

from our viewpoint...

## Airline failures bad for passengers

News that other airlines are circling the carcass of bankrupt AMR Corp., parent of the venerable American Airlines, can't be good for the economy or the consumer.

American, once the biggest domestic carrier, undoubtedly struggled to compete with its merged megarivals, United-Continental and Delta, which itself picked clean the bones of bankrupt Northwest.

All four of the big carriers washed themselves through bankruptcy premerger, shaking out union contracts, pensions and restrictive work rules, terminal and aircraft leases, anything they thought they could get away with. Common stockholders, of course, were left holding the bag, along with retirees, airport operators and others.

In the self-centered world of business, none of that counts. It's a jungle, and survival indeed goes to the fittest, or the one with the most and best lawyers. That is not necessarily wrong, just true.

Then the big airlines set about getting bigger by gobbling up the competition. That blazed a trail that others want to follow. Today, a large airline, U.S. Airways, hopes to go mega by gobbling up American. U.S. Air itself used the name of a fallen carrier taken over by newcomer America West a few years ago. The original U.S. Air formed after regional carrier Piedmont feasted on the remains of bankrupt Eastern, and so on.

There remains virtually no holdover from the "legacy" airlines of yore, the pioneering firms like Continental and American and Trans World whose founders built empires in the days of small planes and government regulation. Just names and shattered dreams.

The men and women who run today's airlines see profits after bankruptcy, but they seem to prize size above all.

Unfortunately, that will make them, like the "Big Three" automakers and the megabanks before them, "too big to fail." And the next time an airline goes down, the entire economy will suffer. Taxpayers will be stuck with the bill.

Can't happen, someone will say.

Of course it will. Just watch.

The solution, as with banks and other businesses, is for the government to enforce antitrust laws and keep big businesses relatively small. You could argue over how small, but any firm that controls more than 20 percent of an industry ought to be suspect.

The purpose is not to control business or punish business people. Let them fight it out in the arena. But make it possible for startups like the highly successful, always profitable Southwest Airlines to prosper. Maintain a level, open playing field. Then stand back and watch. That's what government should do; not control, not bail out and never play favorites.

What happens if AMR does not fall to U.S. Air? Reportedly, Delta waits in the wings. And marketing partner British Airways is said to have a large stake – and say – in what happens.

But management says the firm can and will stand on its own. We believe it should have that chance, though the ones who led it into bankruptcy probably should not be rewarded with even-bigger contracts. That's a question for the board of directors, of course.

But airline customers and taxpayers – the rest of us who stand to have our pockets picked down the line – ought to favor an independent and healthy American over yet another big, big albatross just waiting to tumble. – *Steve Haynes*



## Zumba lessons tiring but fun

I'm learning to dance.

Well, I'm taking a few lessons anyway.

I love to dance. I dance at every opportunity.

Steve has learned to dance out of self defense.

Today, he enjoys dancing. I love it.

I dance at home, on vacation, even at work.

Turn on the radio, and I start to dance – which

can be kinda disconcerting when I'm driving.

I've been known to start dancing to radio music and keep it up when the evening news comes on.

But this a little different.

While I don't normally go in for crazes, I had a chance to take Zumba lessons with my friend Mary.

Mary has done this before and said, "Come on. It'll be fun."

She was right. It was fun. Also sweaty and tiring.

We followed a crowd of women and one

brave man into a cracker-box sized room. There were about two dozen of us, and not

enough room for proper stretching, much less dancing. But that was the space we had, and

the teacher lined us up in three long lines. Then



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

we switched around some, as the shorter of us moved under the ceiling fans and the taller ones near the walls to keep from being hurt when arms went up in the air.

The instructor was young, blond and perky – but then aren't they always?

Mary had told me that it didn't make any difference if I didn't do it "right." She said that half the people there were beginners.

She was right. Most of us didn't have a clue.

The instructor told us that she would show us the steps but that Zumba was more about exercise than dance.

Well, darn. I wanted to dance.

And dance I did.

She started us off with a warm up that had me panting.

And we were soon wiggling around like line

dancers with ants in our pants.

It was fun and exhilarating, tiring and sweaty. Everything that was promised, in other words.

It wasn't pretty, mind you. While one half of the class was following the instruction the other half was going the wrong way most of the time. But we were all moving and getting into the music and the spirit and having fun.

The class was an hour long, but I only lasted 30 minutes.

Thirty years ago, I did something of the same kind. I joined an exercise class and thought I could keep up. I hopped and bopped for an hour and could hardly crawl out of bed the next day.

That was 30 years ago, but it was a painful lesson I haven't forgotten.

I'll be taking a couple more classes and hope to get a little better, but I'm sure that I'm not going to get to be either a Zumba expert or wonderfully fit.

I'm just hoping to be able to get out of bed in the morning and be able to walk to the next class.

## Brass in Blue concert in Colby a great trip

The Brass in Blue concert held Thursday at the Colby High School auditorium was a great evening event for my wife and myself. We always enjoy attending this type of cultural event, and it is great this one was free.

Over the years The Goodland Star-News and Goodland School District have sponsored a number of military band concerts at Max Jones Fieldhouse and hope the Air Force, Navy and Army will make return visits to our community.

The concert on Thursday was our first visit to the Colby High School auditorium, and we found it to be a great venue for holding concerts and theatrical events.

One question brought up when the U.S. Navy Country Band was here in the fall was why we did not hold the concert in the Goodland High School auditorium.

When the military concert people contacted us about holding a concert they are looking for a place to hold an audience of 800 or more.

Sitting in the Colby auditorium the question occurred as to how many people the facility was designed to hold. A call to Colby on Friday revealed the auditorium holds 999 based on the seating.

In comparison the Goodland High School auditorium has a seating capacity of 268.

The Colby auditorium was not filled to capacity on Thursday, but it was a large crowd, and got us to thinking about the facilities our communities have for such events.

Growing up in Lamar, Colo. the city built the Community Building in 1950 about two blocks from my boyhood home. I was fascinated to find the Colby Community Building built in 1954 is a similar design to the Lamar Community Building down to the Little Theatre room.

The Lamar Community Building was expanded in the 80s with the addition of meeting rooms, additional dressing rooms and better



**tom betz**

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heating and air conditioning. The seating in Lamar is a bit smaller than what was built in Colby a few years later. Lamar's main seating area hold 860 individual seats and the stage area with roll out bleachers can add about 900 more. The floor will hold about 500 tables or about 700 seats.

The Colby Community Building has 1,082 individual seats and about 478 on the stage. The assumption is the floor in Colby would hold about the same number of tables or seats as the one in Lamar.

Sitting in the Colby auditorium listening to the great Brass in Blue concert got us thinking about the recent facilities meeting we attended at the Goodland School District office. A small group of about 15 spent more than an hour talking to Superintendent Bill Biermann about the financial and space problems facing the school district and the school board.

This time last year people were discussing and in some cases cussing the proposed expansion and remodel of North to allow the district to reduce to a two-building plan. The proposed bond issue of \$14 million was soundly defeated, but as Biermann said the problem the district is facing did not go away.

Biermann talked about a possible three-building plan keeping West Elementary, reopening North and move the seventh and eighth grades to the high school. He said the idea behind the small meetings is to gather input from the citizens, and he feels the school board is looking for a unified plan to eventually be presented to the voters.

Biermann said he did not feel the plan was

close to being defined, and does not expect to have a plan for several months. He said he was not hired to come up with a plan after the last one was defeated, but looking ahead he said he and the school board realize some decisions must be made about buildings.

One of the items mentioned in the meeting we attended was expanding the high school auditorium and to add more area behind the stage for theatrical presentations.

Biermann said he had thought about kicking the wall out to the north and adding on that way, but had no idea what it might cost and if it would be economical.

Another question was replacing the existing seating in the wonderful Max Jones Fieldhouse. Biermann said replacing the seating would be more than \$340,000, and did not know if seating would be part of the over all plan.

He suggested the addition of Northwest Tech basketball this fall would add to the use of the fieldhouse, and something of a joint effort including outside contributions might be the answer to new seating.

Expanding the auditorium is a small piece of the facilities discussions for the Goodland School District, but as the plans develop it will be something to keep in mind. We do not expect the Goodland auditorium to be as large as Colby's, but improved lighting and stage facilities would be a big improvement. The question will be if the school district and the voters are willing to make the investment in the auditorium as part of the over all district plan.

If you have not been to one of the small meetings we would encourage you to make the effort in the next week with the final two sessions at 8 a.m. on Monday and 7 p.m. on Thursday. Each meeting is limited to 30 people, and to sign up call the school district office at (785) 890-2397.

## where to write

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