

from our viewpoint...

Trying to save store good group effort

City and county officials came together last week with the Sherman County Economic Development Council to develop a package of incentives designed to keep the J.C. Penney store in Goodland open.

The plan includes a subsidy for the store and half-off utility bills for the next two years, and the building owner has pledged to cut the rent.

Is it enough? No one is sure, but it is a place to start, and if Penney's officials are willing to talk, it could be a major step to saving the store.

Why does Penney's want to close the store? The firm cites a combination of the rising transportation costs and the slowing economy, which means lower sales. That's not a bright picture; big retailers look to close what they see as their weakest stores to help shore up their bottom line.

That is practical business, and in corporate America, these decisions are made every day. This time, the numbers people pulled up their charts and said that Goodland was a place to cut.

At least the people of Goodland and the surrounding area got a chance — even if it is a slim one — to come up with a plan to save the store. Not too many years ago, another corporation made a decision to close their Goodland store, and there was no warning. The Alco officials came in before the store opened one day and told the employees it was not only going to close, but would close that day. Instead of having a big sale, the firm just hauled off the merchandise.

One question being asked is if this is really fair to all the other stores to keep Penney's open. We feel the answer is a resounding yes. Retaining an anchor business like Penney's is worth as much as the city and county might spend to attract a new company to Goodland, maybe more.

Those who have written to Penney's officials are helping make a difference, and to those who have not do so yet, we ask you take up a pen or computer and send them a message that we want this store to stay.

The corporate research says people drive to malls to shop today. In rural northwest Kansas, though, the Goodland Penney's is the regional mall. People from surrounding towns come here to shop because of Penney's. It's more than 140 miles to a larger store, and in this day of higher gas prices, without the store, Penney's may lose a lot of loyal customers.

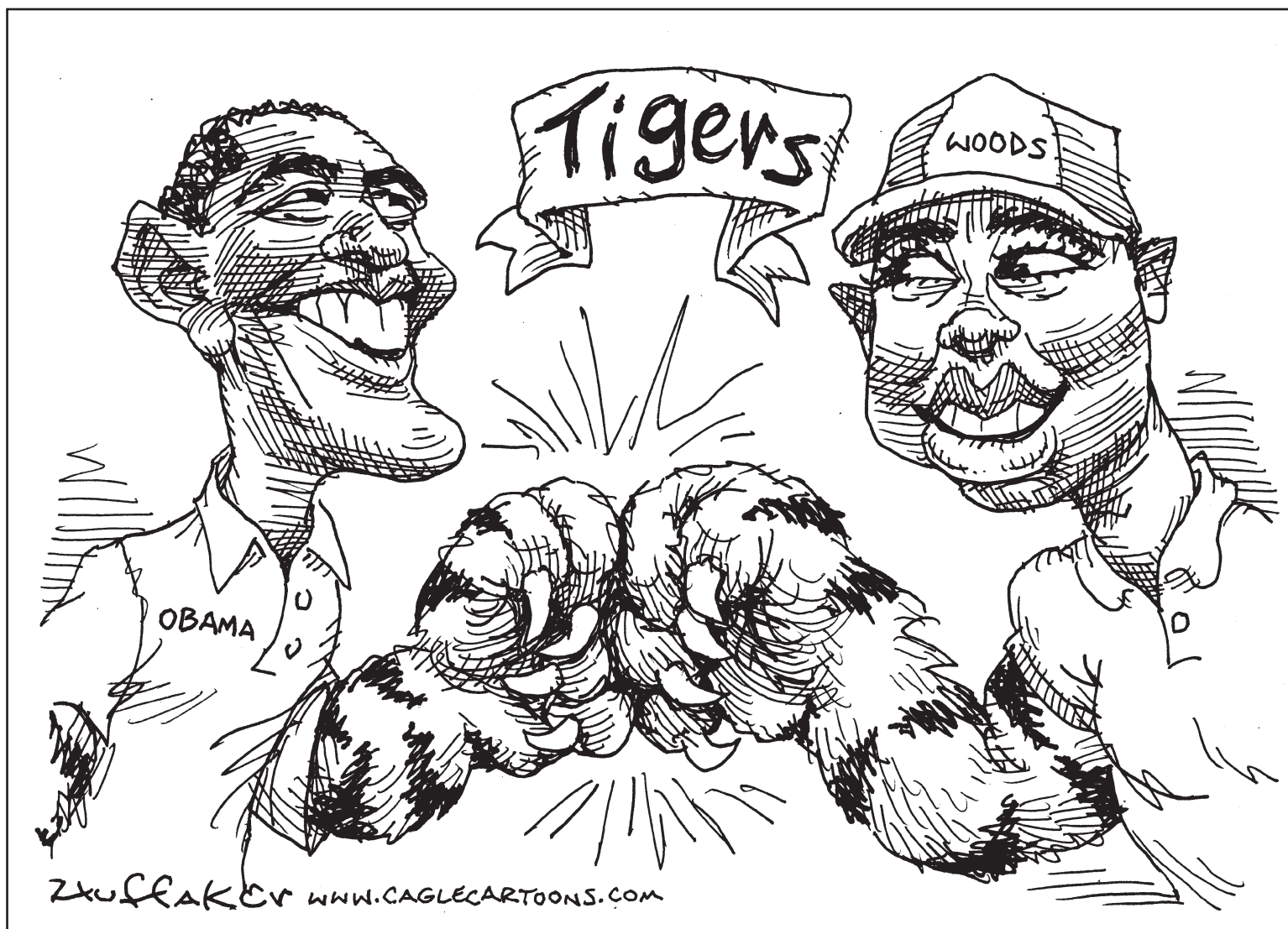
Will the incentive package get Penney's to change their mind and give the Goodland store a couple of years to bring it back up to corporate goals? At this point, the offer has been made and we'll have to wait and see what happens.

One thing for sure is the city and county commissioners, economic development board and Goodland Chamber have shown they can work together when the chips are down and the objective is clear. That in itself is a victory. — Tom Betz

Penney's mailing addresses

Letters can be sent to Myron (Mike) Ullman III, chairman and chief executive officer; Kenneth Hicks, president, chief merchandising officer and director; and Mike Taxter, director of J.C. Penney stores. The address is J.C. Penney Co, 6501 Legacy Drive, Plano TX 75024.

In addition, the e-mail address for Tim Lyons, corporate communications manager, is jpcpcorcomm@jcpenny.com.



There I was directing traffic in Santa Fe

So there I was, directing traffic in downtown Santa Fe.

It's not a job I'm well trained for — or trained for at all, if you must — but it went pretty well.

It all started when our tour bus got stopped in the traffic jam near the square. It was blocking the whole street, with dozens of cars behind us. Cars full of unhappy, impatient people.

So while the driver and others went to negotiate with security, I went back behind the bus to see what could be done about the traffic.

Cops? Not when you need one. Nowhere in sight. A couple of security officers sat on a nearby wall, talking and watching the mess on San Francisco Street. Not doing anything, mind you. Just watching.

That left the traffic jam to me.

It seems the city had blocked off the plaza downtown for an arts and crafts fair the next day. Vendors were setting up their tents and the streets around the busy square were all closed.

We'd been touring all day in a 53-passenger over-the-road bus, but on the last leg home, we got stuck in this mess. With a car illegally parked near the corner, the driver was afraid to turn right and get out of the jam. She couldn't back up without a lot of work clearing cars, so the only way to go was forward — to the



steve haynes

• along the sappa

square.

A few drivers had spotted a route around the bus, through a bank's parking lot. I started sending them all that way, and actually got the street moving. Of course, people still had to find a way around the square or a place to park, but strictly speaking, that wasn't my problem. Not that I could help them anyway.

And they were all pretty nice about it. No abuse, no horns, no shouting.

Eventually, the driver came back with word that security would let her turn around on the square. A couple of us moved the barricades and "road closed" signs so she could get the bus out of the middle of the traffic. Then we scooted them back just as quickly so no one would follow us to the square. That was all we needed, a bunch of cars down there.

Once we got to the corner, the driver tried to turn left as the guards advised. The bus headed straight into one of the art tents. It wasn't even close. She backed up. The only way out was straight east.

And it looked like she might make it, except for the trailer being unloaded on the square. Still, there might be room if we could move the animated sculpture of a bull which partly blocked the left lane as it bobbed.

I went to look. The bull, eight foot tall if it was an inch, was made of rusty-looking quarter-inch Cor-Ten steel. It would have taken an army to move it the required three feet.

Then the guy driving the pickup appeared and said he'd move the trailer in 10 minutes. Said the same thing 10 minutes later. But finally, his crew was done and he did move.

We got the bus out of there. The driver had been on duty off and on since 4:30 a.m. and still had to make it home to Albuquerque. She was trying to smile.

Last I saw of the bus, she'd turned left at the cathedral and had a sharp right yet to get out of downtown. We'd gone that way in the morning, so I figured she'd make it.

Ask me again how I got into this. Oh, yeah, I just wanted to get back to my hotel and go to sleep.

Goes to show how interesting life can be, though. How many people can say they directed traffic in Santa Fe last week?

Thought so.

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THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

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Finally? Yes, finally. Not a trick? No trick. Over? Yes. Over. It is once again safe for the faint-of-heart to come out from under the covers. The battle royale is done and the shrapnel has been kept to a minimum. At long last, the bedraggled Democrats have come to the blessed end of their perpetual primary pursuit. Not the beginning of the end. Nor the almost near-middle of the end, but the very end. The butt end. The last millimeter of moldy hair on the bulbous pimple on the butt end of the end end. An end officially signaled by the reluctant arrival of Hillary Clinton at the sequestered gate of Acceptance.

Acceptance. The final state of grief which has been attained only after an unseemly amount of time spent lounging with her old man on the porch swing at the House of Denial. And a couple of not-so-brief forays to the double-wide Recreational Vehicle of Anger and Depression. Then some boilermakers and cigars back at Denial House. And don't forget that quickie in the Vice-Presidential Suite of the Bargaining Motel. But now the cloak of Acquiescence has been thrown over her shoulders by members of her own staff, while the Democratic Tactless Squad wraps Bill in the Shut-the-Hell-Up Sheet, while beating him across the head and shoulders with rolled-up copies of the latest issue of Vanity Fair.

Say what you will about Hillary; the girl does not give up easily. She possesses the stick-to-itiveness of an emaciated tick. She's like one of those Japanese soldiers who emerges from an island cave 30 years after the war is over. Not knowing that she lost, and having learned

The end end



will durst

• raging moderate

nothing except how to subsist on a diet of bark and moss. But she saved her finest hour for the curtain call. Brilliant exit strategy. Gave the best speech of your life in the process of bowing out. Terrific timing. Next time, she might want to write the good speech for the opening — or during the campaign — instead of the close.

But now it's time to move on. Since he's clinched the nomination, Barack Obama has also assumed the responsibility of unifying the Democratic Party, a task to which we all wish him luck. Unifying Democrats is like trying to herd a clew of worms over a chicken-wire walkway onto an electric waffle iron. Like

nailing lime Jell-O with carrot shreds to a tree. Reconstituting the original ingredients of a bouillabaisse. Unburning a bridge. The good news is the Democrats have gotten their ducks all in a row. The bad news it's closing in on duck season and Dick Cheney is reaching for his blaze-orange hat.

The Dems are fond of calling themselves the party of the big tent, which is all well and good, but you know what else they hold in big tents? Oriental rug sales. Used car clearances. And circuses. And as the newly installed ringleader, Mr. Obama is going to need to find himself a really big chair and an awfully long whip to control the political menagerie that will be encircling him. And something bright and shiny to keep the paying customers focused on the center ring and not the eternally attendant freak show. And cotton candy is always nice.

Will Durst is a political comedian who has performed around the world. E-mail Will at durst@caglecartoons.com.



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The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: star-news@nwkansas.com.