

from our viewpoint...

Congress' mistakes, who gets to pay?

We all know the answer is the American taxpayer pays. Watching the vitriolic "debate" over the recently passed debt ceiling package it was clear what divided government with a sharp "no compromise" attitude has created.

Americans on both sides should not be surprised with the credit downgrade from Standard and Poor on Friday. The credit people have been saying for months that to avoid a downgrade the U.S. had to be closer to the \$4 trillion in the debt package proposed by President Barack Obama in March.

When everything was finished on Tuesday the debt package barely made \$2.1 trillion, and was anything but a balanced effort.

In their message on downgrading the U.S. credit rating from AAA to AA+ Standard & Poor said they had not expected the level and length of the political battle over raising the debt ceiling.

Standard & Poor's managing director John Chambers said on Sunday there is a one in three chance of a further U.S. credit rating downgrade.

"We have a negative outlook ... from six months to 24 months," he said, "And if the fiscal position of the United States deteriorates further or if the political gridlock becomes more entrenched, that could lead to a downgrade. The outlook indicates at least a one in three chance of a downgrade over that period."

If anyone thought the debt ceiling agreement was the end they do not understand the politics of Washington today. The debt default may have been averted as the last moment, but Standard & Poor plus others watching the American debt scene are hearing the rattling of the Tea Party and conservative right saying those who are named to the "super" committee to determine the next round of cuts should be pledged not to raise any taxes or give up any tax loopholes.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said Saturday the downgrade affirmed the need for the balanced approach, which combines spending cuts with tax increases.

The decision, he said, "shows why leaders should appoint members who will approach the committee's work with an open mind - instead of hardliners who have already ruled out the balanced approach the markets and rating agencies like S.&P. are demanding."

Other voices in the debate are saying Congress needs to get the message and do their job.

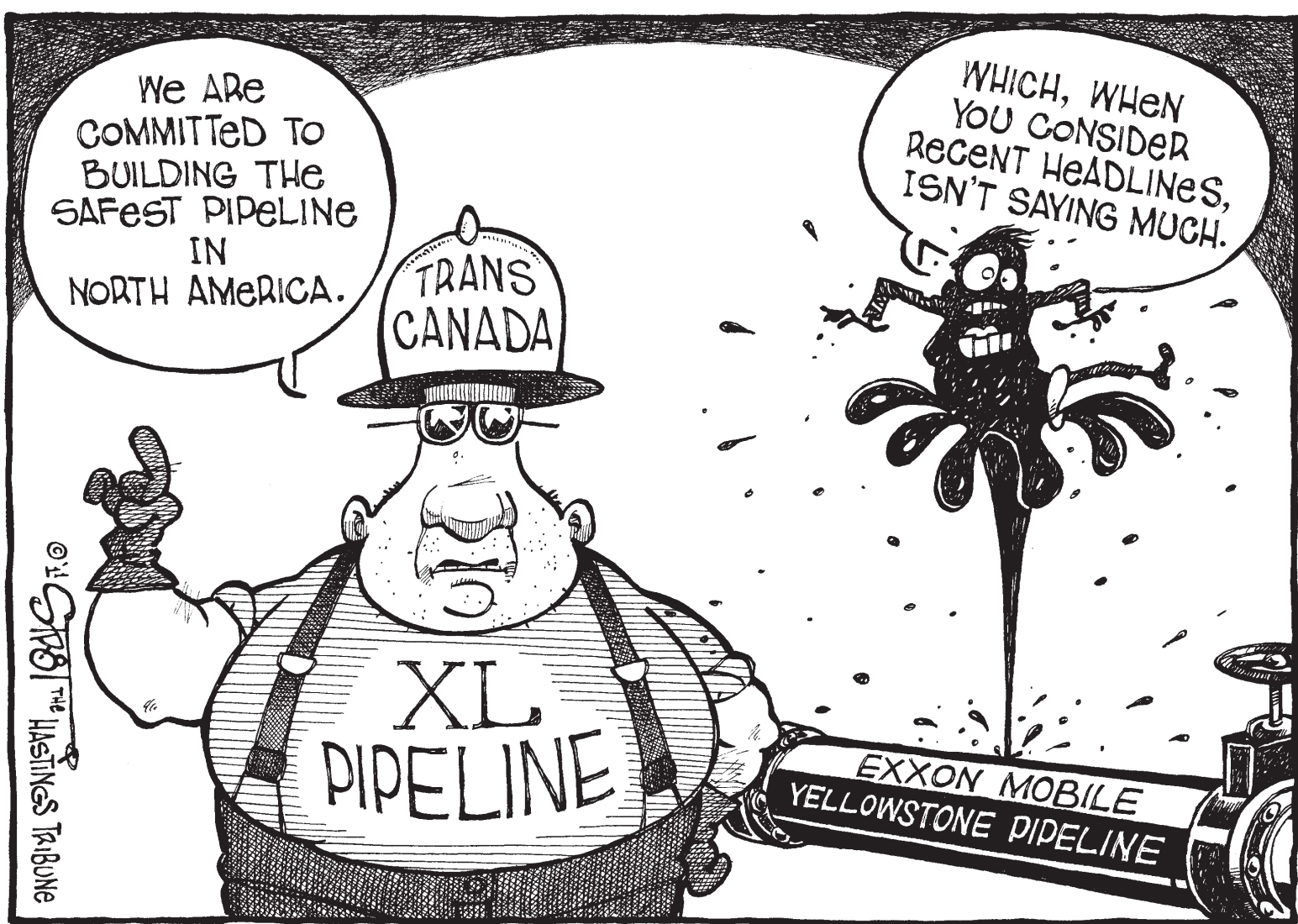
"Don't tell us it's all the other party's fault. Both sides brought us to this nightmare ball," said a *Clay Center Dispatch* editorial. "Don't think the last election was about putting Republicans in. It was about throwing incumbents out."

In an interview with *Time*, former Wyoming Sen. Alan Simpson was asked about the biggest obstacle to cutting the deficit.

"The absolute rigidity of the parties," he said. "I've never seen that before. Somebody said they're as rigid as a fireplace poker without the occasional warmth."

Asked about signing the Grover Norquist "no-tax" pledge Simpson said, "... no. Why would you sign anything before you went into office or before you had the debate and listened to it. I never signed it, and I never got defeated for re-election."

The next big battle inside the beltway will be the annual budget with a clock of 52 days until the end of September. We know the sides are already making pledges and painting themselves into corners to make the debt ceiling rhetoric look like a pre-game scrimmage. — Tom Betz



Explaining that lonesome whistle sound

*Well, if they freed me from this prison,
If that railroad train was mine,
I bet I'd move out over a little,
Farther down the line...*

*And I'd let that lonesome whistle,
Blow my Blues away.*

— "Folsom Prison Blues," Johnny Cash

Some people ride to Sturgis every year. We hear the cry of that lonesome whistle. It's *The Denver Post's* train to Cheyenne Frontier Days.

How do you explain that call to the uninitiated?

First of all, it's a genuine steam engine, the last big one in service today that's never been retired. Union Pacific 844, a war baby born to move troops and heavy limiteds, survived into the 1960s in snow-melting service in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Then someone at headquarters in Omaha decided she'd be ideal for pulling excursions and special trains. The big engine's been at it ever since, thrilling many thousands with her steamboat whistle and flashing drivers.

Then there's the train, a genuine 1950s streamliner, 22 gleaming matched yellow, red and grey cars, looking every bit as good as they did when built back in the 1950s. The train features seven sparkling dome cars, a dance car, snacks and beverages at your first-class-size seat.

There's simply nothing like it in the world. The train has been running every summer for 20 years now, revived by *Post* publisher Dean Singleton in 1991 to mark the paper's centennial. It's become a Denver tradition, and tickets sell out within a few days.

The original train to Frontier Days was designed by *Post* founder Frederick Bonfils to woo advertisers and politicians of the late Vic-



steve haynes

• along the sappa

torian Era. Only men were invited as guests; the only females aboard were leggy young women who gave out cigars and cigarettes. You couldn't buy a ticket; you had to be invited. And if you weren't, then likely you weren't much in Colorado's power structure.

Today, you pay your money and get your tickets. Profits go to *The Post's* foundation. Most riders go year after year, the waiting list is long. It's not so much the rodeo; it's the atmosphere and the ride. Some go for the whole afternoon; others go shopping.

The train draws governors, senators, congressmen and billionaires. The rear three cars are reserved for invited VIPs, but most riders are just people who like trains, rodeos or both. We've been going for most of the last 20 years, missing only a few trips where we had something else to do, didn't get tickets or — one year — just missed the train.

It's a long day, if not a long trip. The train leaves Denver promptly at 7 a.m. The air-conditioned cars are crisp in the post-dawn coolness, and that feels pretty good after the weather on the plains the last couple of weeks.

The big steamer, backed by a historic diesel from the 1960s, eases out of town and heads north, parallel to the sparkling, snow-capped Front Range. The train rolls along "past houses, farms and fields" as the riders digest a continental breakfast, cinnamon rolls, fruit, yogurt and granola.

Along the route, hundreds line up at every crossing, park and field. Whole families wave to the big engine and the people on the train.

Somehow, the word spreads.

On parallel U.S. 85, a couple dozen cars pace the train, slowing for the towns, taking pictures, speeding up in the country. The engineer lets the 844 gallop on at 60 mph, the maximum speed here, though she was built to run 100 and more.

Little, if any, film will die today, but thousands of photos and hours and hours of video will be framed. A pilot buzzes the train in a World War II era Stearman biplane. In Denver and again in Cheyenne, people gather up front to photograph the engine.

There's a big parade, and I'm amazed at Wyoming efficiency: instead of the traditional guys with brooms, a fleet of three street sweepers rolls up the end, scooping the horse manure and washing the pavement in one pass.

Busses take people to the rodeo grounds for a catered lunch before the show. Frontier Days, which claims to be the first rodeo, is like a county fair, a carnival, an Indian show and a stock exhibition all rolled into one, plenty of vendors and everything from hats to jewelry to trinkets and junk.

As the train pulls out for Denver at 5:30, everyone is tired from a day in the sun. They sit quietly, munching on box lunches and enjoying the cool air. But Cynthia wants to go to the dance car, where a country-rock band holds fourth. How could I imagine this would lead to a conversation with the son and grandson of a veteran editor I'd worked with at the old *Kansas City Times* more than 40 years ago?

But such is the cachet of the *Post* train; you meet people.

As we're rollin' home in the gathering dusk, the range turns golden, then purple, in the sunset. The train stops; someone has reported a pickup parked too near the tracks up ahead. We have to wait for police to shoo the offender away, so we'll be a little late.

No one seems to mind.

Unlike the days of yesteryear

In years past, most homes in rural Kansas were never locked. In fact, if there was a key around the house, few family members knew about it.

After living in a larger community for several years, I'd automatically lock my car without thinking whenever I used to visit my parents in rural Sheridan County.

The first few times my dad saw me do this he scolded me like I was still his boy of 12.

"What in the world are you doing?" Dad would ask. "Who in the devil do you think is going to drive away with that car of yours out here?"

Unfortunately, times change. Like their city cousins, farmers and rural homes are increasingly being burglarized.

In farm thefts and vandalism, mailboxes head the list as favorite targets of vandals and thieves. Cars, windows and signs are frequently damaged or destroyed.

As in town and cities, stereos, televisions, computers, cameras, appliances and small objects such as jewelry, hand tools and guns are stolen in rural home burglaries. These items are readily converted to cash, and represent most sought after burglary items.

Farm machinery, automobiles and livestock aren't beyond the scope of thieves in rural Kansas today.

The following suggestions may help prevent theft in your home, whether rural or urban.

*Make a complete security check of your home.

*Always maintain a lived-in look by keeping the lawn trimmed, leaves raked and the snow shoveled.

*Keep bushes and shrubs trimmed. Un-trimmed shrubs make good hiding places for



Insight this week

• john schlageck

burglars.

*If the neighbors can see the back of your house, you'll enjoy less privacy but be safer.

*Keep doors and entryways well lighted. Replace burned out bulbs immediately. Burglars do not like lights.

*Whether you are at home or away, keep garage doors closed and locked.

*Check the locks on all doors. Replace inexpensive locks with the dead-bolt type.

*When you move into a house have the lock tumblers changed by a locksmith.

*Check all windows to make sure they are locked.

*Secure all basement windows. In older homes, basement windows are easily forced.

*Place exterior lights in a strategic spot outside the house.

*Interior lighting is also important. Keep the living room and bathroom light on all the time whether you are home or not. Inexpensive timers are useful for turning various lights on or off.

*Install a wide-angle viewer in your door to allow you to recognize all visitors.

*Mark all your possessions with an engraving or invisible marking pen.

*Whenever you're going on a trip for more than a day or two, let your neighbors know about your plans. They'll be happy to swing by your home a couple times a day and they'll know you're not there and call the police if they

believe things aren't on the up and up.

Remember, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Don't be any easy target for thieves and burglars on your home, farm or ranch. Follow these time-tested methods for avoiding potential heartache.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

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