

from our viewpoint...

# Etch-A-Sketch guy just talking strategy

Unless we look for it, we as voters don't often see behind the scenes of the big national campaigns. When we do, we don't often like what we see. You've likely heard about a Mitt Romney staffer referring to the campaign as an Etch-A-Sketch, and the resulting feeding frenzy among his opponents.

Eric Fehrstrom, talking to CNN, said that if Romney gets the nomination, the campaign would hit a metaphoric reset button.

"It's almost like an Etch a Sketch," he said. "You can kind of shake it up and we start all over again."

Romney's opponents, both Republican and Democrat, seized on the comment, saying it reflect Romney's shifting political positions. Whether or not you believe Mitt Romney is a flip-flopper is a whole other issue, but it seems clear that Fehrstrom was referring to campaign strategy rather than his candidate's principals.

Campaign tactics and strategies often have little to do with a candidate's actual positions. Conventional wisdom says that in a primary, you try to win the base of your party and in the general, you try to win undecideds while holding onto your base. This is how you win elections.

Think of it this way. Ohio is always one of the battleground states. It's a crucial swing state that went for Clinton, Bush and Obama, but never by more than 50 percent. Romney won 456,513 votes in the primary there on March 6. That's 37.93 percent of the Republican voters of the 1.2 million who turned out.

In the 2010 midterms, about 3.96 million people voted in the general election. So to carry that state with 50 percent, Romney would have to get about 1.5 million more votes.

How do you go about getting those votes? That's tricky. Something about him wasn't resonating with a lot of Ohio Republicans and he would need to win undecideds. So when or if he comes back campaigning in the general election, he would have to change things up, talk about different issues, go to different venues, run different commercials, etc.

Campaigns are also often forced to make mid-course corrections, whether because the message isn't reaching the right people, because mistakes force a reshuffling of staff or because the strategy simply isn't bringing in the results

Take Ronald Reagan, for example. Despite initially having a big lead over incumbent Jimmy Carter going into the general election of 1980, the actor-turned presidential candidate had a big problem with moderates. He had supported state's rights in Mississippi (which people were using to support segregation), angered China over Taiwan, supported the Vietnam war, and made other missteps that didn't endear him to moderates and helped Carter close the gap considerably. But after hiring a new political consultant, the campaign was able to refocus and shift the message away from Reagan's foibles and onto Carter's record.

Although he only won narrowly in the popular vote, he had an electoral college landslide: 489 to 49.

It's also worth noting that Reagan lost a primary election to Gerald Ford four years earlier. Obviously he did things differently the second time around, defeating six opponents including CIA Director George H.W. Bush, and Kansas Sen. Bob Dole.

Whatever the candidate's motives and intentions are, campaigns are all about winning, and it takes different campaigning to win a primary than it does to win a general. So go easy on the Etch-A-Sketch guy, because he has it right. A campaign might do well enough to squeak by in the first round, but has to be able to move quickly on its feet, or it risks getting knocked out in the second round. —Kevin Bottrell



## Class warfare undercut by facts

Progressives, Liberals, Socialists and Communists all rally around a good class warfare speech. President Obama seems to be on a Jihad of Class Warfare and the "crowd" loves it. He smells victory at the polls if he can just divide enough of us — facts-be-damned!

During President Obama's Last Official Class Warfare speech (AKA the State of the Union) he trotted out billionaire Warren Buffet's secretary, Ms. Bosanek, as a prop to make the point that she pays a higher tax rate than Mr. Buffet does. Of course, he doesn't share what her income is but Forbes Magazine computed, using IRS tables, that she must make well over \$200,000 per year. Clearly, Ms. Bosanek isn't just any old secretary. She's doing well and instead should be held up for her success! Silly me, you can't have a class warfare speech if you commend people for succeeding.

President Obama highlighted how unfair it is that Ms. Bosanek pays 35.8 percent in taxes while Mr. Buffet pays only 17.4 percent.

Perhaps President Obama is ignorant of how our tax laws work or perhaps he doesn't want the facts to screw up a good class-warfare



guest columnist

• ken klemm

speech but, here are the facts:

Companies such as those owned by Warren Buffet are taxed at a top federal rate of 35 percent. Investors like Mr. Buffet pay an additional 15 percent federal capital gains tax when they take the remaining profits out for their personal benefit. Add on to that state and local income taxes, then Mr. Buffet didn't just pay a tax rate of 15 percent, but in fact, paid way over a 50 percent tax rate on his company profits. In other words, on the next dollar one of his companies makes, he is only going to have 45 cents left by the time it gets in his pocket.

But that's not all.

These investors take their money and invest it in a company with no guarantee of return. Sometimes these companies go belly up and their investment is lost and sometimes they hit

it big. Nevertheless, the tax man, who stands zero risk, can take over half the profits.

Contrast this to how Ms. Bosanek gets paid. She gets paid each week, or month, regardless if the company is profitable. She stands no risk. Of course, in the highly unlikely event that Mr. Buffet's company were to become unprofitable and close up shop she would still be entitled to her last wages, unemployment insurance (paid for by Mr. Buffet) and most likely an nice retirement plan also paid for by Mr. Buffet. Mr. Buffet's and Ms. Bosanek's income and tax rates are not comparable.

If we were to raise capital gains taxes even higher, as Mr. Obama proposes, we would see even more investor money head for foreign shores. Many economists feel that one of the best ways to jump-start the economy would be to eliminate capital gains taxes to spur investment, building and job creation. I agree. It has worked and is working now for many other nations and while it won't make for a good class-warfare speech it will strengthen America.

## Long wait for rain this year

It's becoming an all too familiar refrain among western Kansas farmers, "We need rain."

Last year's drought has continued into 2012. The wheat crop was planted late and many farmers doubled the normal planting rate and drilled 90 to 120 pounds per acre versus 50 to 60 pounds per acre in a normal year.

Because there was little to no subsoil moisture in the ground, the wheat crop started slowly once it germinated. Very little growth occurred until beneficial rains fell in November and December.

In January nearly a foot of snow blanketed a large region of wheat fields in southwestern Kansas. Since that time the crop has received scant rainfall and the crop is heading south in a hurry.

"We need rain," says veteran Gray County farmer/stockman Joe Jury. Annual rainfall averages approximately 20 inches in the sand hills he farms.

People often ask Jury how he can grow crops on that amount of moisture.

"I'd love to have an average rainfall of 18-20 inches in one year," the Gray County crop producers say. "I can grow a wheat or milo crop on that amount of moisture."

In 2011 the small farming community of Ingalls, that Jury calls home, recorded less than six inches of rainfall.

"You can't grow much of a crop with that little moisture," he says. "Last year we turned our cows on pasture in late April and started feeding them the first of June. We've been feeding them ever since and I'm afraid we'll do the same this year unless we receive rain



Insight this week

• john schlageck

and soon."

As of mid-March the wheat crop was beginning to suffer from a lack of moisture. Eighty degree days, winds of 50 and 60 mile-per-hour and 15 percent humidity are sucking dry what little moisture remains in the soil.

In his region of southwestern Kansas some crop farmers have already stripped some of their fields to stop the wind from blowing the soil out of their fields. Feedlots west of Garden City have been cleaned out of manure that has been spread on wheat fields in an attempt to keep them from blowing.

"We're starting to get beat up already," Jury says. "Without additional moisture, we can't afford to lose the remaining soil moisture we have. It could get ugly."

That's why Jury and some producers who have heard about the Dirty '30s and remember the drought of the early '50s are looking at alternative crops this spring instead of the traditional fall crops of corn and soybeans. He'll probably park his 30-inch planter and hook up to his drills because row crops may not provide enough cover his land will need to keep the soils in place.

Jury plans to plant pearl and German millets,

sedan grass and forage sorghums. With the drought of 2011, he didn't grow any crops. He planted milo but it hardly emerged from the soil before it died so what little residue and stalks that remain on his land are from wheat and milo stubble back in 2010 - hardly enough to keep his valuable soil in place.

"This cover is degrading every day and it's pretty sparse," Jury says. "We've got to plant these alternative crops and get something to grow and cover our soil up out here."

The Gray County farmer has no-tilled for many years and believes that without this practice there would already be dust piles in southwestern Kansas with conventional tillage.

Like last year, farmers in southwestern Kansas are staring the probability of another major drought straight in the face. Farmers like Jury are thankful they have crop insurance and the livestock business has buoyed up their faltering crop production. For strictly dry-land farmers it's been a real bust.

"I'll say it again, we need rain and we need continuous rains during the next few months to make this crop business happen out here," Jury says. "My dad had a saying that it always rains at the end of a drought. I'm hoping and praying this doesn't turn into several years of little moisture."

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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