



Other Viewpoints

Parties don't need to be more alike

Since former Secretary of State Colin Powell started an uproar by claiming that the Republican party needs to move away from Rush Limbaugh and, apparently, closer to Barack Obama, whom Powell supported over Sen. John McCain last fall.

Say what? That's an argument that comes up every time the GOP loses an election. The way to beat the Democrats is to become more like them. But is that what either the party or the nation needs, now or next year?

Hardly. Powell has established himself as the spokesman for the so-called moderate wing of the party. In national politics, as in Kansas, that means the liberal Republicans. While they're seldom dominant, there are a few of them – and more in a state like Kansas, where Democrats hardly ever win.

The idea of making the party of Lincoln and Reagan more like the party of FDR and JFK belies the fact that the parties are as alike as they are different. In most elections in the last 60 to 70 years, the nation has been more or less evenly divided.

It's easy to forget that George W. Bush, while elected by razor-thin margins and court orders, had a big Republican majority in Congress when he came into office.

Today, the Democrats have an even bigger margin of power, but in politics, as with the economy, things change quickly.

For all the talk of difference, the county is evenly divided. Voters swing to one party one year, the other the next, the difference just a few percentage points. The goal of a party establishing dominance for decades is elusive, maybe impossible.

This is not bad. It's one of the things that makes democracy work, here and elsewhere.

That said, is it a bad idea for the parties to stand for something? To offer a clear choice in a confusing political world?

Democrats, if they stand for anything, stand for bigger government and more state solutions, more regulation. Republicans do themselves proudest when they stand for less government and more freedom. For both parties, though, the difference is far from clear.

Republicans like our Rep. Jerry Moran, who voted against No Child Left Behind and other budget-busters, represent these ideal better than Colin Powell.

Neither party stands still. The Democrats were for a balanced budget when it suited them, and the money was rolling in. Republicans claim they want to balance the budget, but some Republican presidents, including George W. Bush, adapted easily to big-spending, big-government ideas.

You could argue that the much-reviled Bush strategist Karl Rove had the party positioned to dominate for a generation after the first Bush II victory. His vision joined traditional conservative blocs with Hispanics and black Republicans.

The party squandered the Hispanic initiative by sucking up to jingoistic anti-immigration groups, just as it squandered its once-strong relationship with black Americans to court the Southern vote.

War and terrorism undid the rest of what Rove accomplished. That left the party sitting on a narrow base of social conservatives, anti-immigration hysterics and other fear mongers. That's no way to build a majority.

But neither is imitating the other side. Bottom line, the Republicans will be better served by principles than pandering. Thanks, Colin, but no thanks. — *Steve Haynes*

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Spring walk turns up wildlife of all sorts

It's tick season in South Carolina.

We know this because a hike, picnic and walk in the woods with our daughters produced sightings of birds, reptiles and amphibians – and a dozen ticks.

I really hate ticks, and luckily, we found all the hitchhikers before they had a chance to grab a free lunch. Still, even though I was lucky enough to only find one on me, they just make my skin crawl.

Our daughters have been going on sister hikes about once a month since January. They get together and go to a park in Georgia or nearby South Carolina. Since we were coming to visit and we love to walk, the girls decided to take us on one of their explorations.

And it was great fun. We drove a little over an hour from Augusta, Ga., where they both live, to Parsons Mountain in South Carolina. Then we put on our packs and climbed past abandoned gold mines to an old, abandoned fire tower on the top of the mountain, which rises to an astounding 800 feet. By comparison, Colby is at 3,156 feet and Mount Sunflower, the highest point in Kansas, is 4,039.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Still the climb from near sea level was a good one, and we encountered a beautiful and very large moth, toads and frogs in all sizes, a lizard and a garter snake, which I had to shoo off the trail before we could proceed. We also heard and saw numerous birds we couldn't identify and several we sort of knew — including a woodpecker and a heron.

Before we even got to our hiking spot, we had a close encounter with wildlife.

Driving down the road, we spotted a box turtle in the middle of the lane.

Oldest daughter, our driver, successfully put her wheels around the turtle, slowed, pulled over on the shoulder and did a U turn. Soon we were speeding back to rescue the errant turtle.

But as we went we watched in horror, an 18-

wheeler and half a dozen cars came our way in the turtle's lane. Surely, we thought, one of those vehicles would squash the little hiker.

But, no, there it was.

Daughter stopped, and I jumped out and grabbed the turtle and jumped back in the car.

Our youngest daughter, a former biology teacher, took the turtle and proclaimed it a male.

Amazing, we exclaimed, how in the world can you tell?

Male box turtle, she said, have red eyes and an indent on their bottom shells. Female turtles have brown eyes.

Yep, our little hiker had red eyes and an indent. I won't say what that's for.

You just never know what wonderful bits of knowledge you'll gather visiting your children.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

What is Census Bureau up to?

To the Editor:

I am not an alarmist and this is not about a statewide smoking ban. I am writing to express concern over a seemingly innocuous, government program that is going unnoticed by most of us.

Some of us are aware that a new U.S. Census will be taken in 2010. The U.S. Department of Commerce uses the information gathered in the census to facilitate many government programs. This is an information-gathering activity that is mostly harmless and often useful.

What most do not know is that the Census Bureau, no longer under the direction of the Department of Commerce, but guided by the White House, is sending out "census takers" right now – well before the actual census next year. These government employees, armed with Global Positioning System devices, are not asking the usual questions about the people who live in cities, towns and throughout the countryside. No, they are confirming residence addresses and uploading information about specific locations. They are electronically "painting" our front doors within 40 feet of their actual locations. This information is then uploaded to a satellite and stored.

But why does the government, via its census takers, need to target my front door? Or that of any other taxpaying private citizen, for that matter? When coupled with information gathered in the real census, scheduled to take place in 2010, will that satellite image "target" me and my family in some way? The answer is a resounding "Yes!"

The White House is laying the groundwork for congressional redistricting before the next elections. Coupled with global-positioning programs, census information about the people who live in specific locations will make it child's play for whatever political party is in power to re-draw congressional districts in such a way that their party is much more likely to gain or retain control of the Congress.

This morning, a pleasant young lady came to my door, equipped with a small, hand-held electronic device. She said she was from the U.S. Census Bureau and needed some infor-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

mation. She did not ask any of the usual questions that census-takers have asked in the past, only wanted to confirm my street address. (I happen to live in a semi rural area where many of us do not have a number posted in front of our homes or businesses.)

I informed her politely but firmly that I did not wish to have my specific location programmed into her GPS and requested that she leave my property. Somewhat taken aback, she stammered, "But this is important information that the Bureau of the Census needs." To which I replied that she would be welcome to come back when the Bureau conducts the real census in 2010, at which time I will be glad to answer actual census-related questions. But I refused to allow her to upload my name and location to a government database that includes satellite-based directions to my front door. I simply do not wish to be an unwitting participant in a politically driven attempt to redistrict my representation in Congress. Frankly, my "political smoke-alarm" went off and this time, I paid attention to it.

When these "census-takers" come knocking on your door, I encourage you to politely but firmly request that they leave the premises without the unnecessary and unneeded information they are seeking. When they come next year, prepared to ask real census-related question (and without their GPS devices), we should all be willing to participate in a legitimate information-gathering process.

Rodney C. Eisenbise, Colby

Publisher's Note: Let us clarify a few things:

Congressional redistricting is required by

the Constitution, but it is not done by the federal government. The state Legislatures, using Census numbers, are required to set district boundaries every 10 years. The White House has no direct part in this, nor does Congress.

In each state, the political party in power always seeks to take advantage, drawing the lines ensure winning or retaining seats. This is an American tradition; it's been going on for more than 200 years. Sometimes, if a party gets carried away, the courts will void the district plan and make the Legislature try again. The judge may even draw the lines. That's rare, however.

Whether it's a good idea to have the federal government pinpoint every house in the nation is another question. Such a database could be abused. But the technology has little to do with the redistricting process, which has always been partisan. — *Steve Haynes*

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