

from our viewpoint...

Tax cut 'sunset' could be big hike

Theoretically, Americans are in for one of the biggest tax hikes on record two years after the next election.

That's 2010, when the Bush tax cuts are set to "sunset," or expire. Without action by Congress, rates will return to those in effect in 2002, when the new Bush administration and the Republican majority in Congress pushed through \$1.35 trillion in tax cuts over 10 years.

The nation had a budget surplus then, as figured by shaky government accounting. Today, after five years of tax cuts, a recession and unprecedented government spending, the deficit approaches \$800 billion a year.

Something hasn't worked out.

Democrats say it's simple: the country couldn't afford the tax cuts, and we need to go back to the old rates. They complain about the fiscal irresponsibility of the cuts, but big deficits seldom bothered the party when it was in power. Its priority has always been spending.

Why cut taxes, goes the argument, with so many things we need to spend the money on?

Republican conservatives, on the other hand, argued they could cut government spending by cutting taxes. This sort of starve-the-budget thinking is pretty common, but it seldom works.

Why?

Because few in Congress, or the state Legislature, for that matter, really believe in spending cuts. Cuts produce complaints from those who depend on government programs: program beneficiaries, employees, bureaucrats, everyone feeding at the public trough.

You can cut taxes, but the result seldom is lower spending. It hasn't worked in Washington, and it hasn't worked in Topeka.

This country badly needs fiscal restraint, though. The budget "rules" of the Gingrich era didn't bring it. The tough stance of today's Democrats isn't likely to do much better.

Pressure groups work for spending, not for taxpayers. They represent all the interests who want to get money, from social groups to unions to big corporations.

In Washington and in Topeka, darned few voices represent the taxpayer. Fewer still call out for fiscal sanity, lower spending, real tax cuts and less government.

Money talks, and those who make money from government have the biggest voice. It's not a matter of right or wrong, sound fiscal policy or unsound.

Just follow the money.

So, where do we go from here?

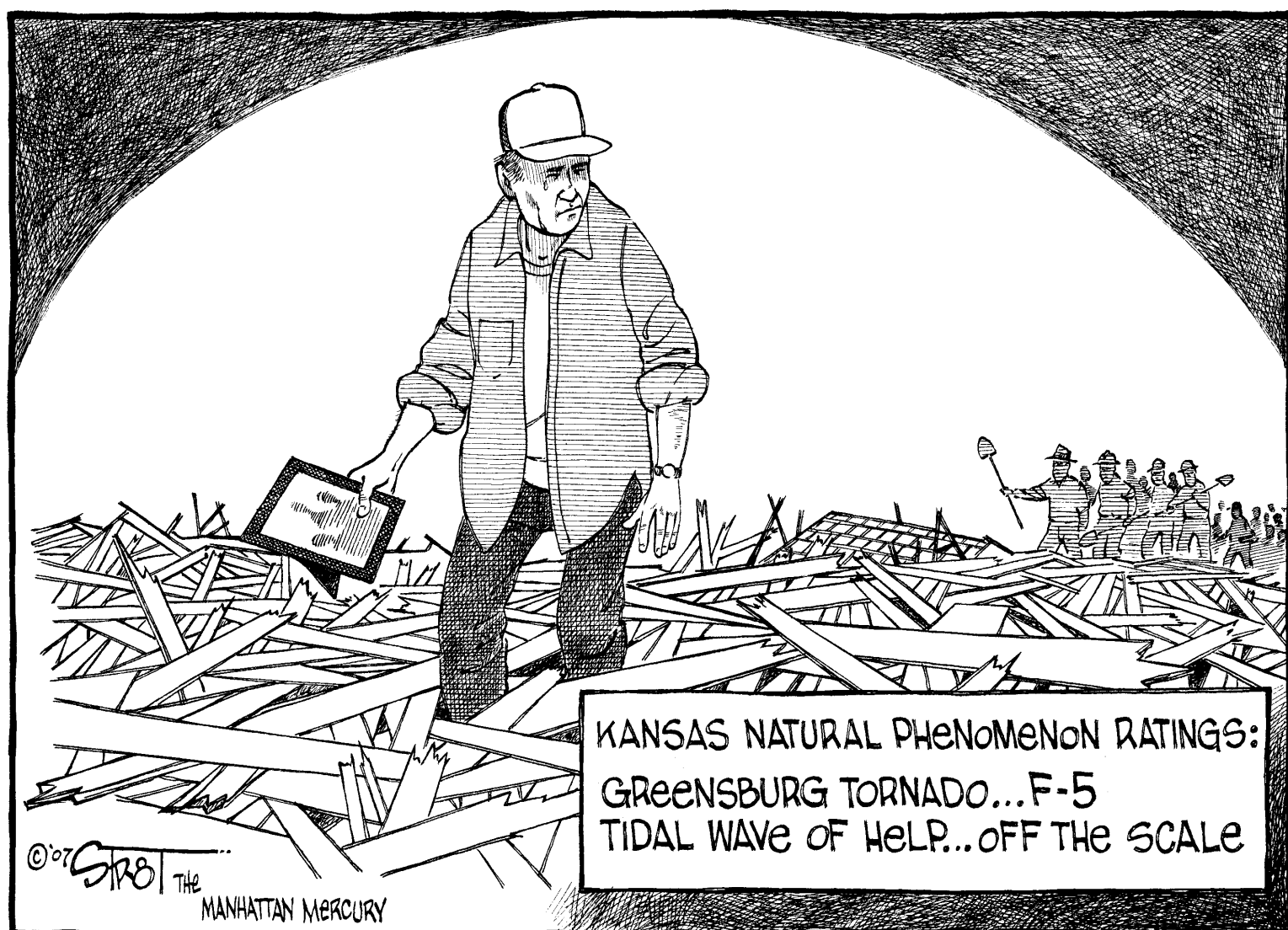
It's a good bet Congress will not let all the tax cuts fade away. The Democrats will vote to sock it to the rich. Republicans will try to defend the economic benefits of stimulating investment. Most of the cuts will remain.

And despite that, most of us will see little real difference in our taxes, which will be too high.

Maybe the economy will grow enough to shrink the deficit, maybe it won't.

And we'll still need to talk about less government, not more.

— Steve Haynes



Talladega — a sacred place to race car fans

I'm sitting at the top of the Talladega Superspeedway with some friends and companions, watching cars race around the track at 120 to 130 mph.

Talladega, in eastern Alabama, halfway between Birmingham and Atlanta, is to motor sports what Churchill Downs is to horse racing — a sacred place.

I went to Churchill Downs and didn't see a horse.

Now, I'm at Talladega and there are cars on the track — two to be exact. The big NASCAR race was last week.

I get to go a lot of places with the National Newspaper Association. Of course, most of them are off season or "if you had been here last week..."

I'm told that on race weekend, 175,000 people jammed the field and stands for the Aaron 499. Now there are about 25 of us atop the stands listening to our guide and to our expert, Jim Sterling.

Sterling is the step-father to Carl Edwards, who drives No. 99 for Office Depot.

Jim wasn't here for the big race. He teaches at the University of Missouri and can't fly



cynthia
haynes

• open season

around the country every weekend, though his wife Nancy, Carl's mother, often does.

As it turned out, Carl didn't attend much of this one, either. He blew his engine in the fourth or fifth lap and came in next to last.

There's an airstrip right behind the track, and Carl is a pilot. Jim said he flew home and was playing tennis by the time the race ended. I'm sure he was not a happy camper, since that cost him a lot of money and his position in the top 10. He finished 42nd and won only \$84,530 and 27 points out of an almost \$6 million purse.

The winner, Jeff Gordon, took home \$355,511 and 195 points, plus 10 bonus points.

Carl had nothing to be ashamed of, however. Only 26 out of the 43 drivers finished all 192 laps. Several others had engine problems and six drivers fell out of the race due to accidents.

Steve thinks I'm pretty brave to sit up here

high above the speedway, since I'm terrified of heights.

Well, my secret is not looking down. I'm checking the cars off to the right and left as they practice below me and watching the horizon.

Our guide says the race cars we're watching are part of a driving school. Before they took to the track, there was a motorcycle running around the infield. Apparently, there's a Harley Davidson plant nearby and they test their cycles here every day there isn't a race.

Now there's a tough job, driving Harleys around the track at Talladega most every day.

For this big a facility, there isn't much happening. The next big race weekend is the UAW-Ford 500 in October, and that's it for the year.

Better get your tickets now. The grandstands only hold 143,000 people. If you don't get a seat, you'll have to stand or bring a lawn chair or maybe we'll all just watch it on television like I did the Kentucky Derby.

Well, the visit to the track was interesting and informative and I bought myself a Talladega T-shirt and a No. 99 hat.

Next stop — Augusta, Ga., to not see the Masters.

Thompson and walls to the White House

If former Senator Fred Thompson decides to make a stab at winning the presidency next year he's better put on his climbing shoes. He'll be faced with scaling some pretty high walls to get there.

He's already begun to climb a very high one: questions about his health raised by his admission that he has lymphoma, a form of skin cancer that in his case is said to be latent and non-aggressive.

No matter how non-life threatening his form of the disease may be, the very word "cancer" when applied to anyone, especially a presidential candidate, raises all kinds of doubts in the public's mind. Those doubts, even if totally unjustified, are very hard to erase from the public's consciousness.

Assuming that his rugged appearance and obvious good health manage to allay public uneasiness about his cancer, once he successfully climbs that wall — like the bear that climbed the mountain only to face other mountains — Fred Thompson will have to surmount a series of other high barriers.

To begin with, there's the matter of money. It's commonly understood that it takes something like \$100 million just to get into the race and stay there, and the top GOP candidates have been out beating the bushes and shaking the money trees for a long time and they've soaked up a lot of the ready cash.

As of now, Fred Thompson hasn't raised one red cent and can't begin to until he becomes a candidate or forms one of those silly exploratory committees.

Then there's the matter of putting together a campaign staff of skilled political operatives, and then organizing the needed army of grassroots workers in the primary states re-



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• commentary

quired to identify and recruit voters and get them to the polls. It's a massive job, sort of like organizing something as extensive as the Normandy invasion — and Thompson is no Eisenhower.

Assuming Thompson can get over this obstacle and is able to organize at the grass roots, he is still facing the need to get out there in all those primary states and carry the flag of his candidacy. There is no way he can rely on his obvious charisma to substitute for being on the scene. And the fact that overwhelming numbers of primary states are having their primaries on the same day next February imposes a huge burden on all the candidates they can't shrug off. They have to be there and highly visible.

Fred Thompson all but shrugged off that burden when he appeared on Neil Cavuto's show Wednesday, implying that his solid conservative message and his high profile and charisma could substitute for his physical presence.

Where have I heard that before? Oh, I know — it was in 1980, during the crucial Iowa pri-

mary caucuses. My father, Ronald Reagan, was an obvious absentee candidate. His top advisers convinced him that his presence in that key state was not really necessary — after all, he was a major celebrity with charisma radiating out of every pore in his body. He could simply rise above the battle by staying off the battlefield.

Unlike my dad, I was there and I saw at first hand how much his campaign was suffering from his absence. My fears were totally justified when George Bush, who was all over the place, beat my father hands down. After that, he fired those campaign advisers and went out and beat the bushes and in the end won the nomination.

I hope Thompson doesn't take the advice of those supporters yearning for a new Ronald Reagan; that he has a leg up on all the other candidates thanks to his Reaganesque qualities. There was only one Ronald Reagan, and he's no longer around. America needs a president who is his own man and knows who and what he is.

Maybe Fred Thompson fits that description, but he has a long way to go and a lot of hills to climb before he even gets as far as the Republican nomination.

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on more than 200 talk radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to Reagan@caglecartoons.com.

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