

Letters & Opinions

Presidential whiskers passé



**FOR
YOU
TO
CONSIDER**

By J.T. SMITH

WE live in the television age, when blow-dried politicians say something and then imme-

diately go on the tube to apologize for what they said the next day.

It's called being "politically correct." It shocked everyone when New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson sported a beard recently. Heck, I thought the former presidential candidate looked great in whiskers. But those TV guys sure had a field day.

So it certainly should be no surprise whatsoever that the very prospects of a black man — or the first woman — be-

coming a U.S. president is absolutely shocking to some.

After all, there hasn't even been a white man with a moustache (much less a beard) as president of the United States since William Howard Taft was inaugurated in 1909 with his handlebar moustache. (A heavysset gent, Taft also would be politically incorrect for that.)

After Taft, it's been a clean-shaven man for the next 16 presidents — from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush.

We want to hear from you!

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All letters must include your name, address and telephone number for verification purposes, and should be 300 words or less.

So when the next U.S. president takes the oath of office in January, it will have been 100 years of clean shaving.

I'd like someone for president that not only looks, but also thinks like Dr. Dale Rollins or Dr. Baxter Black. Dale could give it a "wild side" and Baxter some common sense.

Presidents with whiskers

When you think of other U.S. presidents with whiskers, our 16th president Abraham Lincoln (1861-65) comes to mind. His were sort of on again, off again, depending on the time. Still, he was a pretty good fellow.

In the 1800s, Ulysses S. Grant (1869-77), Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-81), James A. Garfield (1881), Chester A. Arthur (1881-85), Grover Cleveland (1885-89 and again 1893-97), and Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893 between Cleveland's administrations) all had lots of whiskers.

Arthur's and Cleveland's were big moustaches, while Grant, Hayes, Garfield and Harrison had full, heavy beards.

Into the next century, President Teddy Roosevelt (1901-09) had his familiar handlebar moustache.

Politically correct grooming

Of course, cosmetic political correctness goes beyond moustaches and beards. I'm sure the hairstyle of President James K. Polk (1845-49) would be far too long today.

Lincoln remains the tallest president at 6 foot 4. That's likely too tall for today's TV cameras and homogenized politics. (John Kerry is 6 foot 4, but didn't get elected.)

James Madison was the fourth president of the United States (1809-17). But he was the nation's shortest president in history at 5 foot 4. (That's a foot shorter than Lincoln.) Madison likely couldn't have pleased television — even on his tiptoes.

Madison's weight also rarely exceeded 100 pounds. Taft at 332 pounds was our heaviest president. He even had a large bathtub made especially for him.

Ages vary

Then there's age.

Teddy Roosevelt was the youngest president at 42 when he ascended from vice president. John F. Kennedy was the youngest-ever elected at 43. Those two distinctions likely will remain intact for some time.

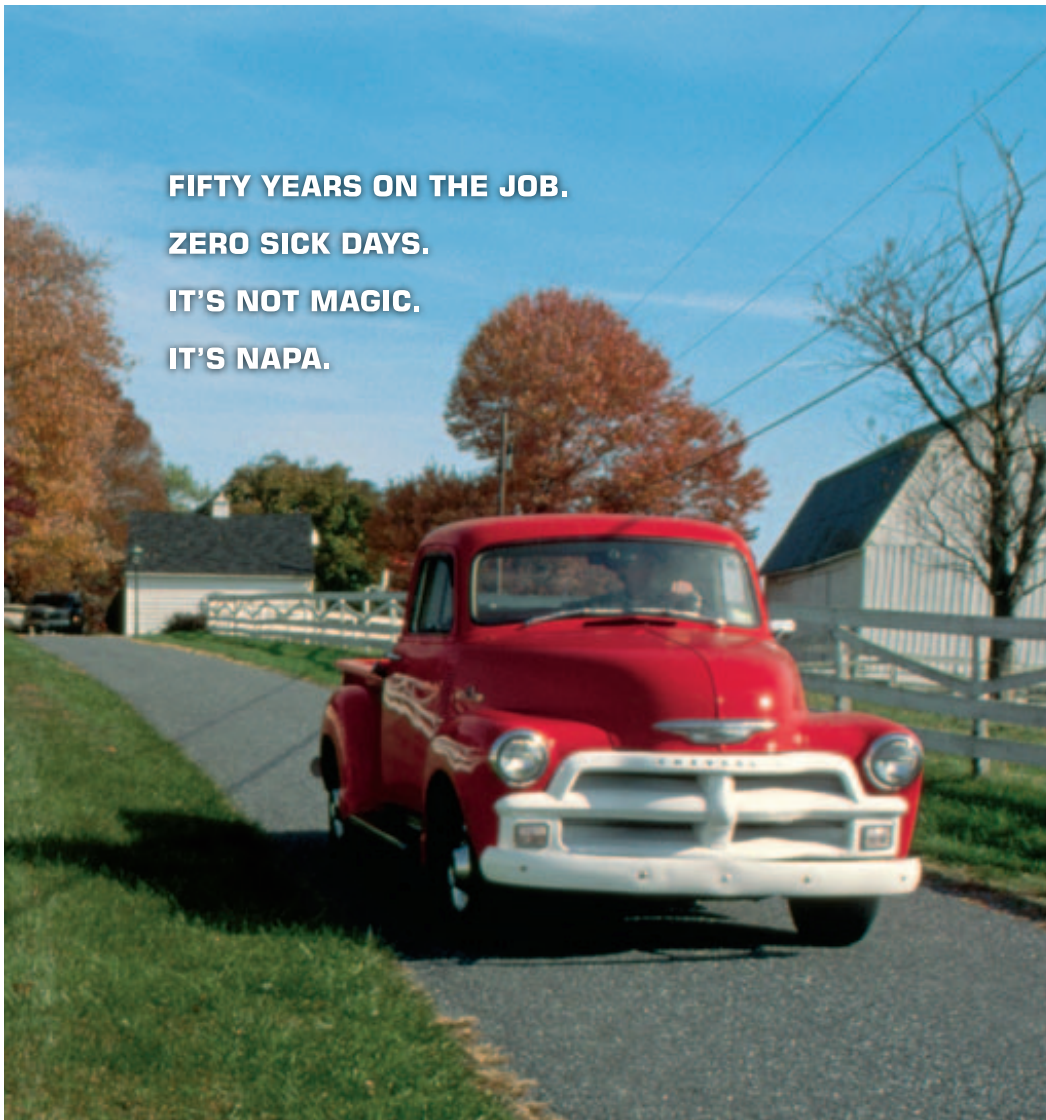
Ronald Reagan was the oldest president to take office, being elected to a second term at 69. That record could be broken, depending upon the outcome of the November presidential election.

In fact, folks may not like change when it comes to political correctness, but it appears Americans will get one for the history books whichever way it goes in November.

The three-possible outcomes will be the first black man, the first woman or the oldest president of the United States ever elected.

But none has a moustache.

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