

Downtown in right direction

Hastings Tribune

With the restoration of the city's oldest downtown building almost complete, we're feeling pretty positive about the direction downtown Hastings is heading.

There was a day when we worried what the new Wal-mart Supercenter and the migration of businesses to the city's north end would do to the downtown area. We'd heard stories about other cities' losing battles to keep their downtown hubs viable after the same retail climate change. But three years later, we're happy to say that downtown Hastings just keeps getting better.

The most recent improvements are the restoration of the Farrell Block and the construction of a downtown park area, both on Second Street. The Farrell Block was the city's first stone building and today is the only stone building remaining downtown. Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches recently opened on the first floor of the building, and two other adjoining commercial spaces will soon be ready for occupants. Meanwhile, five apartments are nearing completion on the building's second floor.

Just a few blocks west, a new outdoor space is almost complete. Nestled between two downtown buildings, it features a stone walkway and benches surrounded by grassy areas, flowers and trees. The space once held the Kipp Cigar building, but it caught fire in 2004 and was later demolished. Creative minds decided to beautify the empty lot this year.

Other downtown improvements over the last few years include remodeled retail spaces for new businesses, a growing number of loft living spaces — extremely desirable real estate in any large metropolitan area — and the Hastings City Council's approval of sidewalk eateries. At the same time, many longstanding Hastings businesses are still doing well downtown. It seems the city's downtown area is getting its own identity as a fresh and cool destination for shopping, eating and doing business.

The success of downtown Hastings hasn't happened autonomously. The city has been smart about giving downtown the attention it needs through agencies like the Community Redevelopment Authority and the Business Improvement District. The BID keeps the downtown looking sharp with details like manicured flower pots and well-trimmed trees. The CRA has provided incentives to individuals and businesses to build lofts and apartments in the downtown area. It even gives tours of these lofts and nearby businesses to representatives of other Nebraska cities and towns, showing them the potential of their own under-used downtowns.

The downtown will receive a lot of attention Oct. 9 with its second Downtown Hastings Upper Level Living Tour, put on by the BID. One ticket includes tours of 10 downtown dwellings, and proceeds benefit the downtown park project. Last year, more than 450 tickets were sold for the event. This is a chance for area residents to see firsthand the creative ways downtown spaces are being used.

We're proud of what downtown Hastings has become in the last few years, and we encourage residents to enjoy it for the destination it is.



Yesterday

2007 — Arson was suspected in a fire that destroyed the former Marshalltown Instruments building at 108 S. Colorado Ave.

1998 — Will Locke, associate professor of teacher education at Hastings College, was inducted into the Mid-America Education Hall of Fame.

1988 — Larry Ackerman of Hastings, who played Little Willie, a tramp clown for the Tehama Shrine, placed second in his division in a clown competition at Wichita, Kan.

1978 — Of five Nebraska communities included in a survey, the average cost of living was highest in Hastings. Others surveyed were Lincoln, Omaha, Scottsbluff and Falls City.

Palin example of out-of-control populism

The parody rockumentary "This is Spinal Tap" features a scene in which a fictional rock band's manager defends a particularly idiotic decision by pointing out that he was merely following the instructions of Nigel Tufnel, the band's profoundly clueless lead guitarist.

Lead singer David St. Hubbins replies, "But you're not as confused as him, are you? I mean it's not your job to be as confused as Nigel."

The latest in a string of revelations about the depths of Sarah Palin's ignorance — a report that she's apparently incapable of naming any Supreme Court opinion other than *Roe v. Wade* — is a reminder that it's not the job of someone who could be a heartbeat away from the presidency to be as confused as the average American.

John McCain's nomination of Palin has turned out to be what can be called an attempt to pull off the Full Nixon. Forty years ago, Richard Nixon figured out that there were a lot of votes to be won by tapping into widespread resentment of "arrogant elites," who thought they were smarter and better informed than their fellow Americans.

For months now, McCain has been hammering away at this theme in regard to Barack Obama, whose Ivy League education is supposed to have infused him with the arrogance and elitism that makes him contemptuous of ordinary folk like, for example, Sarah Palin.



Paul Campos

Palin has spent almost her whole life in a very small town in a sparsely populated and extremely isolated state. For reasons that remain obscure, she attended five colleges in six years where, if her public performance to date is any indication, she seems to have learned nothing.

If Palin knows anything at all about national politics or foreign affairs or history or economics or almost anything else one would want a president to know something about, she has till now kept that fact remarkably well hidden.

She is, in other words, the ultimate representative of a kind of out of control populism. In its more extreme forms, populist resentment of elites flows from the belief that any ordinary person knows enough to be a good political leader, since political leadership is all about having the right values, and good character, and a pure heart.

This is of course nonsense. It makes about as much sense as saying that performing open-heart surgery or piloting a jumbo jet is all about having the right values.

McCain and his advisers know this, which is why they've spent the last month trying to stuff Sarah Palin full of plausible sound bites of information, so she can at least pretend to know what she's talking about when she's

asked questions about the federal government or foreign policy or economics or history, etc.

It's a cynical and incredibly reckless strategy, especially given McCain's age and precarious health. (McCain's odds of dying of natural causes in the next four years are, conservatively speaking, at least one in seven).

It's a sign of how successfully political know-nothingism has been exploited in America that it's even necessary to say this: To do a decent job, the president of the United States needs to be vastly more educated and knowledgeable than the average American.

This is a necessary, though far from sufficient, requirement. And, as Palin's cringe-inducing performance on the national stage illustrates, there are plenty of politicians who are no more qualified to be president than I am to be an NBA power forward.

Consider that the most recent of Tina Fey's hilarious yet horrifying Saturday Night Live parodies of Palin included merely repeating, word for word, one of Palin's rambling and nonsensical answers to CBS interviewer Katie Couric's questions.

That fact by itself ought to disqualify John McCain from the office he seeks.

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Main Street needs to support rescue effort

To all you "Main Streeters" who protested the federal bailout plan for its lack of accountability and socialization of losses, I have a message for you. I feel your pain, I share your pain, but things are only going to get worse if Americans don't come together and tell their members of Congress to vote for it.

Every hard-working American has a right to be furious about CEO golden parachutes in which corporate titans strip companies of all their value and walk away with large fortunes for their great (uh, that is, horrendous) work. Clearly Congress and the White House must rein in, even ban huge payouts for self-promoting profiteers who buy Lear jets and McMansions while the rest of us see our life savings dwindle to nothing.

The list of profiteers is disgusting. According to the New York Daily News, the plan the U.S. House turned down on Monday would have allowed, "Washington Mutual Chief Executive Alan Fishman, who had been on the job for just three weeks when the bank went bust ... walk away with more than \$18 million in salary, bonuses and severance. Robert Willumstad, former chief executive officer of insurance giant AIG, could have gotten a \$22 million exit package — after just three months at his post. Willumstad turned down the package." (As well he should. At least one of them has a conscience!)

The list continues: "If failed CEO Richard Fuld were to leave Lehman Brothers as it struggles to sell off its assets, he could rake



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in about \$65 million in salary and bonuses, a top Wall Street analyst said. That's on top of the estimated \$446 million he was paid between 1993 and 2007."

The consequences of not passing the bailout plan — or as some in Congress and the financial world have renamed it the "recovery" plan — are pervasive, painful and possibly devastating. If small businesses can't borrow money to keep going, many will fail. They are the economic engines that keep job growth steaming along. Right now, there is no job growth, only job decline. We can hardly stand by and watch record unemployment rates go up and up and up. Second, a new wave of bank failures will not only harm consumers, but drive Wall Street losses higher and higher.

Third, it'll become much tougher to take out mortgages, student loans and to keep the flow of credit helping average Americans stay afloat. Lastly, if Congress doesn't do something, and fast, a crash in the personal credit industry comes next. People won't be able to pay off their credit card balances and no one knows where that will take us.

Meanwhile, the Senate version of the bailout/recovery bill had some much-needed goodies for consumers to entice the protesters of last week into the, "Yes, we now support the bill" category. Among the goodies is an increase in FDIC limits to \$250,000 of protection for savings, up from an outmod-

ed \$100,000 amount. The 450-page proposal also includes tax breaks for business and the middle class.

Barrons writer Bob O'Brien notes: "(This, coming on a day when the national deficit is expected to eclipse the \$10 trillion mark.) Other trinkets, such as an extension of jobless benefits and a homeownership tax break, might also get stapled on before a vote is taken. The expectation is that the added features would afford the legislation some momentum that would allow it to hit the Senate chamber running. (Though if significant additions of left actually make something faster, your average business journalist ought to be able to out-run that Usain Bolt fellow.)"

There's hope the stock market's response and passage by the Senate of its plan will prompt House members to reconsider their "no" votes of Monday. Last week public opinion was about equally split on the bailout plan. There's been a reversal since the stock market plunged 777 points on Monday.

Congressional staffers are telling media outlets calls from constituents more often than not urge them to pass, not defeat, the plan. And opinion polls are showing and increase in support for it by more Americans.

So if you're angry, adamant and against, please understand the person on whom you're venting your fury is yourself.

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