear program entirely and it gets political guarantees and foreign aid in return. The problem is that North Korea has never lived up to any agreement it’s

calls, credit-card purchases, airline tickets and rental cars are being monitored. In quick-cut scenes reminiscent of “The Firm,” Ashcroft frantically tries to uncover why the government has turned its probing eyes on him. The show ends when he discovers the answer that viewers know all along: Because it can.

“Faux Millionaire” would follow the zany adventures of former Silicon Valley masters of the universe as they visit consignment shops and used-car lots in their attempts keep up appearances. The last one to lose his membership at the Olympic Club wins.

None of these shows will be made. Television producers know people want fantasy, especially from reality shows like “Joe Millionaire.” So I have another suggestion, a series called “Joan Millionaire.” I get a million dollars. Other mothers watch in envy as I build a separate bathroom (where no one can take my cuticle clippers or leave toothpaste in the sink) and spend a weekend at the Golden Door, where I’m able to watch a movie not starring Will Smith.

It might not be “Survivor,” but I think a producer ought to give it a shot.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfchronicle.com.

ever made and can’t be expected to do so in the future.

Dictator Kim Jong Il wants nuclear weapons as a means of extracting concessions from the world on an ongoing basis — that’s called extortion — and, as in 1994, will start a new program the minute he agrees to stop his current one.

Bush needs to persuade China to threaten a cutoff of commerce to North Korea if it does not completely give up its weapons program and submit to a thorough inspections regime.

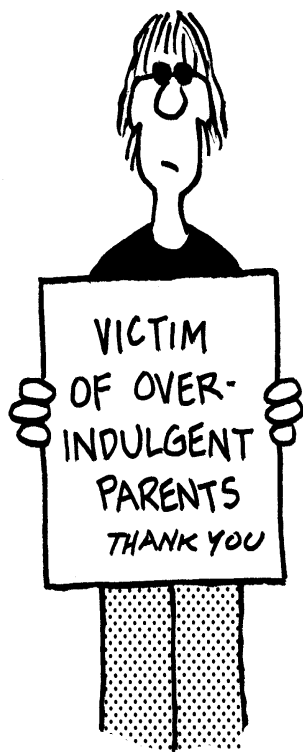
If China is not willing, then Bush needs to take the issue to the United Nations — and be prepared to act militarily if North Korea refuses. This will provoke as great a crisis as the current Iraq confrontation.

Let’s hope that the 2004 election is fought over economic policy. It will mean that we’ve come through the crises of 2003 safely.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

berry’s world

EDITOR’S NOTE: Jim Berry is on vacation. Please use this classic cartoon, which was originally printed in 1995.



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