



Free Press Viewpoint

Hardly a mandate for the Republicans

Republicans should not assume that their wide-ranging victories in the midterm elections signal a "mandate" to change the nation.

While the vote certainly signals a rejection of what's been going on the last two years, it's far from a license to change everything, repeal all Democrat-passed laws and return to an era of small government.

American voters don't usually give that sort of mandate. Perhaps Franklin D. Roosevelt, taking office in the depths of the Great Depression, came as close as anyone to having a license for change. Even he lost 81 seats in his second midterm.

What many don't understand about American politics is the country is more or less evenly divided. The left pushes for more social programs, government control and spending. The right preaches lower taxes, less spending, smaller government.

But most Americans are not ideological. They lean strongly neither to the left or the right. And, no matter what the ideologues say, change is the last thing they want.

Elections swing one way or another. Either party may be in power today. Voters may move the other way down the road. It doesn't take much to swing control.

The last few elections tell us as much. Republican took over after years of Democratic majorities. They ruled for a decade, then at the start of a recession, the voters shifted to give the Democrats an ironclad majority.

Voters were not happy with the Republicans' performance, but they were even less impressed with the Democrats.

Last week's elections show how quickly the mood can change, and a shift in sentiment produce a big swing in House seats, governor's mansions, even the more stable U.S. Senate.

But no one should confuse that with a mandate for change. And while the Republicans talk about smaller government, under George W. Bush, they did nothing but grow government.

Democrats talk about long-cherished social goals, primarily health care. Voters were not impressed when it happened.

No party can control enough votes long enough in this country to simply have its way. Our system is not built for that kind of power. Yet the parties have shown they don't know how to work with each other. Each has its own pet beliefs; each is willing to sacrifice its effectiveness to push them.

Thus, the Democrats will cling to their health care boondoggle while Republicans insist on maintaining every tax cut. There is no bipartisan spirit, but that may not be a bad thing.

A deadlocked Congress may be less threatening than a double-majority, veto-proof juggernaut.

Now, the Republicans will try to repeal the health-care bill and cut spending. It won't happen. The Democrats in the Senate won't allow it, and little will be done without compromise.

With control of the houses split, there's little chance the GOP can trim programs or cut spending much, despite the demands of the "tea party" movement. Every program has its constituency. From Social Security to Amtrak, killing a federal program is next to impossible.

So what will happen? Expect two years of bombast and inaction, deadlock created by the split in power.

While change is needed, from some of the more odious provisions of the health-care bill, to repeal of the No Child power grab over local schools, to massive spending cuts, it mostly won't come. Our system is not built for radical shifts.

The health care bill represented change, and it scared America, but the voters won't countenance radical move by the other side, either. That is the great fault, and maybe the genius, of our system. — *Steve Haynes*

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MARGULIES
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Hard-working tool drawer bites the dust

The kitchen tool drawer broke. It just had too much weight for the size and shape of the drawer and the type of hardware holding it up.

It had done a wonderful job for years and years, but eventually there came the screw that broke its back, so to speak.

Of course, the drawer started out, like all such drawers, as a need repository for tools.

But every time we had a fix-it project, more tools, more stuff, more leftovers were added. Then one day, as I was pulling it out, it just gave way. It would have fallen, except the cabinet under it was full of stuff. So there I was, holding a tool drawer half in and half out and sitting on my electric skillet, two bird feeders and several empty jars.

It sat that way for a day or two, and then Steve and I pulled it out. Then it sat on the counter for another few weeks.

Finally, we decided we needed the counter space, and that drawer was doing nothing for the ambiance of the kitchen. We decided to transfer the tools to two smaller drawers, which mostly held food storage products like foil and plastic bags.

Of course, the two small drawers had to be cleared and cleaned first. It's amazing the number of twisty ties a drawer can collect, especially when you consider that all the plastic



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

bags today have zip-lock tops.

That turned out to be the easy part of the project. The two drawers were relatively clean and only needed a quick swipe of a damp cloth to make them ready for their new inhabitants.

The tool drawer, however, was a slum — dirty, disgusting and full of odds and ends.

First I removed the real tools — hammer, screw drivers, pliers, wire cutters, branch cutters, wrenches and some round things that fit on the end of a long thingee that I'm sure is used for something.

So far so good. Unfortunately, the drawer doesn't look all that much emptier.

OK, next we'll remove the bottles and boxes. Let's see, we have six kinds of glue or glue-like substances — Gorilla Glue, Shoe Goo, Super Glue, pipe joint compound, all purpose cement and pipe thread compound. There are four boxes of picture hangers; assorted wire nuts; eight rolls of tape, include Scotch tape,

masking tape, black electrician's tape, duct tape and a roll of red automotive lens-repair tape; and a package of stick pins.

Then there are the screws, nuts, bolts, nails, washers and what-the-heck-is-this's still covering the bottom of the drawer. A couple of empty pickle jars and two butter tubs rounded up most of that. I still don't know what to do with a half a piece of slightly used sand paper, three dust masks and several lengths of chain, wire and string.

After the drawer was empty, it was still dirtier than the dog after she's found a mud puddle. I washed and scrubbed. Steve put it outside in the sun to dry, and I bought some shelf paper.

All three drawers are now neat, organized and clean. It was a successful project.

Steve still needs to make repairs on my new food-storage-and-covering-products drawer, and I'm not sure what to do with this box of odds and ends. Which now includes three-quarters of a roll of shelf paper.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of NorWest Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Tomb Guard 'the most honorable thing'

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, on holidays and in all weather, Tomb Guard sentinels keep watch over the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. These soldiers are the best of the U.S. Army, members of the elite 3rd U.S. Infantry called the Old Guard.

Recently, while visiting Arlington with reporter Tim Carpenter of the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, I had the privilege of meeting one of these guards on his last day. Sentinel Kyle Obrosky, a Topeka native, had just completed 4 1/2 years of duty (twice the average length of service there), or in his words, "the most honorable thing I'll ever do."

The Tomb of the Unknowns contains the unidentified remains of Americans killed in World War I, World War II and Korea. An unknown soldier from the Vietnam War was later identified and removed.

Sentinel Obrosky and the 587 other guards who have protected the Tomb since 1925 endure rigorous training for this coveted duty. A little more than one-fifth of volunteers for the ceremonial guard are accepted, and a smaller number of these become guards. The training time is dictated by each individual's ability to learn the curriculum. Some soldiers may pass in about six months, but training cannot exceed one year.

Anyone who has seen their sacred and sol-



U.S. Senator Pat Roberts

• From the Senate

emn ceremony walks away proud of their nation and those who sacrifice for it. Sentinel Obrosky is this feeling personified.

"They are known but to God," he said. "We are their friends and family now; it is up to me to take care and honor them. They did not lose their country."

What is even more moving is hearing him tell of his path to becoming a Tomb Guard. It started with three veterans at Topeka West High School.

A struggling student, having lost sight of his priorities, he said, he joined the Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. Retired Maj. Chuck Wright, retired 1st Sgt. Don Munn and Stan Wagstaff, a colonel in the Kansas Army National Guard and then principal of Topeka West, served as his mentors. He said they inspired him to seek out a career in the Army and turn his life around to take on the challenge of becoming a sentinel at the Tomb.

It was these three Kansas veterans who took a young man who probably would not have graduated from high school and molded him into a soldier, and not just any soldier, an elite soldier serving in the nation's most honorable capacity.

As Sentinel Obrosky said, "You can tell the pride of a country by the way they honor their fallen heroes."

On this Veterans Day, I want to say thanks to Chuck Wright, Don Munn, Stan Wagstaff and all veterans who continue to inspire, protect and defend our nation through humble actions.

And thanks to Sentinel Obrosky. I wish him the best of luck as he continues his service with an intelligence mission at Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

Each individual veteran and service member's story of sacrifice is unique, but all have the collective threads of honor and service which makes our great nation the symbol of freedom and liberty around the world.

From this Marine, on Veterans Day, to all those who have served our country, *Semper Fi*.

Pat Roberts has been the junior U.S. Senator from Kansas since 1997. He currently serves on four senate committees including finance, ethics and agriculture.

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