

Anchorage Daily News

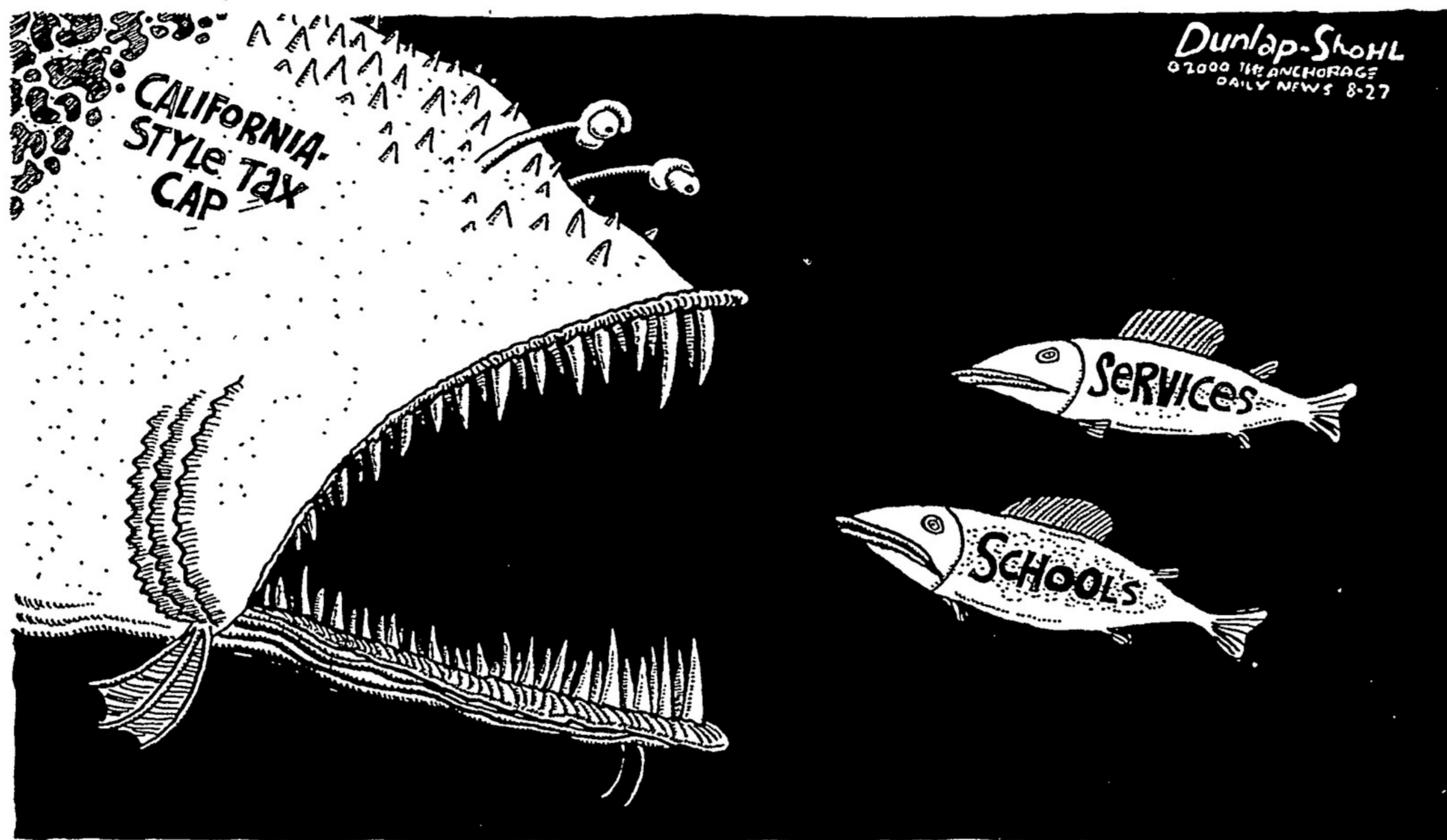
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WHILE ALASKANS ARE WORRYING ABOUT EXOTIC IMPORTED SPECIES...

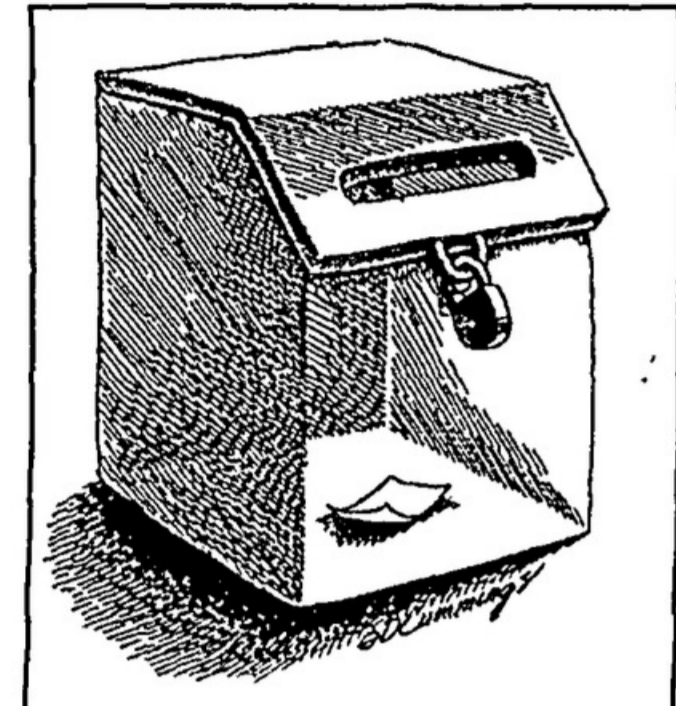
Turnout

The numbers were mighty poor

Turnout in Tuesday's primary election was in the neighborhood of 18 percent. That's the poorest primary turnout in memory.

What happened? Why the lack of interest? For starters, many races were noncompetitive. Many candidates did not have primary opponents. A few will not have opponents in the November general election.

Without a gubernatorial election or a race for the U.S. Senate, Alaska's lone congressional seat was at the top of the ballot. Rep. Don Young has held this seat for almost two decades, and in this primary, his challengers were invisible.



There were no ballot propositions before the voters. Typically, ballot propositions draw not only the most regular voters but thousands of those who rarely turn out. You can bet that the November election ballot, studded with the tax-cap proposal, the wolf initiative and the hemp initiative among others, will produce long lines of voters.

Some precincts had turnouts so low that the election workers must have cheered whenever a voter deigned to walk through the door — for example, precinct number 297 in Anchorage's House District 14 (Rep. Lisa Murkowski's district).

Of 6,751 voters, less than 1 percent turned out, although the Division of Elections conceded that absentee and questioned ballots could push the turnout above 1 percent in this mostly Elmendorf area.

For the district as a whole, turnout was 7 percent or so — less than one in 12 registered voters and less than half the statewide average.

"Yes, this is a poor turnout," said University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato when the results were described to him, "but in Virginia we have precincts with no turnout."

How could this be possible? "Because people register in these places, for whatever reason, but all their attachments are someplace else. These precincts have a ghost population. The Second Congressional District in Virginia, for example — Norfolk and the Navy bases — has the lowest turnout for any Congressional district because of the transience of the people." Folks are counted by the census, they register to vote — and move on.

This Elmendorf precinct may be similar, suggests professor Sabato. After all, he said, there are only two explanations for such poor turnout.

Either something is structurally wrong with the makeup of the precinct that distorts participation levels — people registered there actually are somewhere else, for instance — or the people who live in the precinct have an exceptional lack of interest in community affairs, including voting.

The turnout Tuesday was low, no question about it. But the turnout figure also probably was deflated by ghost voters long departed.

Clean cruising

DEC does right to test the big ships

The state Department of Environmental Conservation tested wastewater on five cruise ships this month and found filth.

Both galley and laundry water in one sample, for example, were home to thriving colonies of bacteria — more than 24 million colonies of fecal coliform in 100 milliliters of water. Compare that to state standards of no more than 14 colonies per sample or even Coast Guard standards of 200 colonies.

And all this water gets pumped overboard into the ocean home of the salmon and shellfish that Alaskans and tourists like to eat and the whales that Alaskans and tourists like to see.

Developing natural resources for jobs and profit inevitably requires compromising the environment to a certain degree. In Alaska, the argument rarely reaches the level of whether or not to develop; more often, the argument is limited to the amount of damage the most (or the most vocal) citizens are willing to accept in any given area. But the cruise-ship industry has more reason than most to practice environmental concern along with its regard for profit: Alaska's environment, clean and unspoiled, is the industry's bread and butter.

The industry has agreed to voluntary inspections and testing and committed to leaving as small an "environmental footprint" as possible. To that end, DEC's new interest in air and water discharges from the huge, floating towns that ply Southeast should be applauded by the industry, the visitors it serves and Alaskans who value the environment.

It's been 20 years; how about some trust?

Former President Jimmy Carter and Cecil Andrus, his Secretary of the Interior, are in Alaska this week to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, known as ANILCA or D-2. To welcome them back, and to refresh our memory, I thought I'd share a letter I wrote to Secretary Andrus in April 1978.

Now, more than two decades later, Alaska still needs to explore its resources and restore its trust relationship with Washington, D.C. And as long as we're a state, we shouldn't quit trying.

The Honorable Cecil Andrus

Secretary of the Interior

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On your desk is a decision that affects not just the future of Alaska, but the future of America as a whole. The D-2 lands issue goes far beyond the questions of acreage, resources or wildlife. It has to do with our entire philosophy of government.

The battle is as old as our nation, when Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton debated the issue of who to trust. Hamilton said protect the elite and trust government. Jefferson said trust the people.

Now in the holy name of the environment, the proponents of placing nearly a third of this state in wilderness are resurrecting Hamilton's ghost.

I believe, Mr. Secretary, that more than ever in a free society, we must make our decisions on a basis of belief in people, rather than distrust.

Therefore, in the interest of a wise, intelligent decision that will live beyond your or my time, let us not rush the D-2 question to meet any artificial deadline that might come to haunt and frustrate the American people.

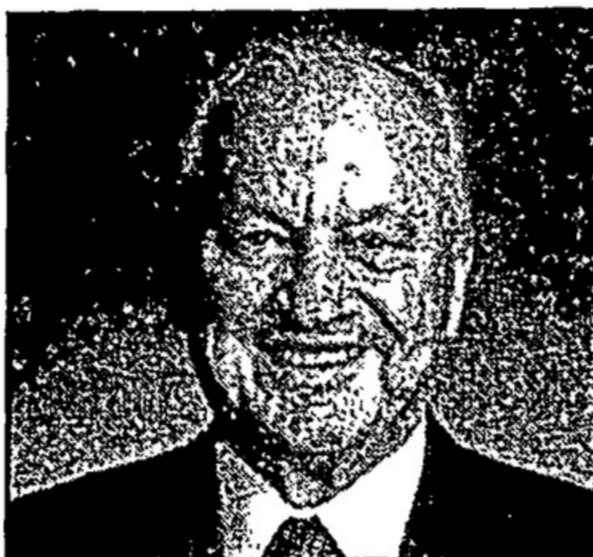
Instead, let us look to a deeper understanding of God's intent in the creation of this great land and thoroughly weigh all values before we set it aside where man is not the companion of the land but the trespasser.

Mr. Secretary, I have thought long and deep about this problem. Stretching over a period of 26 years last January, when I begged and pleaded with the Truman Administration to give us our lands, and we would build not only a great state of the union, but a great country of the world.

You see, Mr. Secretary, that original Alaska statehood bill gave us but 23 million acres out of 365 million, hardly a pittance, and yet the opponents of statehood, un knowledgeable concerning Alaska, said we should remain a territory because we had no viable economic base.

But I asked at that time, how could we be anything but a welfare state if we lived in a totally government-dominated community?

Recently in Bellingham, Washington, you made a



WALTER J. HICKEL

speech saying there are 247 million acres in Alaska apart from D-2 that are available for mineral development and other uses. This is misleading. Alaska is basically a sea-level country, with its mountains rising directly from a sea-level base. Much of the land is covered with mountains, rivers and lakes, and that which is above 3,000 feet is not habitable. Much of the area of habitable land you would designate as wilderness.

You also must be aware that in your own department, in the Bureau of Land Management, there are new aspects to the Organic Act that would add additional large acreages from the D-1 lands in wilderness category. Likewise this is true on Forest Service lands.

I know, Mr. Secretary, the frustrations of sitting in that seat, its strengths and weaknesses. I would urge you to rely for your advice on those people who understand and believe in our system, not those who are captive of a small special interest, whether development or conservation oriented.

The lands in Alaska won't be lost if Congress takes no action this year. They will still remain in federal jurisdiction, mostly under your stewardship.

Time should be taken to fully assess the variety of uses these lands hold as designed by the hand of God.

Is it right to say that any

Left to itself nature becomes intolerant with no compassion for any living need. Only man in concert with nature can add the compassion and emotion so vital for balance.

one acre is meant to be designated single use for all time?

The Arctic Wildlife Range is a perfect example. I have crisscrossed that 9.5 million acres and know it well. I promise you, out of no motivation other than to communicate the truth, that we could help meet the energy needs of America and not harm the wildlife in that range.

Mr. Secretary, history shows that civilizations can enhance wildlife populations and the environment. Left to itself nature becomes intolerant with no compassion for any living need. Only man in concert with nature can add the compassion and emotion so vital for balance.

Therefore, join me and the vast majority of the American people, who know and love this land so well, in calling on Congress to postpone the D-2 decision until the real knowledge of these lands and their multiple values can get to the American people. No one should fear that knowledge getting to the public, except those who cannot win in the light of truth.

Mr. Secretary, the fundamental issue is trust. At stake is the entire American philosophy of confidence in free people. If we lose that, we have lost much more than 100 million acres of Alaska. We have lost America.

Walter J. Hickel is former governor of Alaska and U.S. Secretary of Interior.

Farewell; trust everybody, but cut the cards

WASHINGTON — I always wanted to quit at the top of my game or at least while I was ahead. It's obviously too late for that, so I'm going to do the next best thing: quit now.

Yes, this is the last column I'll be writing for this paper or any other. You won't have Don Kaul to kick around anymore (or "Don Kaul, Liberal Scum" as one reader addressed a letter to me recently). I'm sure that news brings tears to the eyes of some of you. Others aren't laughing quite that hard.

When I started doing this, some 35 years ago, I never suspected it would turn into a life sentence, but it did. During that time I wrote 6,500 columns, give or take a couple of hundred, and used up 500 ideas, give or take a couple of hundred. I have no ideas or columns left in me.

Writing a daily newspaper column is a strange way to make a living. A well-known columnist once likened it to being married to a nymphomaniac, and there's something to that. It can be a thrilling and even ecstatic exercise, but there's no respite from it. No matter how well you do on a particular afternoon, by the next day your Muse is asking, "What have you done for me lately?"

That gets old after three or



DON KAUL

four decades. Mind, I'm not asking for sympathy; I've had a good run.

Mark Twain once said that when he looked back on his body of work he felt much as God must have when He looked at his creation: "Not bad, but a mite too much water."

That's pretty much the way I feel about what I've done through the years, except that there's a good deal more water to it than either God or Twain used.

Still, I've learned a few things in my time; hard-won lessons they were, but they've given me principles to live by. Let me share a few of them with you:

• When both political parties agree on an idea, you can

be pretty sure it's a bad idea.

• The first widely accepted explanation of anything is generally wrong.

• Politicians who promise to cut taxes generally aren't talking about your taxes.

• Never mistake verbal clumsiness in a politician for sincerity.

• There's no reason to expect a person in a position of power to be any more honest than you would be if you had his chances.

• Don't count Richard Nixon out, just because he's dead.

• The fact that life seems increasingly to imitate professional wrestling doesn't make it right.

• The last place to look for wisdom is your television set.

• The second-to-last place is the National Rifle Association.

• Trust everybody, but cut the cards. (This last from the sublime Mr. Dooley.) You can laminate those and carry them in your wallet if you wish. I give them to you as a gift.

A.J. Liebling, one of the great press critics of the post-World War II period, once wrote:

"The pattern of a newspaperman's life is like the plot of 'Black Beauty.' Sometimes he finds a kind master who gives him a dry stall and an occa-

sional bran mush in the form of a Christmas bonus; some times he falls into the hands of a mean owner who drives him in spite of apavins and expects him to live on potato peelings."

The newspaper business has been that kind master to me. There was a rough patch there once or twice, but for the most part it's all been downhill and shady. When I was a young lad, with hardly an idea in the world of how I would make a living, if you had told me that I could spend my life writing pretty much anything I pleased and you would pay me to do it, I'd have said:

"I'll take that and you can keep the change."

As it turned out, that's the way it turned out.

I'm stalling a little here. I feel like a child who's trying to delay his bedtime by asking for another glass of water. It's time to turn out the light.

It's been more than a career; it's been fun. I don't know if you'll miss me but I'll miss you, even those of you out there who are rejoicing at my departure. I always had a soft spot for crackpots.

Goodbye.

Don Kaul was a Des Moines Register columnist.