

from our viewpoint...

Highs and lows of the past year

We reached the end of another year, and time to look at a few of the highs and lows of 2008.

The high of the year was the opening of the skate park at Steever Park with the money raising efforts of the Shine On Sherman County youth committee.

A big high-five to all those young people and adults who worked on the many money raising events to raise more than \$40,000 to pour the concrete base and purchase the first phase of the skate park equipment.

The city threw a blip at the project when the insurance company insisted on having a \$9,000 fence erected around the park. City crews helped erect the fence so the park would be in compliance and protect the city from liability.

The youth committee continues to work at raising money to purchase other pieces of equipment.

Biggest low for the community was the loss in August of the J.C. Penney's store.

The intention to close the store was announced in May, and the Sherman County Economic Development Council with the help of the city and county commissioners tried to put together an effort to save the store. The groups came up with an incentive package worth more than \$50,000 plus savings on electric utilities and an agreement to reduce the rent by the building owner.

Hundreds of people sent messages to the J.C. Penney's headquarters in Plano, Texas, to let the corporate people know how important the store was to all of northwest Kansas.

The J.C. Penney's officials said they did not see a way to make the store profitable even with all the help the community offered. The store held a closing sale and closed in mid August.

Jacque Cooper opened a J.C. Penney's catalog store in her Hallmark store to keep some access for customers. Her effort deserves a high-five, and the support of loyal Penney's customers to keep this connection viable.

Closing that major store left another big hole on Main Ave., and discussions have been held about organizing a community department store that might open in downtown. The owners of El Dorado Western Wear, Dan and Norelia Ordonez, has been expanding their clothing offerings to fill some of the void from the closing of the store across the street.

For those looking for an alternative to Wal-Mart you might stop in to El Dorado and check out their new offerings. Supporting our local merchants is the only way to avoid having another empty building.

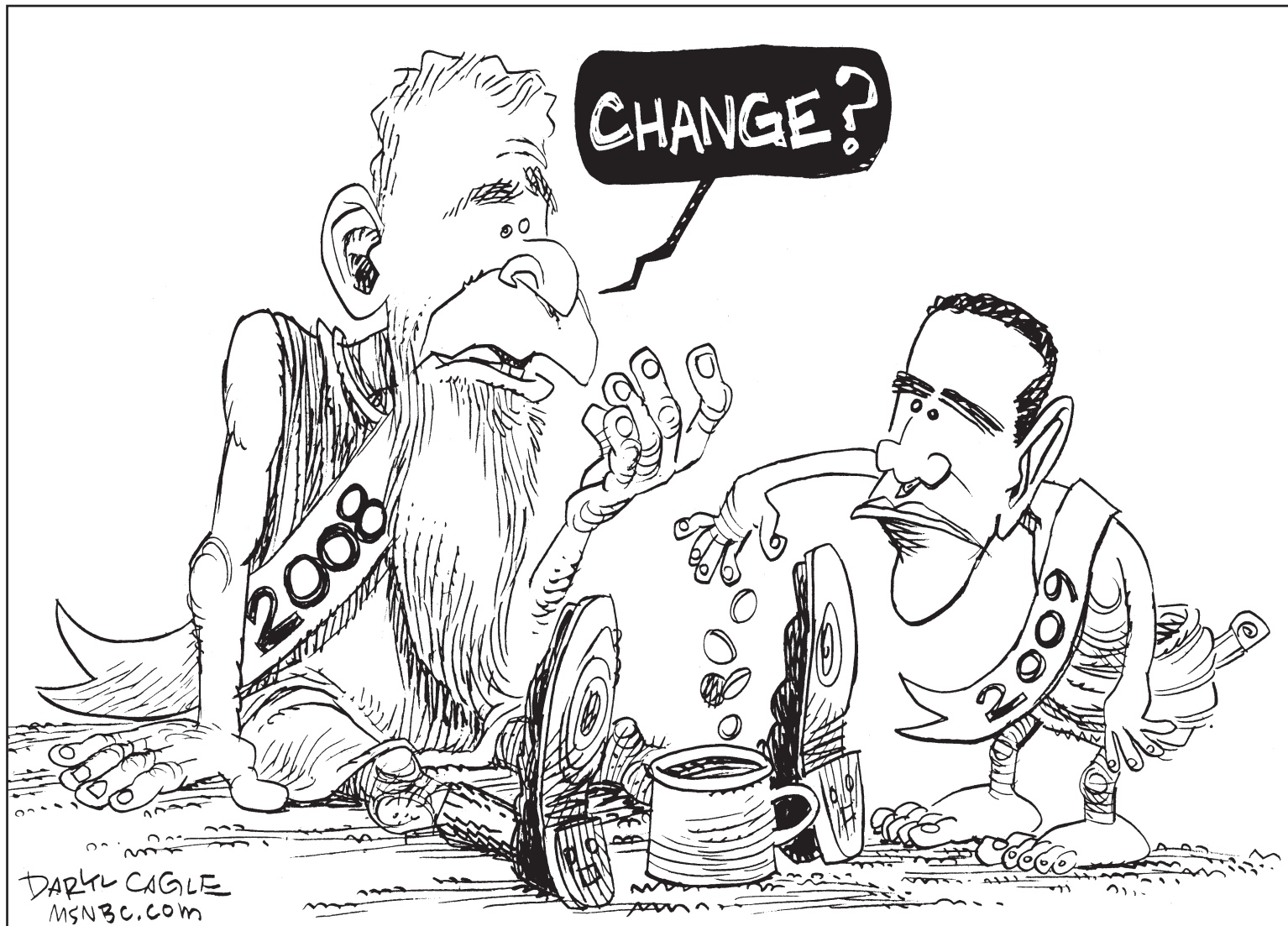
For many the closing brought the efforts of the economic development council to the fore, and people were wondering what could be done to enhance the effort by creating a large pot of money that could be used as an incentive to keep businesses and recruit others to open stores.

State law allows the county commissioners to raise property tax for economic development. A joint committee from the city, county and development council have been exploring this avenue and may ask the citizens to support a tax levy for this purpose.

Having such an incentive fund would be a good way for Sherman County to compete in the economic development field.

The year ahead may be a tough one given the economic climate, but we know the people of Sherman County have the resilience to weather any storm. The county motto remains firm "They came to stay."

Happy New Year to everyone! — Tom Betz



I'm a workaholic, allergic to housework

Steve says I'm a workaholic. That's sort of true. However, there are some things I really don't do — housework, for one.

I'm allergic to cleaning. It makes me lethargic and out of sorts.

It took Steve a few years to figure this out. His mother was a housewife, who despite raising four children, kept an immaculate home.

My mother was a teacher, who, like me, is allergic to housework.

Since I've always worked full time, we've tried to have someone come in to help do the floors, bathrooms and dusting.

We've been so lucky to have Barbara for the last few years. She's an absolute jewel. She showed up once a week for four hours, and when she left, the house was clean and smelled wonderful.

Did you notice I changed to the past tense? Barbara got a new job and she's not available to clean houses any more. I'm in mourning.

After she left, I made a list of jobs that need



cynthia haynes

• open season

doing around the house and assigned a job or two to each day so that I wouldn't have to do everything at once.

Tuesday — kitchen counters and floors.
Wednesday — downstairs bathroom/change towels.

Thursday — upstairs bathroom/change towels.

Friday — dust and change bedding.
Saturday — vacuum rugs and furniture.

Sunday — sweep and mop hard floors/do laundry.

Monday — work at office and forget house.

After the first week, though, every day seemed to be Monday.

I do change the bedding and towels, keep the dishes and laundry done and do lots of general picking up. What I didn't do was sweep, dust or mop unless there was a major spill or the cats left a present.

By last week, however, the fallacy of this started dawning on me as I found everything I owned was covered in cat hair. We have three, and when it's nice, they go outside. When the weather is bad or it's cold, they become house cats.

Without a pretty consistent program of dust and hair removal, the place soon becomes overrun with dust bunnies and cat hair.

So, I took Thursday off to clean.

I swept. I washed. I dusted. I scoured. I cleaned.

I hated every minute of it, but just turned the Christmas music on high and dove in.

Now, I'm very proud of my handiwork.

The only problem I see is, I'm going to have to do it again next month.

Bill Bennett to GOP — Let's get to work

Conservative author and radio talk-show host Bill Bennett has been a prominent American political and cultural figure since 1981, when he became President Reagan's chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities and later Secretary of Education.

The author of 16 books — including "The Book of Virtues" and his newest, "The American Patriot's Almanac" — he is host of "Bill Bennett's Morning in America," a syndicated talk show that airs from 6 to 9 a.m. weekdays on nearly 200 radio stations and Sirius Patriot Channel 144.

I talked to the man The New York Times says is "the leading spokesman of the Traditional Values wing of the Republican Party" after the election.

Q: Was Barack Obama's victory due to his personality or his neo-New Deal ideas?

A: All of the above and more. It was a perfect storm of a campaign for him. He's a terrifically talented political figure. If politics is a sport, like some others, he's a natural. He made very few mistakes. Second, his ideas seemed to be right, given the circumstances. And as you probably have noted, it looks like the ideas of free-market capitalism didn't get a very good airing in the last campaign. John McCain's a great guy. But he never defended the basic principles of free-market capitalism. He talked about earmarks, but never the rationale for free-market capitalism. ... Plus, another part of the storm was the economic collapse of Sept. 15. I'm not sure anybody wins on our side after that.

Q: What did the Obama victory tell you about the Republican Party's current health and fitness?

A: Well, what it told me is that we haven't been very good Republicans. I think our principles are fine; I think they need some refocus and much better explanation. One thing that has not been talked about is the "failure to communicate," as Cool Hand Luke said. George Bush is a terrific guy in a lot of ways, but he's not a good communicator. The rationale for various things was never really made in a compelling way, whether it be the war or other steps. By the way, contrast that with a first-rate communicator.

These things also often happen in cycles. There's a kind of schoolyard ethic in America which says it's somebody else's turn. Combine that with the final point, which is ironically Ronald Reagan's teaching — if it happens on your watch, it happened because of you; and are you better off than you were four or eight years ago — and you have the result. I'm kind of pleased that McCain got 46 percent. Given all that was against him, that's not really so bad. Byron York has written that McCain was flying



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

into head winds. I told Byron at the governors conference (in Miami) that he was flying into a Category 5 hurricane.

Q: You've no doubt examined the election results. Obama won mainly in the cities. Do you see in those numbers any problems for Republicans down the road?

A: Yeah, there are problems and challenges, but they're not insurmountable. We can do this if we're smart and put our best ideas forward. I keep telling our guys this is not the worst of times for us. This is not Watergate. (Mississippi Gov.) Haley Barbour reminded us in Miami that after Watergate there was serious discussion as to whether we should drop the name "Republican." We're not there (laughs). It's not that bad (laughs).

Who knows what will happen in the next four years with Barack Obama? It looks like a pretty strong Democrat majority — maybe a filibuster-proof majority, or close to it, in the Senate — and a majority in the House. So they'll have their way. And when they have their way, there are the laws of physics and the laws of politics and sometime they look the same: There's reaction and there's counter-reaction. We shall see what they do.

But we have work to do. But I'm not worried about talking to people in the cities. I'm not worried about talking to blacks and Hispanics. There are plenty of good ideas that Republicans have if we just present them. I'm very impressed with the book "The Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream" by Ross Douhat and Reihan Salam. We have some good young talent and these are two of the brightest young talents. The book is really quite good. It's sort of what (Minnesota Gov.) Tim Pawlenty talked about — the Sam's Club party rather than the country club party.

Q: Do you think conservatism's core values have been forgotten over the last eight years?

A: Yes. The crazy spending. And again, no defense of these ideas. Tom Wolfe has a great phrase: He talks about the "great relearning." We need to relearn some of these things we've forgotten — about why we believe in freedom, why we believe markets should have the dominance in our economic system. The current circumstances are very scary, because we've swallowed a ton of government very quickly and we aren't digesting it very well. We'll

see, but one thing that may come out of this is a very strong — I'll say the word again — counterreaction.

Q: What do you think it's most important for Republicans to stress from now until 2012 — social conservatism and value issues or fiscal issues?

A: Solutions. Pragmatism. Getting the job done. Fixing things. One is encouraged when you're around the governors: They have real jobs — they've got to pick up the garbage and educate the kids.

I think that's where we go. People are nervous. They're worried about "losing ground" — Charles Murray's phrase. They're worried about their kids not succeeding, not advancing the ball, the next generation not doing as well as the last. And that's what Republicans need to address. We're a party that can get things done. We're not blinded by ideology. We believe in the American dream. We believe in individual enterprise and individual responsibility. That's an amalgam: That's partly values, partly business ethic.

Q: Do you think that it is time for some younger conservative Republicans to show up on the scene and carry the ball?

A: Exactly. I actually was calling for all of our guys to step down — (House Minority Leader) John Boehner, (Senate Minority Leader) Mitch McConnell, everybody. I like them both. They're capable people. But I think the British have a good idea here — when you lose like this, you step out of power. You're gone and other people step in. I love our bench. I love the Eric Cantors and the Paul Ryans. Some of our governors are terrific. (Louisiana Gov.) Bobby Jindal was on our panel — I had the honor of being on with him. I mentioned Pawlenty. We have a terrific bench. We have great talent up there.

Q: What is the most important step conservatives must take — starting now — to begin their comeback?

A: Well, get their heads up. Darrell Royal, the old football coach (at Texas), said the only time you should look down at your shoes is if you have had an accident. Morale is important. If you believe in these ideas and principles, then act like you do and let's get to work. We lost the game here. But I think morale is very important. I don't want to say it's time to go off in the wilderness, but it's time to think, and think things through. Prepare your stuff. Some discipline like the Contract with America would be a very good idea, I think.

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