

from our viewpoint...

Downtown project math pretty simple

With the equipment for the Aircraft Seal and Gasket Corp. plant expected next week, we can be proud of the effort of business people and citizens who stepped forward to make this happen.

The owners of the company are pleased with the building provided by the city and the enormous effort to get it ready for their use.

It is time to turn attention to another project that needs as much support as bringing a new company to town, and that is the downtown improvement program.

The deadline is getting close — Dec. 12 — to have commitments from building owners in the downtown district for what they are willing to spend on their buildings in the next year to be a dollar-for-dollar match for a state grant to replace the sidewalks, curb and gutter in the center of the downtown district.

The Downtown Revitalization Committee has sent letters to all building owners asking their support. To do the whole project as planned, it will take \$200,000 worth of work on the business-match side to complete the three blocks between 13th and 10th.

This area is the first phase of a planned rebuilding of all the brick streets, intersections, sidewalks, curb and gutter for the whole of the Main Street Mile. The city is going ahead with plans to replace the brick intersections at 11th and 112th under a separate grant from the state Department of Transportation.

This year's project will cost over \$700,000 and rebuild the three blocks, but only if building owners commit to spending a total of \$200,000 in that three-block area.

There are more than 40 individual businesses in the three blocks, but some buildings have more than one business. If the total is divided by the number of businesses, it means each one would have to commit to spending just \$5,000 on improvements in the next year, or about \$8,000 per building.

The intersections will be done with or without the development grant. If there is not enough to do all three blocks, the grant could be scaled back to two or even one. However, this is an excellent opportunity for the city and the downtown businesses to have a new face and a new brick street for those who stop and shop in our city.

The bricks on Main have been there for nearly 100 years, and so have some of the buildings. Replacing the bricks will brighten the downtown area, and as the project continues, the whole area will benefit from the new smoother ride and fresh looking sidewalks.

Many business owners have been told that the sidewalks, curb and gutters need to be replaced, and this program will do that with the money from the state while the building owners can concentrate on improving and preserving their investment in our city's downtown shopping and business district.

The math is simple. If the city can get the commitments, we'll have another step forward on the heels of the economic development that is expanding in our city and its economy. — *Tom Betz*

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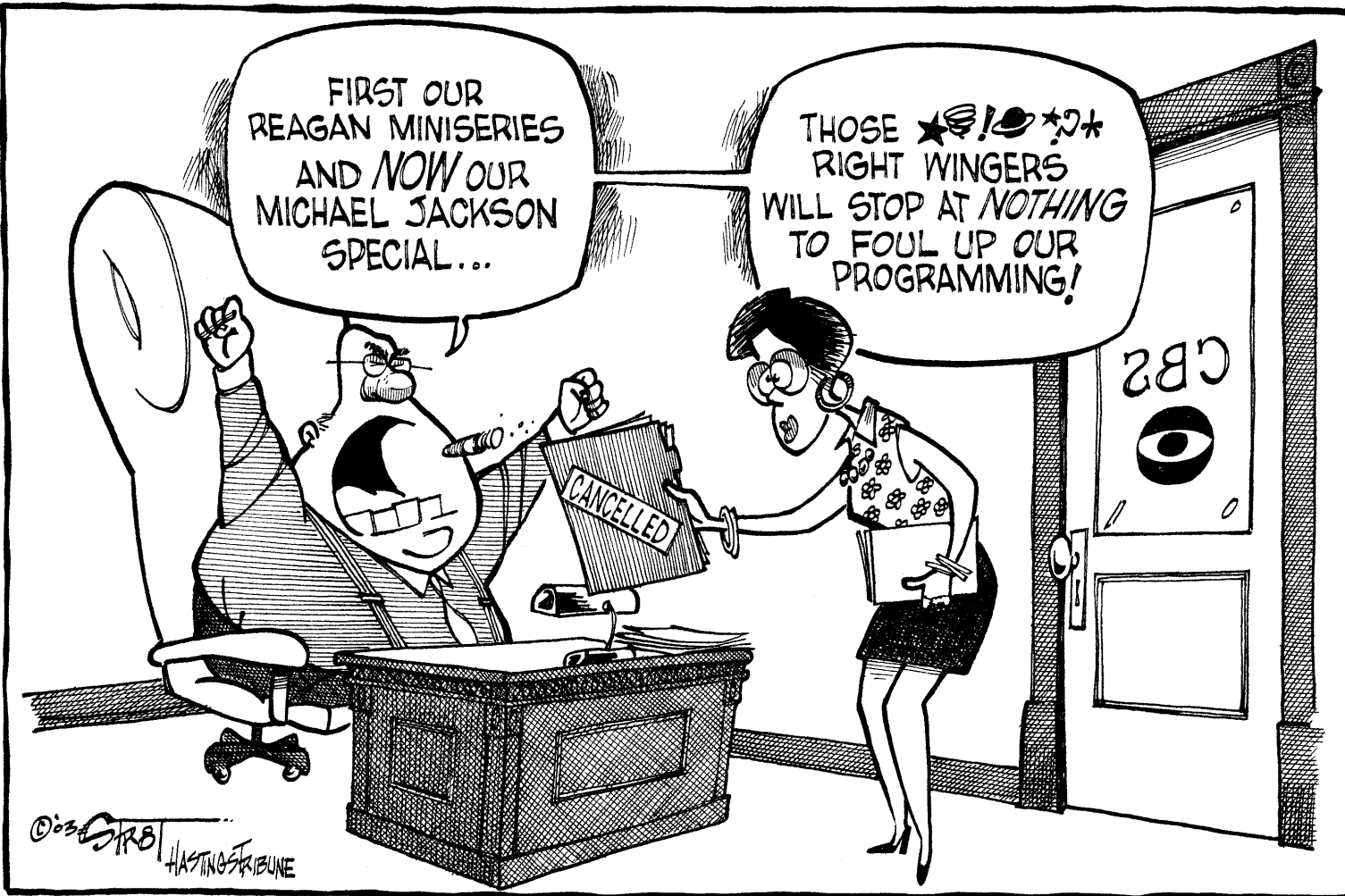
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Mini-vacation lands us in lap of luxury

Steve and I took a mini-vacation last week.

He claims he has to get me out of town to keep me away from work.

Even that doesn't work, however, because we both take our computers.

This was a one-day trip to Denver for a concert, a glass of wine and a night at a downtown hotel.

Steve got tickets for the Lucinda Williams concert on Wednesday night and I booked us a room at the Comfort Inn downtown. We planned to drive in after work, park at the hotel and walk to the concert, which was at the Fillmore about 12 blocks east of downtown..

Steve and I have a routine when arriving at hotels. I check in and he deals with the luggage — in this case two computer cases and a small suitcase.

But there was a hangup at the desk. The clerk told me they were booked up and the person who had had our room the night before wasn't leaving.

In other words, there was no room in the Inn. So, for the same price they had booked us a room at the Brown Palace across the street.

Oh woe is us — forced to stay at the luxury hotel. Life is tough.

We boogied across the road and checked in



cynthia haynes

• open season

as a pair of bellhops grabbed our bags and practically carried us upstairs.

There was ice in the bucket, water in the silver pitcher and a mint on the pillow.

Life was tough.

We dropped our stuff and headed for the Fillmore, although the bellhop's suggestion of hors d'oeuvres and music in the lobby was tempting.

The walk was brisk but enjoyable and we arrived during the middle of the opening act — a nice band that ended its set with a gospel song.

The Fillmore is a strange place. It has the stage at one end and what appears to be a huge dance floor in the middle with a few small tables scattered down the sides. Mostly, however, it hosts concerts.

We were able to get a spot up front and after about 45 minutes, the main attraction came on.

Lucinda Williams was weird, but we had a

Can't blame rural problems on Wal-Mart

If rural America is dying, what's killing it? Though it's popular to blame Wal-Mart, I don't think that's it.

Wal-Mart is a symptom, not a disease.

What's killing rural American is rural Americans.

We don't realize how good we have things, and we don't invest in our own, wonderful way of life.

We teach our kids that they need to go off to the university and get a good job in the city. We don't make jobs for them back at home like we used to.

We do our shopping out of town or with some big, faceless corporation. We don't support the hometown grocery or the mom-and-pop stores on Main Street.

We're hooked on the excitement of going to the big stores and buying big-brand merchandise. A trip to the next-bigger town becomes a social outing, not just treason to the local economy.

But it's more complicated than that.

Wal-Mart exists because it does what people want.

It has low prices, if you don't mind hiking through a jammed up, ding-and-dent parking lot. It's open all day so people can shop when they have time.

One retail expert notes that in an era when everyone works, a store that's open 9 to 5 must be catering to the retired and the unemployed. That's not the most profitable demographic, is it?

Go to any Wal-Mart at night or on Sunday, or 9 p.m. on a Wednesday, and you'll find cars from all the surrounding towns. Go downtown in those same towns, and you'll find most of the stores locked and shuttered.

Maybe the owners are home complaining. Maybe they're over shopping at Wal-Mart along with all their customers.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Most of our towns have places to buy the things we need. These businesses provide jobs that keep our towns going. They are the building blocks of our communities. But we drive right by them on our way out of town.

Then we get together and complain about the declining population and the ever-lower enrollment in our schools. We gripe that it's tough to attract new businesses. We complain that no one wants to live "out here."

We'd all be a lot better off if we learned to invest in our own towns and the businesses that support them. Instead of hitting the highway to buy a car or a coat, we ought to look downtown. Out on the highway. Or worst come to worse, in the next county over.

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