

Choosing our leaders a major decision

The decision of how to fill the late Sen. Ted Kennedy's seat has brought up a very important point, how do we choose our replacement leaders? Massachusetts law stated that a general election had to be held within 145 days to choose a successor. However, the state's Democrat-dominated legislature voted to change the law to let the governor, also a Democrat, appoint someone to fill in before then.

This has been taken by some as an attempt to subvert democratic process to keep the 60-vote majority that the Democrats currently have in the Senate, and it probably was. There are dozens of issues coming before Congress.

So how do the rest of us choose our replacement leaders? Each state has its own procedure.

Wyoming went through the process in 2007 after the death of Sen. Craig Thomas. The Wyoming process was fairly straightforward: all interested and eligible candidates had to submit their name to the state party — in this case, the Republican Party — within a certain period of time. There were more than 30 candidates.

Three representatives from each county's Republican party gathered, and each candidate was allowed a short speech. The field was narrowed to 10 and then a final three. They were all well-qualified: a doctor who had been a state senator; a former state treasurer and state representative; and the late Sen. Thomas' former chief of staff.

The three names were given to the governor, who picked the winner. That person would serve until the next general election, in which he or she could run to serve the remainder of Sen. Thomas' term. Interestingly, on the questionnaire each candidate had to fill out — made available to the public — the candidate had to indicate whether they would run in the special election in 2008.

What is interesting in this case is that Wyoming's governor was a Democrat. This put a Democrat in the position of picking a Republican senator that would have a strong footing in the next election. Incumbents, even appointed ones, always have an advantage unless they are extremely disliked by their constituents.

The governor could also pick the weakest of the candidates submitted to him, in order to stack the deck in the next election. The governor's choice was the doctor, Sen. John Barrasso who, as it turned out, did win the 2008 election and will serve in the Senate until 2010. The former state treasurer also went on to win election to the state's only congressional seat in that same election.

By and large the process was open, transparent and with a healthy dose of partisan politics thrown in. Not a bad way to pick a successor short of an actual election. And what they were really doing was picking a temporary senator. Massachusetts was essentially trying to change their law to this process, but at the wrong time for the wrong reasons.

Massachusetts could learn a thing or two from the way we handle things out west. This kind of major decision has to be done in such a way that, even if the people don't get to directly choose their representative, they don't feel like they've had someone thrust upon them for partisan reasons. It has to be fair from start to finish so that there is no doubt or controversy surrounding the appointee. A last-minute rule change to swing it in favor of one party over another is not going to be well-received by constituents.

—Kevin Bottrell

And the battle begins

And, the battle begins again. The battle over the thermostat, of course.

This little cold snap brought it on and it seems to be getting worse as we get older. Jim is hot when I'm cold. And, then he'll be cold when I'm hot. He's pulling on covers while I'm kicking them off. Then sometimes he's opening windows and doors while I sit shivering.

I know one thing — it's going to make our "golden years" a real challenge.

An old, old friend has come home to live with us. He's very good looking and has gotten better with age. Although, all he does is hang around all day.

Before the rumor mill goes into high gear, I should explain. My old friend is a painting my mother had commissioned by an artist friend as a memorial to my dad after his death.

It was of a prairie windmill standing beside a stock tank and I loved that picture. It had been on loan to a local cafe that has been closed for a few years. When remodeling began on the building I thought I best retrieve the picture. It's no worse for the wear and looks very comfortable amongst my other windmill collectibles.

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



Mexico is on our minds, again. A trip to Juarez is planned for the last week of October. Now, I know some of you are going to say it's too dangerous. What with all the drug lords killing each other and everything.

But, seriously, out in the poor parts of town where we work, no one can afford to buy drugs, so there's no problem. We have been assured by the ministry group we work with that most of what we hear is "media hype".

The ministry workers tell us they have not had any problems and would never bring us anywhere they felt was unsafe.

Heavens, you're probably in more danger walking down a street in any major city, than we will be in Mexico.

Besides, as Christians, shouldn't we trust God for our protection. We can't let fear keep us from doing His work.

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A story of survival

Surviving cancer Rita Speer

I am a breast cancer survivor, and I volunteered to write this article to help increase awareness of breast cancer, diagnostic tools available and the importance of early diagnosis.

I was diagnosed in May 2006. I had been having yearly mammograms for a number of years with my breast specialist. In 2006 I had the mammogram and carried the films to my doctor. She looked at them and didn't see anything abnormal. I told her I had been having pain in my breast off and on for about 4-5 months (this is not a usual symptom of breast cancer). She did an ultrasound and then a needle biopsy and told me that afternoon she was positive I had breast cancer. I cried, and she and her nurse both hugged me. I made a follow-up appointment to schedule the surgery, a mastectomy, after the lab reports would be back. I was to have staging test (to determine if the cancer had spread) in the meantime.

I called my husband after leaving the

office and tearfully told him the diagnosis. All I remember of our conversation was his saying, "We'll get through this together." (He was undergoing chemo at the time for a metastasis of his colon cancer, originally diagnosed in 2004.)

I had a bone scan and a C-T scan. Several days after the C-T scan was done, my family physician called me and said the scan showed a mass on my left ovary and that I probably also had ovarian cancer.

My oncologist referred me to a gynecologic oncologist in Omaha and another surgeon, who concurred that a mastectomy was necessary. Surgery was scheduled in two days, and both the mastectomy and the abdominal surgery were done at the same time. My sentinel node was positive for cancer, so the lymph nodes in my armpit were also removed.

It was not until I was home that I knew that the abdominal mass was fallopian tube cancer (a rare form of gynecologic cancer) and a primary tumor, not a spread of the breast cancer.

After I was physically healed, I began chemotherapy. My two most profound side effects were losing my hair and fatigue.

But after I completed chemo, my hair slowly grew back and the fatigue lessened over time. I got involved in activities and hobbies and made a point of reaching out to other women diagnosed with breast cancer.

In 2008, I decided to have reconstruction surgery done. It was done in several stages, and I had the final procedure done in January, 2009. I have not regretted that decision and feel better about how I look.

I have learned many things from having cancer, but one of the most important is how precious life is and that I can enjoy each new day I am given.

Time for Washington to move ahead

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



The democrats blew it this time. When will they get the message, I want health reform, not Joe Wilson reform. Do I think his actions were disrespectful? Definitely, but he called the White House immediately following the "You lie" outburst and apologized. Rahm Emmanuel, Chief of Staff, accepted the apology on President Obama's behalf and President Obama's response was that Wilson apologized "quickly and without equivocation". He continued with, "We all make mistakes."

Ever since Watergate, politicians have labored against one another instead of working for the country. To be sure some things warrant investigation or condemnation, but I don't believe wasting precious floor time or money was valid in this instance. I understand the issue of precedent and concern the message

reflected by no action could impart, but his behavior has received the necessary attention. Why generate more publicity for a foolish act?

It is unfortunate, but I agree with former President Carter that race played a role in this. The irreverent congressman, I think, would never have issued such an outburst to any white president, democrat or republican.

One must remember he is a southern republican congressman from South

Carolina and having lived in the south I can guarantee you his view of African Americans differs from mine. The sad thing is he, and others like him, do not even realize they view Obama differently. They would adamantly deny the charge and stand firmly on policy differences.

The resolution has now been passed for a "formal admonishment", along party lines for the most part. Maybe now we can get on with the business at hand; health reform and the economy. Perhaps both parties in our governing body will learn from this incident.

We have seen an example of civility and graciousness from President Obama. He has a much better grasp on Christianity than many in the governing body. It is called forgiveness.

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Autumn in Kansas

Insight John Schlageck

Indian summer is without a doubt the best season to live in the Sunflower State. Temperatures are milder — gone are the sweltering dog days of summer, although for many Kansans this may have been the coolest summer we'll ever see.

Trees are flashing brilliant golds, reds and silvers. Stormy skies have been replaced by a deep blue backdrop overhead.

Autumn is magical for another reason. While the growing season has come to an end, harvest is moving ahead full throttle.

Like the trees, fields of grain have donned their fall colors. Red, green and silver combines chew their way through the abundant corn, milo and soybeans. Farmers are working long hours, often late into the night to bring the bounty of harvest into storage.

For farmers harvest is everything. Bringing the crops out of the field is the only thing that matters.

A half year of time, money and labor has gone into producing these crops.

Producers cannot risk leaving the crop standing in the field.

Yes, autumn signals the end of a cycle. Soon the weather will turn cold. Arctic winds will whip down from the north accompanied by sleet, freezing rain and snow.

During this period, farmers will dream about spring when they can plant fall crops again.

Kansas farmers are special people. They meet our food, fuel and fiber needs. Thanks to them, we never have to worry about food availability.

The next time you walk into your local supermarket, remember the wheat in your bread comes from someone's Kansas farm. Milk comes from carefully cared for dairy cows.

Remember, while the butcher performs a service in cutting and packaging the steak or hamburger your family eats, the

Kansas rancher cares for and produces the beef. Styrofoam cartons only hold eggs that are laid by hens on farms.

Kansans and other Americans across our land remain the most fortunate people in the world. No other country can claim that so few people feed so many.

Today less than two percent of our nation's population are farmers. They are capable of supplying the other 98 percent with food. They also feed people around the world.

Indian summer won't be around forever. Try to take a trip into the country soon. As you motor through farm country, notice the fields of corn, milo and soybeans.

Take a look at the cattle, hogs and sheep grazing the pastures. Don't forget the Kansas farmer who helps feed you, your family and our hungry world.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.