

OPINIONS & IMPRESSIONS

Playing gimmick game

Max Baucus is walking, Pat Williams is riding (Amtrak and in a camper), Arnold Olsen is doing a lot of talking about what a lousy congressman Rep. Dick Shoup is, and Shoup says he's just plain running.

That, in a nutshell, is what the race for Western District congressman is all about.

The race is on the Democratic side, if it can be called a race; and it probably shouldn't be because so far it's just one big game of gimmicks.

Yes, the Democratic candidates are doing a lot of talking, however it's all about Shoup, Nixon and Watergate. Oh, they are also saying that if they get to Washington they're going to see that "Big Brother" solves all our problems — whatever they might be.

A campaign folder says that Baucus is walking 631 miles through the district to "... talk with western Montanans on their own ground (he could do that in a car) — to find out the real problems in each locale — and to illustrate the strength of character and endurance that will be necessary to straighten out problems in government."

Since when did a long walk qualify someone for a seat in Congress? There are quite a few congressmen who jog every day and look what a mess Congress is in right now.

Williams is going to copy the late Harry Truman with a train ride. "It'll sort of be like whistle-stopping in the tradition of Harry Truman," Williams said. There will be a couple of differences

though. Williams will probably be riding as a coach passenger instead of in a private car and the whistle won't be tooting very often since there are only a handful of cities in this district that are serviced by Amtrak. In any event, "I hope to get the tradition started again, and I'll see that the trains are available," Williams said.

There's another almost-tradition that was associated with Truman's whistle-stop campaign across the Hi-Line in 1948. Truman's train spent the night in Wolf Point during that trip. One resident of that northeastern Montana area said she thought that a plaque should be set in cement under the spot where Truman's train was parked each night. The plaque was to read: "Harry S. Truman s — here." (The word wasn't "slept".)

So far it's plaques for all and plaudits for none.

There has been one statement that was worth reading and Pat Williams deserves the thanks for that. Williams has challenged Baucus and Olsen to a series of television debates "of the issues" on two occasions. His opponents have not seen fit to reply, either because they don't know what the issues are, or they are deathly afraid to create some, which will then force them to take a meaningful stand.

Anyway, why debate when you can walk and talk about other things?

And so goes the game of gimmicks. One can only wonder when we are going to have a real election campaign. Maybe that will come after the primary.