

Other Viewpoints

Will Republicans keep agendas out of redistricting?

Republican control of Kansas government seems all but absolute, thanks to the party's sweep of statewide offices and pickup of 16 House seats in this month's election.

It will be a while before Kansans find out whether the GOP juggernaut will ease the post-census remapping of congressional, legislative and state Board of Education districts – or translates into a fight as heated as the last one, which drew a governor's veto, landed in federal court and nearly postponed an August primary.

The job sounds simple enough: Using the latest census data, redraw district boundaries to ensure that one person's vote in one district has approximately the same weight as the vote of any other person in the state. But the task can get tricky, especially if those involved see the opportunity to remake the maps to serve their agendas and hurt their political rivals.

Unlike in the 1990s, Kansas isn't expected to see slow population growth translate into the loss of a congressional seat in this round of redistricting. That's a relief.

But Republican lawmakers can be expected to try to ensure the new GOP-only congressional delegation stays that way, just as they sought to dilute Democrats in 2002 by dividing liberal Lawrence between two districts and separating obvious "communities of interest" in Junction City and Fort Riley.

The biggest fights will be over the state's population shift from rural to urban. Predictions are that the counties west of U.S. 81 could lose two Kansas Senate seats and as many as seven House seats.

Then there is the concern about whether minority populations will see their voting strength eroded by new maps.

At the very least, the new cast of characters for the 2012 redistricting process should make things interesting.

As Senate majority leader, Derek Schmidt unsuccessfully championed reform of the process as recently as 2009, saying that the status quo invites "hyperpartisanship, legislative bitterness and personal animosity." Schmidt pushed a bipartisan, independent approach similar to that favored in Iowa and other states. Now, Schmidt is attorney general-elect – in the position that Carla Stovall held in 2002 when she filed a federal lawsuit over the congressional map.

The leader of the House redistricting effort in 2002 is the House speaker now – Rep. Mike O'Neal, R-Hutchinson. And Secretary of State-elect Kris Kobach can be expected to make the most of his responsibility to supply lawmakers with data.

Once the new district maps emerge from the Legislature and are signed by Gov.-elect Sam Brownback, they must be reviewed within 30 days by the Kansas Supreme Court to ensure they comply with state law. Though congressional maps are not automatically subject to court review, all in recent memory have been challenged in court.

One thing is clear: If the looming redistricting effort again turns hyperpartisan and nasty, there will be calls to fix it before 2022. If the GOP lawmakers in charge want to avoid all that, they will make 2012 redistricting as fair, logical and transparent as possible.

– The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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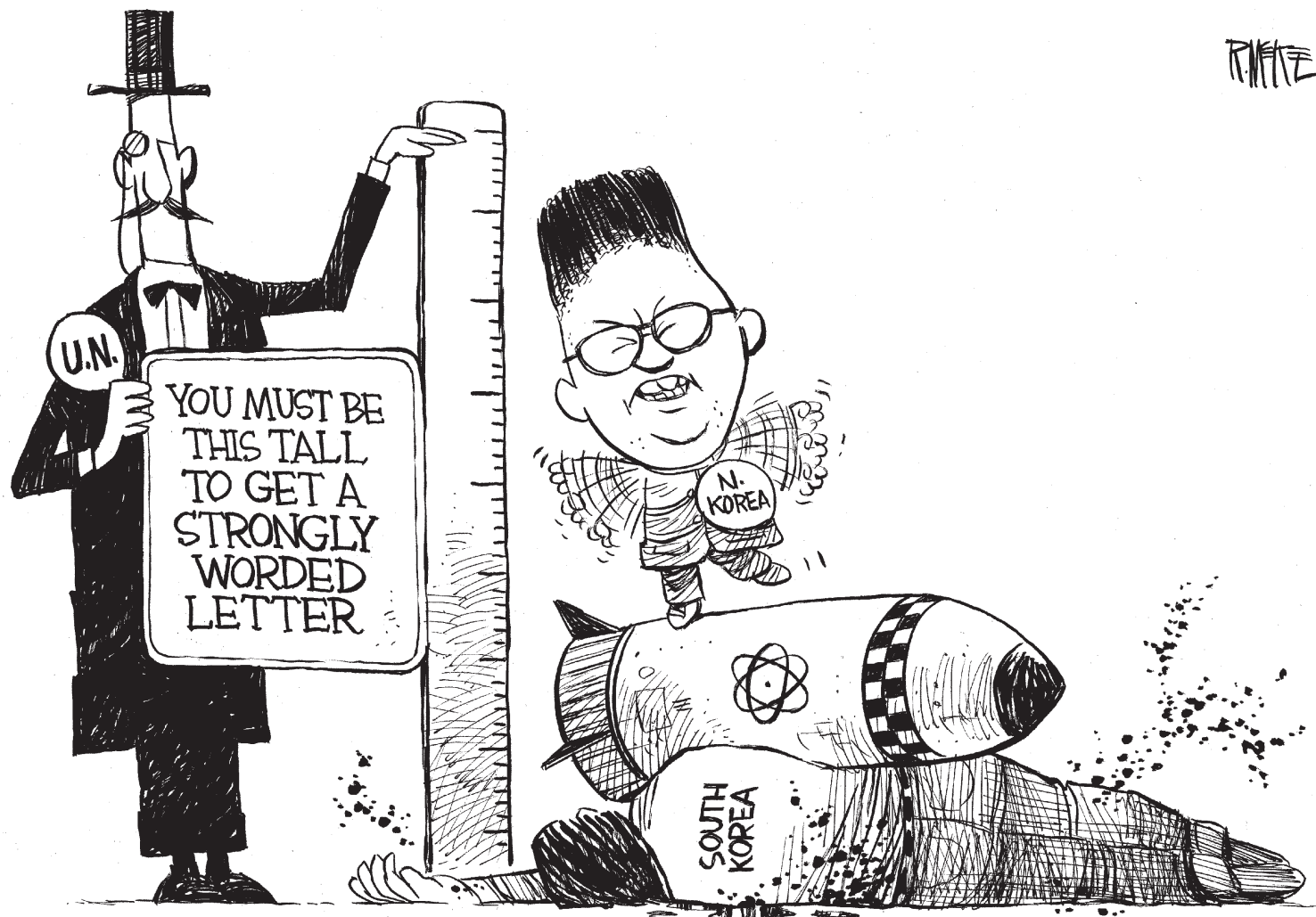
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Rep. Morrison a good friend

I lost a good friend and the Kansas Republican party lost a good man last week.

Jim Morrison and I didn't agree on many issues, but we could debate those issues and maintain our friendship and respect for one another.

I told him one time that he wasn't far from the line that would identify him as a Democrat. He just grinned and said he hadn't crossed that line yet.

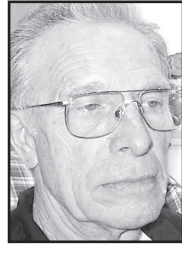
Then he would suggest that I was almost conservative enough to qualify as a Republican. Neither of us ever really thought the other one was in the closet. We knew where we stood on the issues.

As I write this, the news report today is that the National Republican leaders are threatening or promising to filibuster a bill to provide benefits to those who suffered injury and illness while working with rescue operations at the World Trade Center.

The Republicans hold hands and say no! But, they say, it is the Democrats who refuse to compromise. Oh??

A nearly two-thirds majority doesn't give much credence to the cry of the minority for compromise. Compromise, to the minority, has translated into, "give me/us what we want, or we will sit in the middle of the road and hold up traffic until you do!" We had a few Democrats who stalled in the middle of things, until they got what they wanted, too.

The far right and radical religionists have been beating the drums about patriotism and honorable service, but all that sounds rather hollow to me when they circle their wagons and refuse to allow honoring the volunteers, as well as civil servants, and provide just com-



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

pensation and health care for ailments resulting from their heroic efforts in the 9/11 disaster.

"Compromises" to allow advancing the health care bill in the Senate over the last two years resulted in the hodgepodge now confusing taxpayers. The minority has been allowed to broadcast half truths and outright misrepresentation of many of the bills before Congress in the last two years. They have been allowed to blame the "new" administration for some of the bailout and economic policies that were initiated by the past administration.

Can't you imagine the outcry if the Obama administration had immediately taken steps to repeal the previous two years' work of the Congress and Bush administration? Yet that is exactly what they are promising to do now.

The Republican leaders aren't talking about cleaning up or addressing obvious errors. They are promising complete repeal of entire programs and returning to the programs or lack of programs that put this nation in the predicament we were in at the end of the Bush administration.

Someone needs to define when it is compromise and when it is blackmail and extortion. Are the Republican leaders honestly trying to do what is right for the nation or are they holding the nation hostage?

They shout victory and public mandate because they gained a majority in the House and weakened the Democratic majority in the Senate in the recent midterm election. Never mind that historically, the winning presidential party has lost ground in the midterm elections more times than not.

They never recognized any public mandate when the Democrats gained the majority in the midterm election during Bush's last term. They never recognized any public mandate when the Democrats swept both houses with a compelling majority, and won a majority of the governor's races across the country in 2008.

No! They heard a public outcry, after the election, that shouted NO to everything the Democrats had supported on the campaign trail. The so-called silent majority made such a clamor that the voting majority retreated in silence. It seems to me that the real majority faded out while the minority grabbed the megaphones.

Did election officials all across the country miscount the ballots? Did the declared winners have to rely on the apparently partisan highest judicial court to declare the winners, as in 2004?

I think not. There was very little evidence of any irregularities or fraudulent tallying of the ballots. There was no serious challenge made that could change the outcome of the election.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

Wars, not Social Security, deplete budget

To the Editor:

The President's Commission on how to cut the budget so that the United States won't go deeper into debt consists of half Republican and half Democrat participants.

Now, when I was working as a waitress in Colby in 1941, I remember what a whopping lot of money Social Security took out of my pay when I was making only a dollar a day. However, when I went to vote, I voted for Social Security because of listening to others talking about the good Social Security would be in old age.

There was a fellow browbeating me to vote against it at the voting place. He was a Republican and I was a no-good Democrat.

The problem of the budget wouldn't exist if the Social Security Trust Fund were separate from the federal budget. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York pointed out that "borrowing" from the fund was stealing money. Some even called it the "Rainy-Day Fund."

Alice Rivlin, who served in of President Bill Clinton's administration, says that the United States will pay it back. At what rate of inter-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

to pay back the huge amount of money borrowed from the Social Security Trust Fund.

It makes me think of the time I was a little girl in the first grade. I was from the country and some "city dude" girls stole my purse with pennies in it from my desk and then told the teacher that I had stolen another girl's purse.

Edna A. Hatcher, Colby

Praise for citizen

To the Editor:

Sunday morning as I was walking my dog up Walker Street, I came upon a mess of shattered crockery, food and glass scattered along the middle of the street.

As I walked by, a truck stopped and we both commented on how something like this could have happened. Then the guy got out and pulled a shovel from the back of his truck and started shoveling up the major portion of the mess.

That is what I call a good citizen, and I commend him.

Mary McNutt, Colby

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