

On the subject of...

Galloping Gertie

by Viki Eggers Mason



THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

The Aberdeen Advocate

They finally got around to building a high school in West Yellowstone, Montana, in 1968. Until then those intrepid few who braved the fearsome winters there were forced to make other educational arrangements when their youngsters graduated 8th grade. Some families sent their high-schoolers to board with other families in Bozeman, Montana, 90 miles to the north. Other students climbed on a school bus bound for Ashton, Idaho (sixty miles to the southwest) at five a.m. each morning and were returned home about twelve hours later. My family did neither. Instead, when my brother and I came of age, we would pack up and leave God's country around Labor Day and relocate to our winter residence near Tacoma, Washington.

Life in the big city was a fascinating change for me. There were no morning walks to school at 40° below zero. There was no snow to shovel, nor was there a wood box to

be filled each afternoon. Instead there were movie theaters, zoos, concerts and countless other entertainment opportunities. One of my favorite hangouts was a huge mercantile known as the B & I Store. The B & I was the sort of place you might expect if you crossed the Ringling Brothers with Walmart. The building itself was constructed to resemble a circus tent and inside one could munch hot freshly roasted peanuts while observing clowns, caged lions, elephants and other big-top trappings while Mother shopped. One might say that, as a teenager, I had the best of both worlds.

Tacoma is linked to Gig Harbor, Washington, across the Puget Sound by a graceful dual-span bridge known as the new Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The old bridge, pictured on page 2, opened in May of 1940 to great fanfare. Designed by one of the engineers responsible for San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, the Narrows Bridge was said to be a tri-

umph of ingenuity. Conceptually, the bridges are similar, but the storms on Puget Sound are far more energetic than the weather around the city by the bay. In their planning of the Tacoma Bridge the engineers made a few modifications meant to make it capable of withstanding winds of 120 miles per hour.

Like the "unsinkable" Titanic before her, the colossal structure wasted no time in thumbing her nose at her proud engineers. Within a few weeks the bridge became known as "Galloping Gertie." In even mild breezes, Gertie would pitch and roll like a rodeo bull, making the half-mile drive to Gig Harbor something of an adventure. Just four months after the bridge opened, it collapsed during a gale. (The dramatic original newsreel footage of the collapse can be seen at the following website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxTZ446tbzE>)

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From other pens...What works and what doesn't work

By Newt Gingrich

Ask the American people and they will tell you they know our government isn't working, and they know it will take real changes to make it work.

My new organization, American Solutions, polled the American people and found that by a consistent 84-to-12 margin, Americans favor real change in how we control our government and how our government controls us:

- 92% believe we need to provide long-term solutions

instead of short-term fixes (only 5% believe it is unimportant);

- 80% believe we must strengthen and revitalize America's core values (only 9% believe that is unimportant); and
- 67% favor moving the government into the 21st Century (only 15% believe that is unimportant).

Fortunately, the world that actually works is all around us. It's not a theory: It's the hard work, innovation, creativity and accountability of entrepreneurs who are meeting the demands of the public and giving us more choices of higher quality at lower cost with greater convenience – think iPods, iPhones or the transformation of New York City under Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Police Chief William Bratton.

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Galloping Gertie

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The moral of this story is this: When you start messing around with a proven system, you're apt to be disappointed in the resulting performance.

There is something to be said for following a well-worn trail between points A and B. The folks in wagon trains moving westward in the 1800s understood that by following the successful routes established by others, they had a much better chance of arriving on the West Coast with scalps intact. Those who veered away from the beaten path, or who failed to follow established wagon train rules (like NOT getting caught in the mountains when winter arrived), found themselves in situations like the Donner party.

In society, in families and in communities of any kind, we establish rules in order to keep ourselves safe, our families secure and our property rights inviolate. It is for these reasons that we establish governments and empower them to act on our behalf. We elect candidates who promise to do those things designed to accomplish safety and order in our lives and, in a perfect world, we give incumbents the old heave-ho when they fail to keep the promises they've made. We have a right to expect our leaders to lead, just as we expect bridges to stand still and behave as bridges are meant to behave.

I've found it fascinating to watch the politics around Aberdeen lately. We've arrived at campaigning time. I know this because our leaders have suddenly begun talking out of both of their two faces, flipping, flopping, juggling the books, and trying to please everybody. (Speaking of circus clowns!) Until recently, they have just done whatever they wanted and ignored the wishes of the governed. Now, since they can clearly see the end of life as they know it looming in May, they have developed an interest in making friends of voters. They are attempting to make omelets without breaking eggs an interesting, if futile, experiment.

Take the matter of municipal court Judge Adrian Haynes. Her victory in the recent election would appear to give her a suit of impenetrable armor. The people have spoken and even though our aldermen know she's making a mockery of the law and a laughing stock of our community, they just can't bring themselves to send her back to Amory to practice her preposterous brand of justice. The current administration can't afford to make voters cranky and so, to our peril, Haynes remains on the municipal bench. Wobble, wobble.

If there is a sure way to garner votes it is to cozy up to the kids. For nearly four years, I've watched the aldermen squeeze every possible penny from the city's budget to spend on "the chilrens." The Parks and Rec program is a big one and it serves our community well. I've been critical of the program in the past

because my priorities are poles apart from those of the current administration. I just happen to think the community would be better served by better paid police and fire-fighters than it is by transporting children to and from football

games. That said, I know Parks and Rec Director Tohona Larthridge makes every effort to make the program pay its own way. Sadly, she is currently under attack and probably from within.

A few weeks back, Larthridge banned one parent from games for cursing at a coach. The parent, who admitted to me that she shouted the coach down, went directly to the aldermen for relief. The ban was overturned by the board, just as they "un-suspended" a child from the gymnasium last year even though he was caught fighting on the property. All of this sets a pitiful example for "the chilrens," but we don't want to make the parents restless - they vote, remember. Flip, flop.

The Aberdeen Public Utilities Department is still under the microscope of the State Auditor as a result of the nasty habit some aldermen have of using elec-

tric services as bait in their little vote tournament. All manner of ugliness has turned up over at the power company and it just keeps getting deeper. To the credit of Adrian Garth, head honcho over at APUD, the power company has actually started turning the power OFF when people fail to pay their bill and, better yet, frantic calls to aldermen can't seem to get the lights to come back on.

There are, of course, exceptions to this new rule. City employees, who have been allowed to rack up months and months of unpaid APUD bills, were given a "get out of jail free" card at a special meeting called in September. They were told they had 45 days to bring their bills current. Then, in a memo dated October 4th, Mayor Belle told Adrian Garth, "Employee accounts should be current within 45 days of this letter." There are about 100 city employees, all of whom are able to vote. Wiggle, wiggle.

Structures of any sort, from bridges to governments, must be built from a solid, proven set of plans if they are to survive. You can't just hang a house without framing it first. You can't construct a skyscraper from the top down. In our case, the framework is in place—its called the law—but it's being totally ignored.

The men at city hall are nailing our city's hopes to thin air and holding them up with the proverbial skyhook. We have hired the wrong set of engineers and we desperately need new ones. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to do just that. In a few months, we will go to the polls. When you get there, remember Galloping Gertie and her fate. Wiggle and jiggle may be just dandy in gelatin deserts, but it's bad news in government.



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What works and what doesn't work

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Unfortunately, the world that fails surrounds us as well. It's the red tape, excuses and lack of accountability of lawyers and bureaucrats who are giving us fewer choices of declining quality with rising costs and no change – think Hurricane Katrina and our government's anemic response to it, big city public schools or the failure to protect our border.

Transforming government from the world that fails to the world that works is an essential step toward limited, effective government. But it's about more than making government cost less and perform better. It's about bringing the principles that have built America and made it great – hard work, entrepreneurialism, innovation and optimism – to our greatest national challenges.

Do we really have to accept incompetence from government? The governing elite in this country routinely expect us to accept a level of incompetence from our government that we'd never tolerate from the private sector. To do otherwise, they say, would be unreasonable. We have to "bow to reality," as Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff recently said.

"Bow to reality" – that seems to be the slogan of our government these days. I have a better idea, however. Instead of listening to the secretary of Homeland Security tell us what's impossible, let's look at what is considered by many to be a successful company – Disney World.

As I wandered around Disney World recently, I was reminded once again of the world that works and the world that fails. Disney works. It works because it's focused on the customer. It works because every person it hires is trained to serve the customer, creating a happy experience, being positive and making sure that all the young people have a good time. And, of course, if the young people have a good time, then Grandpa does pretty well too.

So what is the difference between Disney World and a Detroit public school system that only graduates 21% of incoming freshmen on time? Or a Washington, D.C., school system that not only can't tell you how many students are enrolled, but also can't tell you how many teachers are being paid? What is the reason Disney works but the federal government can't meet the demand it itself created for passports for its citizens? And can't help successfully rebuild New Orleans a full two years after the disaster that destroyed it?

As I walked around that, happy, functioning, efficient place, my conclusion was that the difference between Disney World and the federal government is that there are certain, basic principles that Disney understands. Disney understands that you first have to have a market. There has to be a customer. And the customer has to be at the center of what you're doing.

Then you have to have a budget for investments so that you have the right technology and can take advantage of the right opportunities. In addition, you have to evolve constantly – the Disney of 1955 is not the Disney of 2007. And finally, you have to be willing to

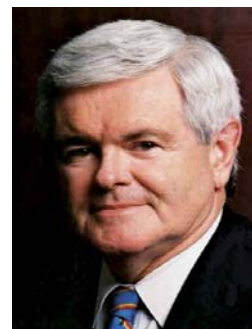
listen carefully to your customers and your employees.

Government bureaucracies today do none of those things. We have obsolete, paper-based bureaucracies that don't take care of their employees and don't teach

their employees to take care of citizens. The result is not a happy, functioning, efficient place. The result is a mess.

Realistically, however, there is no reason we can't take the principles of the world that works and apply them in Washington. Therefore I will leave you today with this suggestion: The next time you get a chance to visit the world that works – at Disney World or anywhere else – look around and say to yourself, "There is no reason we can't take these principles and apply them in Washington, in our state capitals, city councils and school boards."

This basic fact—that we can take the principles that work so well in the private sector and apply them to how we govern ourselves -- is why I founded American Solutions. Our belief is that politics can and should take second place to meeting the challenge of restoring basic American principles to government. We have to have a fundamental approach to thinking through what we're doing before we worry about the politics of what we're doing. And I hope that you get a chance, sometime in the near future, to visit a place that works, and ask yourself the same question I did: If they can do it, why can't our government?



Former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich.



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"Of all the things I've done, the most vital is coordinating those who work with me and aiming their efforts at a certain goal."

...Walt Disney