
PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES TO NOWHERE?

Missing in Iowa: a dose of Midwestern common sense?

In Meredith Wilson's 1957 Broadway hit, *The Music Man*, Professor Harold Hill arrives in Iowa to sell the citizens of River City a boys' band. Fifty years later, a handful of US Senators and other politicians descended on the state to sell them a Presidential election. Wilson's story had a happy ending. Bags packed and skipping town, Hill falls in love with Marian Paroo, the town librarian, and sticks around to make good on his word. The politicians were out of Iowa faster than a marching band, stymied only by the country's creaky air traffic control system which grounded them at Des Moines International for a few extra hours. (See, "Infrastructure Story," following.) Moving on, they've since hit New Hampshire, Nevada, and soon several larger states.

"Presidential candidates" — but, nominated by whom? On the surface, at least, by themselves, fueled by their own ambition and fund raising machine. Nothing wrong with that, or is there? Something seems different in 2008. Stature is in such short supply, the pundits have tripped over themselves explaining why experience really isn't that important. Slogans and personalities now hold center court where ending an intractable war, corralling a distracted Congress, and getting real about a government \$9 trillion in debt should be. Iowans could have told the nation, "Enough. That's not the way we do things here."

Is this simply democracy at work? Or, like its famous Alaska namesake, did Iowans send the Nation off on the Presidential primaries to nowhere?

What do you think?