

from our viewpoint...

## Conventions over, 54 days to decision

The Republican and Democratic conventions are behind us, and the campaign stretch has begun, with 54 days remaining until the the first Tuesday in November.

This was a strange year for conventions, with both parties having chosen their nominee long before. Both were designed mostly to play to the prime time television audiences.

One commentator said he thought the old exciting conventions were a thing of the past, and that probably in the future, the Republicans and Democrats will have their delegates gather and party for the weekend, do about three hours of actually convention for the television networks on Monday and Tuesday, and that would be it. He suggested they might keep the main speech from the nominee on Wednesday, but felt that really could be the windup to the Tuesday television show.

Over the next eight weeks, the gnashing of teeth over the military records of both George Bush and John Kerry will continue to surface among the waves of rhetoric. The evidence so far is that Kerry is unfit to command because he came home and worked against the Vietnam War along with millions of other people in 1971, and that Bush is unfit to command because he found politics in Alabama more important than making his National Guard weekends.

These should not be the main reason someone decides to vote for either man, but there will be lots of charges and counter charges between the two camps. Many citizens feel these tactics are a good reason to stay away from politics; they are not members of either major party.

Referred to as the “great unwashed,” those who cling to the No Party Affiliation on their registration seem to always complain about the choices on the November ballot, but do not want to be part of the decision process.

Now that the conventions are over, the Democrats and Republicans will focus their efforts to convince the unaffiliated that their guy is the best choice. Neither of the major parties has enough members to control the national election; to win, they must attract the unaffiliated.

There are splinter parties who have members across the nation, and seek the same unaffiliated voters. In a close vote, there numbers might throw the election into doubt or keep either major party from winning and it would end up in the House of Representatives. This is the stuff political science theories and doctoral thesies feed on.

The polls continue to show this a close race for the White House, and it will be interesting to watch the pundits as they try to divine the winner before any of us have entered the voting booth.

Politics is a global game we all are involved in, whether we are affiliated with a party or not. Politics is everywhere, and will be a daily story for the next 54 days to Nov. 2. — *Tom Betz*

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## The cat lady seems to be getting out of hand

It’s pretty widely known that, when it comes to cats, my wife is crazy, but I think things may be getting out of hand.

It all started when youngest daughter took her two cats to our house in Colorado last year.

She was spending the summer, or thought she was, and she had to take the cats or find someone to keep them. That made sense to me. (In fact, she wound up in the hospital back in Kansas and had to find someone to feed them in Colorado. Go figure.)

Lindsay was waiting tables while on break from her teaching job. She said the cats liked the house fine, but she had to make them stay inside after one tangled with a raccoon.

When we went for a week’s vacation, though, it gave Cynthia ideas.

“I kind of liked having a cat there,” she said, with a twinkle in her eye.

I should have seen it coming. When we packed up to go close the house in October, she slipped a cat carrier into the car.

It was just April Alice, the calm cat. April travels well. She just sits in the carrier all day, saying nary a thing until you exceed her kidney limit.

Until then, we had paid a friend to bring in the mail and feed the cats when we went on vacation. I was fine with that. I can go a week without petting a cat.

Apparently, though, some people can’t.

Now, you could say this is my fault, because I



## steve haynes

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do take the dog to Colorado. And Cynthia always says she’s my dog, because I brought her home.

Fair enough, though I am not the one who buys her bones and toys for her trips.

We started taking her because she is wild and rambunctious and likes to run, and Colorado is full of wide-open spaces. Annie likes cold, wet, water and a place to run, so the mountains are perfect for her.

But Cynthia always said the best thing about cats was that you can leave them at home and they don’t take much care. Cats need food and water, but you can leave that out in big bowls. Ours just need someone to let them in and out once a day.

A dog, you have to feed daily. If you left a big bowl of food, the dog would eat it the first day and starve by the seventh.

Anyway, I don’t remember anything in that rap about taking the cats with you. Still, I was fine with April Alice, because she travels well and the first night she was there, she caught a mouse, making her useful as well as decorative.

## Our fragile food supply

By Dennis Keeney

*Prairie Writers Circle*

The capacity of the world’s commercial agriculture to produce sufficient food faces some severe tests.

Food is full of paradoxes. Currently there is enough produced to adequately feed the billion people on the planet, yet nearly a billion are underfed.

In the rich United States, 35 million people, including nearly 13 million children, experience hunger or the threat of hunger, yet at least that many Americans are obese.

The best land in America produces two low-value commodity crops that are mostly not consumed by humans, at least not directly — corn and soybeans. They are used instead for animal feed and increasingly for biomass fuel, such as ethanol.

Commodity-driven agriculture brings many ills — economic, environmental and social. The short list includes soil erosion and depletion, nitrogen fertilizer contamination of drinking water, fouled lakes and rivers, damage to the Gulf of Mexico’s fisheries, pesticide contamination and feedlot pollution.

Often not considered: the loss of farms because government programs favor consolidation and ever-larger farm operations, and the destruction of Third World agriculture, which can’t compete against the subsidized farmers of rich nations.

Rather than address these problems, federal farm and export programs worsen them while costing taxpayers billions of dollars.

Consider these further challenges:

• Water shortages for irrigation are becoming common worldwide because of poor water use and increased agricultural, urban and industrial demand. While irrigated farming is



## prairie writers circle

- dennis keeney

practiced on about 20 percent of the world’s agricultural land, it produces more than 40 percent of the food.

• Animal diseases threaten meat, milk and egg supplies, and plant diseases threaten to decimate corn and soybean production.

• Land continues to revert to deserts or is covered in concrete. Soil erosion removes more soil than is formed. Most threatening over the long term is climate change that within 50 years will greatly change agriculture in the Midwest.

• China’s huge and expanding economy is sucking in grain, posing a further challenge to our food supply. Last year saw a continued decline in worldwide grain stockpiles in spite of increasing production. Coarse grain stocks are now the lowest in three decades, with only about a 50-day supply — 70 days is considered necessary for food security.

• Short of global apocalypse from disease or war, the world economy will continue to expand, and population, especially in the Third World, will continue to grow. An increasingly affluent population that demands diets high in animal protein will require more grain to produce more animal products.

• More food will not come from more land because, aside from fragile lands in Brazil, there is little new land left to exploit. New technologies will help, but we have peaked on the benefits of many of them. The green leaf can convert only so much energy to carbohydrates

Then last week, Cynthia shows up at the car with two cat carriers. This did not look good, because the other cat, Molly Monster, hates to travel. She cries the whole time she’s in a car and tries to destroy the upholstery.

“Not to worry,” the cat lady says, producing a bottle of kitty tranquilizers. “The cat will be calm.”

Now, giving a cat a pill involves shoving it down the cat’s throat, past the teeth, and with a normal cat, it can be quite an adventure.

“Leave me out,” I said. Yeah, I’m chicken. They don’t call Molly the Monster for nuthin’.

I have to admit, the pills kept her meows down to a dull whine. Her eyes went screwy and she laid down in her carrier.

And I have to admit, she seemed to enjoy her time at the new house, at least until the cat lady tried to give her another pill for the trip home. I think a fingertip may have been damaged in that struggle.

She actually seemed to like being in Colorado better than being at home. When we’re gone, she gets lonely and leaves little “presents” around the house. Then she snubs us for a day or so after we get back.

So it looks like we’ll be traveling with three pet carriers for a while, and we may need a bigger truck.

But hey, a cat lady has to have something to pet, right?

and proteins.

If these problems coalesce, there is the strong possibility that the food supply cannot be sustained. Food shortages, dramatic increases in food costs, lowered exports and worldwide pressure on food supplies could result. Food could become a precious commodity, available only to rich nations.

How the world responds to the global challenges in food supply will be critical.

Adoption of healthy diets based on less animal protein, lower energy use throughout the economy, and policies to help build strong rural communities and promote farming methods that protect the environment would help. However, such changes are difficult and likely would come slowly. They require research, public involvement and major reversals in federal policies. Moreover, they require us to think big rather than working on small, disjointed half solutions.

Equally important, the United States and other food-rich nations must redouble their support of food self-sufficiency in food-short nations of Asia and Africa. Lessons learned from the Green Revolution must be applied. Neither food sufficiency nor ecological sustainability can be achieved by exporting inappropriate western technologies.

Agriculture has served the world in the past and it will do so in the future. Now is the time to make decisions to ensure sustainability. The welfare of our grandchildren demands no less.

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### garfield

