

from our viewpoint...

Primaries begin fun of political process

Iowa and New Hampshire have opened the political primary season and have given Mass. Sen. John Kerry the spotlight as the winner.

These are the opening round of the presidential nomination process which will continue until the national conventions in late summer, and then the stretch to the election in November.

It seems like yesterday we were waiting for the United States Supreme Court to settle the Florida election mess, and declare George W. Bush the winner — here we go again.

There are nine Democrats vying for the honor of facing Republican George Bush in the election, and today the polls would indicate none of the Dems have a chance of winning in November.

The political optimist will hear that and say 'a lot of things can happen in 10 months, and as the number of Dems thins out the focus will become clearer.'

For those who do not ponder the pros and cons of the two-party system the primaries are something of a circus, take up otherwise important time from their daily news programs and interrupt their favorite programs.

This year's election will be a bit more free wheeling than those of recent years because the Republicans have amassed so much money they will not have to abide by the spending limits of the federal election process and will not take any of the money the taxpayers have been earmarking for these elections.

Bush said he will not take any federal money, and his war chest is bigger than any on record. This is the type of election that spawned the federal election commission and the campaign finance act to limit political spending.

Since the federal election commission was created taxpayers have been given the option of checking the box on their income tax form to help fund national elections. That seems to have been a successful strategy giving each side an equal share of the earmarked money for the election process.

One of the complaints citizens have about the two-party system is it is geared to those who give the largest donations. Those inside the party circle know it takes a lot of money to run any state-wide or national campaign. It is a never-ending process raising the money, and trying to get the candidate's message and image out to the voters.

The unfortunate part of the process which slides by a large portion of the voting population is that unless they are registered as a Democrat or Republican what happens in the primaries and the national conventions is out of their hands. No matter what party you are a member of the fact you participate in the process of selecting the person whose name appears on the ballot gives you the right to cheer or complain about the outcome.

Politics is the interaction of people with a like set of beliefs, and the objective is to select the "best" person to represent those beliefs in the election. Each party will try to display their set of beliefs in the best light and attempt to convince enough of those who are outside the party to join in electing their person because he is the best one to lead the country.

The process has left the starting gate, and there is time for those on the sidelines to get into the action. While we watch the national process unfold it is good to remember there are similar political processes on a more local basis which deserve attention and participation. — Tom Betz



Book, popcorn perfect for enjoying snow

I don't know about you, but before Christmas, where I live, the ground was covered with snow.

It seemed early for so much snow, but farmers were thrilled to have the moisture for next year's wheat crop.

For a day or so, quite a few people were inconvenienced, some activities were cancelled, some parents and grandparents worried. Shopkeepers bemoaned their holiday sales losses, but, truth be told, the world really didn't stop turning.

It was a beautiful snow — exceptional for Kansas — as there was no wind with it. I wanted to pretend that I was snowed in, absolutely unable to get out to interact with the world.

I thought a good book and some popcorn would make the winter scene just perfect - from the warmth of my easy chair. The electricity didn't go off; the world seemed somehow hushed. A good time to commune with the Creator of it all.



lorna g t

• commentary

But of course there are other people — the ambitious, the snow-lovers, who can't wait to get outside and prove their mastery of nature. They get cabin fever at just the suggestion they can't hop in their vehicles and leave home. So they are out shoveling, being the first to make a track in the beautiful snow God provided. Too many were just wanting to escape the house, not necessarily get out to enjoy the snow with their children.

I remember enjoying snow when I was small.

My dad (Alferd Vernon Gotchall) and uncles would build a sled about six-feet long (evidently never saved, because we always had to build a new one every winter).

Then adults and kids alike would take turns piling on the sled, and we would be pulled behind the car through the streets of our little town. My dad always insisted on driving; he knew he would not be reckless.

A good time was had by all, and there was no fear of auto insurance claims, lawsuits, or government restrictions. Those things happen when people don't act responsibly and/or want to blame others for their inattention or immaturity.

One year in Colorado Springs, I was discouraged by the numerous snowfalls. I was working out of the home, so had to get out and join the crazies on the slick roads. I commented to a chaplain friend of mine (Col. Charles Hadlock): "Wouldn't it be great if God could arrange it so that snow only fell where there weren't roads and streets?"

He merely smiled and replied: "He did."

Think about it.

Flying coach is not pleasant experience

Maybe every adventure these days has to begin in the back of the coach cabin of an overcrowded 777.

I can tell you, it's not very romantic. They have taken all the "leg room" out of coach, and they've started shaving away the lap room. And planes are full of boorish people who think it's still OK to lean back and drop your seat into the next person's lap.

I am writing this with the keyboard resting on my chest so I can see the screen of my computer. The woman ahead of me is reading a trashy novel and probably had no idea the havoc she is causing back here.

I know, there are some who would lose no sleep if I could not write, but where there is a will, there is a way.

The airlines won't let me bring anything sharp on board, and it would be bad form to pour my soda down her back. So I will take my revenge out in print.

She'll never see this column, but if she should, she'd have a hard time proving anything. In Kansas, truth is an absolute defense for charges of libel or defamation, although I think I am over Virginia right now. I can't see out the window, so I'm not sure.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

The woman to my right wears a mask to protect her from germs and spends her time reading New Age religious tracts. One tells about converting the Jews of Palestine. She is reading the Bible right now, but she seems pleasant enough. I read the Bible, too, sometimes.

With new security, we are strapped into our seats while we approach Washington. There is so little room in coach that it would be difficult to stage an uprising.

This airline, which shall remain nameless, but whose initials are UAL, has made diminishment of the airline experience an art form.

Time was when flying was an adventure eagerly awaited. Today it more to be endured.

And United has driven the last nail into the coffin of that great oxymoron, airline food.

Over the years, the airline meal shrank from a lunch on a tray to a sandwich to a snack contained in a tiny box. Still, the snack usually was

edible and nourishing, perhaps a small sandwich and some fruit, with a cookie.

Such opulence is a thing of the past. Free snacks consist of tiny pouches of tiny pretzels, or some such. If you want a box lunch, it's \$10, cash or credit card.

And this may be hard to believe, but the quality is actually worse than the former free snack. My sandwich, supposedly prepared by a national chain restaurant, included stale bread, soggy bacon and tasteless cheese.

It is plastic food at its finest, a triumph of airline ingenuity. Who would have thought they could not only make the food worse, but start charging you for it?

Why am I complaining? I can type by contorting myself, I can throw the stale bread away, I will smile at the cabin attendant when she asks me how my flight was.

To tell her the truth risks an encounter with security.

I will change planes at Dulles, leaving there on Air France. You know how the French feel about their food, their wine and their service.

So I remember once again why I do not like to fly United.

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