

from our viewpoint...

Tuesday votes vital for Kansas caucuses

It's difficult to imagine a more exciting way to head into Super Tuesday, with a real horse race between two candidates. Super Tuesday is the traditional blitz day when 10 states hold primary elections. Ohio, Georgia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Alaska, Idaho, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia all hold primary elections.

Some have decried this drawn-out primary process, saying there should have been a clear-cut result by now, but a long and arduous race is the best way to test a candidate's mettle. Does he or she have the strength for the sprint of the General Election? Do they have skeletons in their closet? And the most pressing question of them all, which one does the majority of the party want? Those questions shouldn't be settled until all the votes are in.

Mitt Romney says he's strong in Ohio, and current polls back him up. In fact, it looks like Romney has the momentum around the country. The latest *Wall Street Journal* poll, 38 percent of likely Republican voters support Romney, compared to 32 for Rick Santorum. The poll shows Romney may be gaining support among voters who identify as "very conservative," a demographic he has had trouble courting.

Several prominent Republican leaders, including Sen. John McCain and Rep. Eric Cantor, say Super Tuesday will cement a Romney nomination, but he and Santorum are neck and neck in Tennessee.

Santorum was on an incredible rise going into last week, but a poor debate performance, campaign gaffs and Romney's sweep of last week's nominating contests have halted his momentum. Wins today could bring his flagging campaign back to life.

Neither of the two candidates didn't have a good week leading up to this deluge of primaries. Both Romney and Santorum were forced to walk back statements. Romney tried to get out from under criticism that he is too wealthy to understand common people, and Santorum had to clarify remarks about college education, religion and other social issues.

For former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, this is likely to be his swan song. He hasn't won a state since South Carolina. He knows he's on the ropes, and he's hoping for a big win in Georgia to try and regain some momentum. CNN says he is likely to win there, and if he is competitive anywhere else, he may still have a shot.

And what if Ron Paul gets some big wins? The Texas congressman hasn't yet come in first in a primary or caucus.

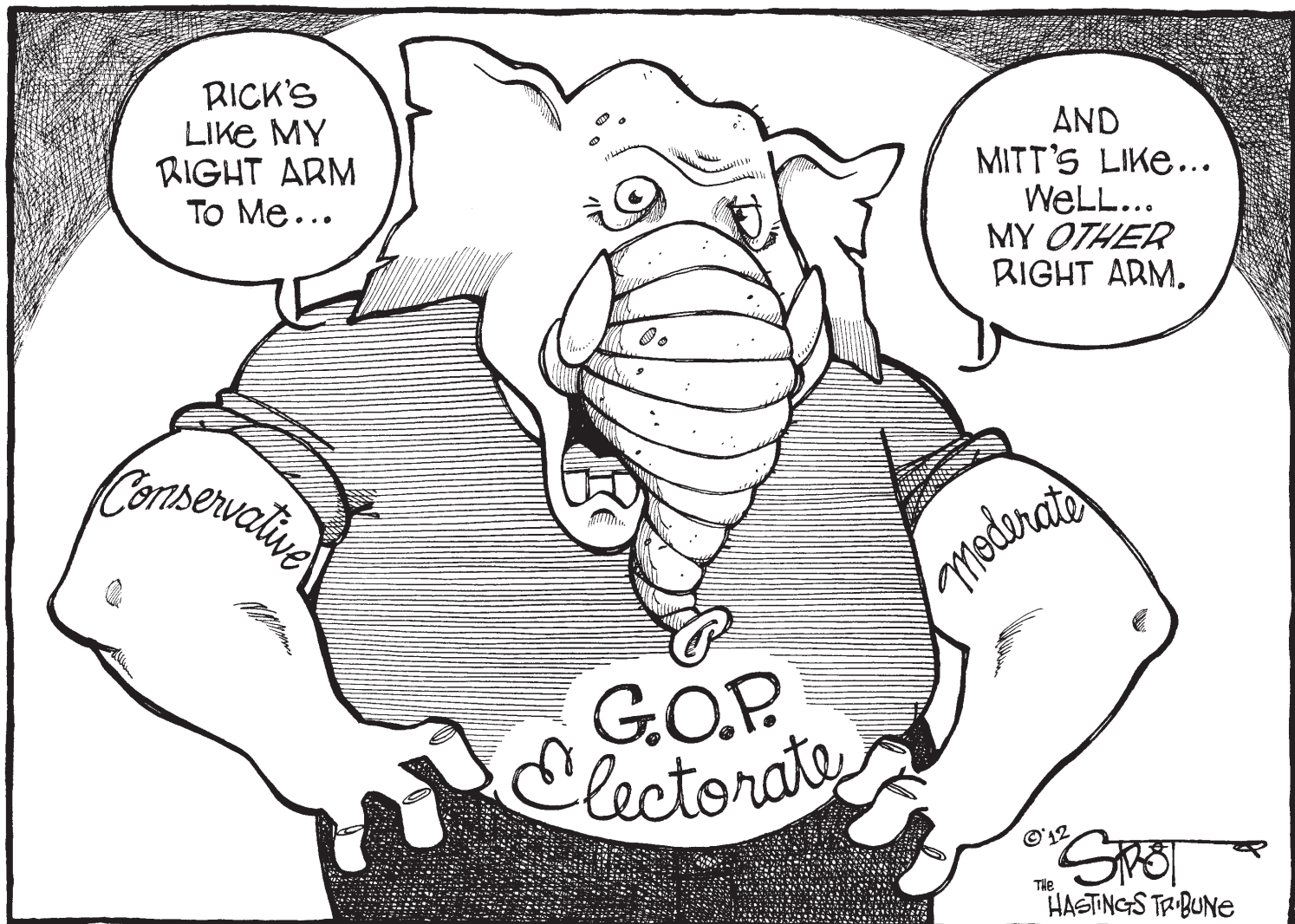
Will the Super Tuesday results come up with a clear winner, or will it continue to show a fractured party? We'll only know at the end of the day when the results come in.

What is important is what this will mean to Kansas voters. Our caucuses come up next weekend, and the outcome of Super Tuesday will affect the tenor of those caucuses. Kansas is not a battleground state in the General Election, but we could be a key player in the battle to nominate a new standard-bearer for the Republican Party.

If there's still a narrow margin between Romney and Santorum after Super Tuesday, the Kansas Caucuses become much more important. We may not have a lot of delegates, but in a close race, ours could help swing the primary in one direction or the other. If not, we might be too little, too late.

In either case, the best way to help steer the country in whatever direction you would like to see it go is to participate in government at any level, and local caucuses are a good place to start. The Sherman County Republican Caucus will be at 10 a.m. Saturday at the Sherman County Public Library. Be sure not to miss it.

—Kevin Bottrell



Speaker has message for rural America

The speaker at the recent Farmer and Rancher Appreciation Banquet in Oberlin had an important message for all of us, both farmers and ranchers and the business people who supported the banquet.

If we want to preserve our small-town, rural way of life, said Dr. Welden Slieght, dean of the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis, we need to act now before it's too late. He talked about his hometown in Idaho, where no one acted, and today, it's nearly too late to save a business community.

He asked Ryan May to come up and represent our youth. Rural America needs to bring its young people back home to take over or start businesses, he said. If no one does that, soon there will be no businesses and no farmers and ranchers to support them.

"We've got to keep Oberlin alive," Dr. Slieght said, "and the best way to do that is to bring Ryan (now a high school junior) back."

Every business owner and professional, he said, should ask a young person they know and feel is capable to consider coming back to take over their business. And while a graduate just out of college might not be able to buy out a large farming operation, he or she could start with, say, 100 cows, and build up a ranch.

The key, he said, pointing to population trends in both Kansas and Nebraska, is we've got to start asking, or pretty soon, everyone will be living in Johnson County, Omaha and Lincoln.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Interestingly, state Rep. Ward Cassidy echoed these thoughts just a few days later. At a "town hall" meeting in Oberlin, he stressed that rural towns need to find ways to bring their young people back.

Those who aren't in business can do their part by supporting businesses here, Dr. Slieght said, and not spending their money in other towns. He was especially critical of Walmart, which he said contributes nothing to towns like Oberlin, Atwood and St. Francis.

"A hundred dollars spent at Walmart brings \$15 back to McCook," he said, "and nothing back to Oberlin. A hundred dollars spent in Oberlin puts \$45 back into Oberlin."

"Is it worth saving a few dollars for that?" (And we might add, the benefits of shopping in locally owned stores in Colby and Goodland are similar.)

People shop out of town mostly for clothes, groceries and household products, Dr. Slieght said, even when those products may be available at home.

"Why?" he asked. One of the big reasons people give is "the store at home isn't open." "I'll bet we could go to the Walmart park-

ing lot right now and find Kansas cars with Decatur County plates," he said. "We've got to change that."

He said his college is pushing programs to allow graduates to get into business or start farm operations, because only those with experience and some capital built up will be able to take over larger operations later.

But the rest of us, farmers, ranchers, business owners, government workers and educators, the whole town, need to pull together for each other and the future of Oberlin, of rural America.

Instead of just sending our kids off to college, he said, we need to ask them to plan on coming home, and then help make that possible.

Today, too often, rural people think it's enough to raise money to send our kids off to college. Before World War II, that might have worked. Since 1950, though, the shift to the city has become more pronounced with each census. While most of us value our rural lifestyle — low crime, no traffic, clean air, lots of countryside and outdoor opportunities — we're not doing much to save it except wringing our hands.

But if each of us would make an effort to ask just one student to come back, to buy just a few more things in town, to do a little more business here, things might change. If every business did just a little to encourage more shopping here — not just complain that people go to other towns — we might just make it.

Should elections be publicly financed?

A college friend of mine, a conservative Republican from Chicago, backs publicly funded federal elections.

When pressed a couple years ago, he explained his reasoning. Under such a system, members of Congress would arrive in Washington beholden to the citizens who elected them instead of the special interests that currently elect our congressmen.

This conversation came back to me last November as my civic club listened to our congressman speak over lunch. By coincidence, that same day the congressional Supercommittee in Washington announced that they had been unable to reach agreement on a plan to cut the nation's deficit. As we filed out that afternoon, another members remarked to me, "What you heard here today was a demonstration of the problem."

The comment stayed with me, and I felt compelled to define the "problem" to which he referred. One member had asked the congressman if he could think of anything they (the two parties) might be able to agree on in the next few months.

My reflections led me to the following definition: Congress is largely dysfunctional because it is dominated by ideologues who are controlled by special interests, who as a result are unwilling or unable to compromise to solve the nation's problems.

Campaign finance reports shed further light on this thesis.

Congressional campaign finance reports can be viewed by anyone these days on the website www.fec.gov. I naturally started by looking at the report of my own congressman, and that of the congresswoman from the Kansas 2nd District, since the latest redistricting map floating around shows my city moving into her district.

For the fourth quarter of 2011, the congressman from the 1st District raised \$138,028. A whopping 53 percent of all the money he raised, \$72,986, came from Political Action Committee donations.

Only one of these came from an entity listing an address in his district. Twenty-three listed a Washington address, and the rest came from



a voice of reason

• alan jilka

11 other states. A sampling of committees that gave the congressman between \$2,500 and \$5,000 last quarter alone includes Koch Industries, Honeywell International, Alston and Bird, and the Build PAC.

The congresswoman the 2nd District is in her second term, and has further mastered the art of raising money from these committees. In the fourth quarter of 2011, she raised \$225,522, with 58.8 percent of the haul, \$132,750, coming from PACs.

Her report shows only one such donation from an address in her district out of her total of 93. Thirty-nine donors listed a Washington address, with the rest coming from 18 states. Donors of \$5,000 include the Prosperity PAC, American Seniors Housing Association PAC, the Freedom PAC, and the Waddell and Reed PAC.

Kansas doesn't have any Democratic members of Congress, so I checked on a Democrat from a neighboring state. Diana DeGette

represents a district in the Denver area. In the fourth quarter of 2011, she raised \$141,733, with 51.7 percent (\$73,250) coming from PACs. This affection for PAC money is a bipartisan affair.

I shared these statistics with a friend and he shrugged them off. Maybe we've become numb to the whole process.

You can't blame the members of Congress for devoting most of their time to chasing PAC money. That's the system under which they operate. But the result is that we are governed by the individuals who are the most successful at raising this money. This begs the question: Are we well-served by the compromises they have to make in this process? Members will, at the end of the day, represent those who elect them (i.e. those who pay for their campaigns).

I'm not sure if my friend's solution (publicly-financed campaigns) is the remedy. But the cause of effective governance requires a serious discussion of reforms needed to make our system work better for all of us.

Alan Jilka of Salina is vice president of Jilka Furniture, former mayor of Salina and a one-time Democratic candidate for Congress in the Kansas 1st District.

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