

# commentary

from other pens...

## Virginia special election offers political lessons

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The high-stakes congressional election in Virginia last week offered some valuable political lessons even though many said the contest probably was not a bellwether for future campaigns in the fierce battle for control of Congress.

Republican Randy Forbes defeated Democrat Louise Lucas on Tuesday in the race for Virginia's 4th congressional district. The race between the two state senators in southeastern Virginia was a surprisingly close battle that captured the attention of the nation's political establishment, inspired an intense voter turnout effort and cost the parties more than \$5 million.

Top GOP leaders — several of whom were from Virginia — hailed the victory as an endorsement of Bush administration policies like the huge tax cut the president just signed and his proposed changes in Social Security. Democrats said it was purely a local race with a determined campaign and get-out-the-vote effort.

The truth probably lies somewhere in between.

Lessons from the swing district in the Virginia Tidewater region:

—Democrats showed again they can motivate high turnout among black voters, who came out in dramatic numbers to support Lucas, a black state senator. That kind of turnout helped Southern Democrats win several surprising victories in 1998.

—Republicans demonstrated they can turn out votes just as impressively when they need to, not just rely on a barrage of advertising.

—Democrats still have trouble attracting votes of whites in rural areas — a problem clearly illustrated in the 2000 presidential election.

—President Bush may have slipped a bit in the polls recently, but not enough to cost Republicans a congressional election in a swing district.

"A candidate like Forbes could never have won this race if Bush had lost a lot of ground," said Larry Sabato, a political scientist at the University of Virginia. "Forbes is not a dynamo, and he doesn't carry a lot of baggage. He is Republican Everyman."

Republicans will continue to cause problems for Democrats when they can blur the distinction between the parties, said Rep. Nita Lowey of New York, chairwoman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. "It's up to us to define the difference."

Democrats were able to finish close — 52 percent to 48 percent — after polls had shown Lucas behind by nearly 10 points.

"I don't see this as any kind of decisive verdict," Sabato said.

Voters split largely along racial lines, according to analysts who have looked at the precincts. In a district with a 39 percent black population, Lucas didn't get quite enough support from whites to overtake Forbes.

The main lesson from Virginia for political analyst Charlie Cook was the intense level of competition likely in every swing congressional district in 2002.

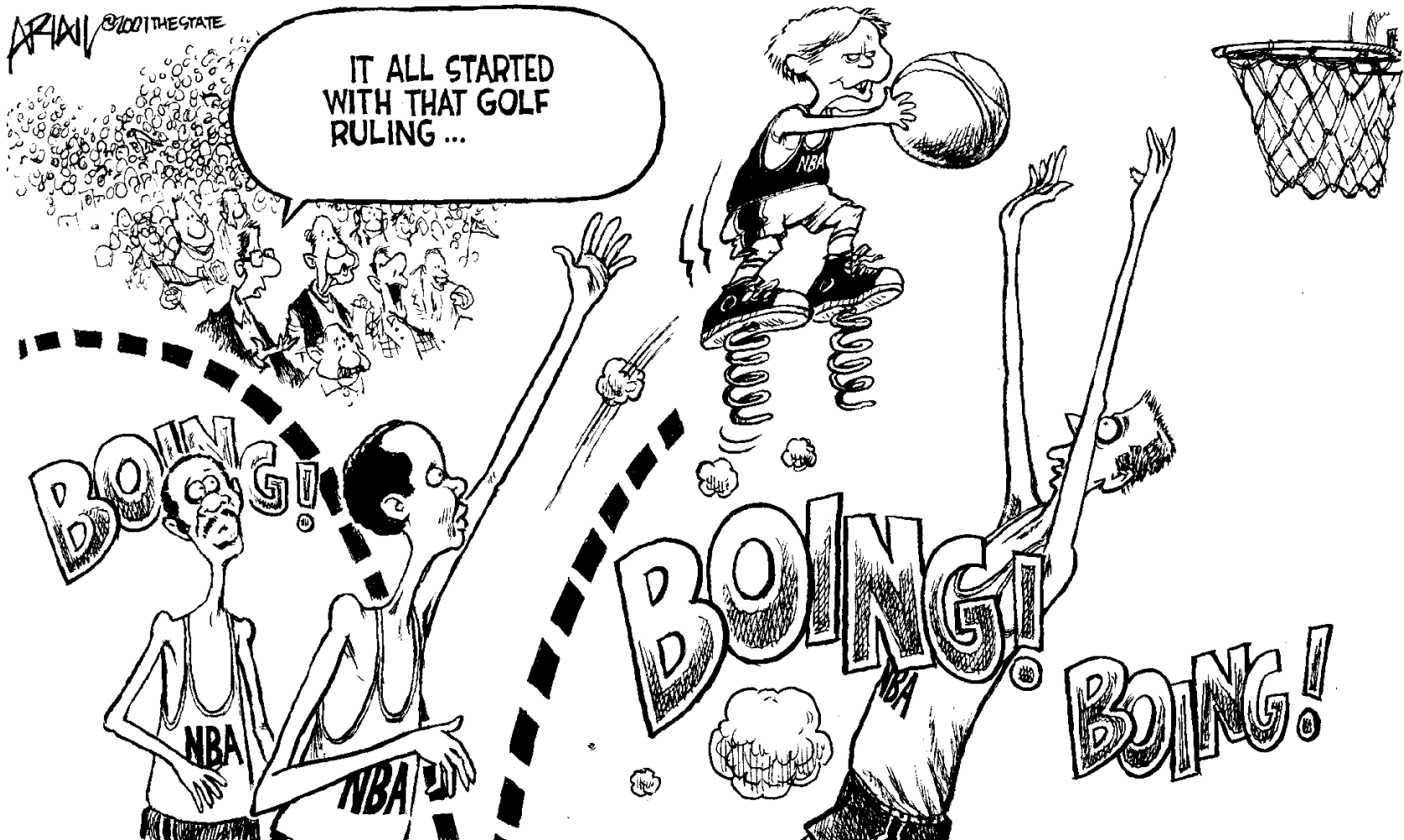
"The money, the resources, the time, the get-out-the-vote operation — where there are competitive races there's going to be hand-to-hand combat," Cook said.

Republicans have a 12-seat lead in the 435-member House, meaning even a small shift in the 2002 election could tilt the balance of power. "It reinforces the level of parity between the parties," said political analyst Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution.

Virginia's 4th district went narrowly for Bill Clinton in 1992 and narrowly for George W. Bush in 2000, Sabato said. Rep. Norman Sisisky, a conservative, held the seat for 18 years before he died in March.

The national parties are likely to make a major commitment in competitive districts around the country. But Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Gilmore, the Virginia governor, acknowledged it was unlikely many districts would get the amount of interest — and money — lavished on southeastern Virginia this year.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Will Lester covers polling and politics for The Associated Press.



## Movie makes me reflect on working at my job

One of the best movies I've ever seen is called "Office Space."

It's one of those flicks you and some friends pick up at a video store because it looks sort of funny, no one has heard of it and the group can't agree on anything else.

Most of the time, you get the movie home and find it's about a stupid man who is down on his luck — though he doesn't realize he's down on his luck or stupid — but manages in the end to get the girl and learn an important lesson, anyway. The star is usually Jim Carrey or Adam Sandler.

Office Space does have the same basic plot. A man who is tired of traffic, his boss, the fax machine and the day-to-day grind in general decides one day that he's not going to work anymore. He doesn't quit, he just stops showing up.

Instead of working he sleeps in, goes fishing and blows off his uptight girlfriend. Ironically, he eventually gets a raise at work and is promoted to a management position. One scam, attractive woman, run in with the law and big explosion later, he ends up taking a job as a construction worker and loves it.

This type of movie is usually semi-entertaining, but nothing to say... write a column about. So, I'm not sure why "Office Space" — which is not based in reality at all — struck a chord in me.

Yes, I thought it was funny, the acting was OK and the main character was kind of cute. But more



### rachel miscall

- unraveling

than that, I think the film brought forward questions that are always lingering in the back of my mind. And, in the end, I think I admired the lead character for doing something I sometimes wish I could.

Though I ultimately enjoy my job, it can be frustrating and sometimes I find myself sitting at my desk wondering: Why do I have to get up in the morning and go to work? Why do I sometimes force myself to do things that make me feel uncomfortable, stressed or scared? Is it natural — or healthy — to sit in front of a computer all day with a phone stuck to your ear? What will I remember most fondly when I'm on the verge of death — what I accomplished with my work or the day I blew everything off and drove to the mountains?

The movie reminded me of my — and pretty much everyone else's — working environment.

How a bunch of people who have never met before are forced to spend a majority of their lives crammed close together in an often stressful environment. How machines are always shutting down

when you need them most. And how other people's harmless personality quirks can sometimes drive you crazy.

The lead character was heroic to me because he realized he didn't like it and he just wasn't going to do it anymore. And, of course, he was still rewarded and admired by his co-workers and boss.

I think the movie gave me hope that I could do the same thing someday. I could say to heck with this office stuff and become a skydiving instructor, a personal trainer, a landscaper, a pool cleaner, a dancer, a jewelry maker or something else that would allow me to spend the day outdoors.

It also gave me hope that I could make a guilt-free and worry-free transition. I wouldn't feel guilty about disappointing my boss or co-workers and I wouldn't worry about being able to pay the rent.

Now, that would be freedom — doing exactly what you want to do when you want to do it. Of course, it's never that easy.

Movies tend to simplify situations and emotions — that's why people enjoy watching them. But, like I said, they aren't based in reality.

In reality, there's no simple solutions and there's no eternal happiness. No matter where you work or live, there will always be bad days and hard times when you wish you could escape or just give up.

I'm not going to do either, but that doesn't mean I can't dream and watch movies like Office Space — it's kind of like a mini-vacation.

## Pain at the pump — a lesson in elasticity

(Last of two parts)

Last week in the first part of this column, we discussed the theory of price elasticity. We explained that if a product's price has little bearing on the quantity sold it is an "elastic" product or one with a lot of "stretch" in its price. Gasoline is a good example. The recent price increases are closing in on \$2 per gallon, and they haven't slowed down the demand for gasoline noticeably.

On the other hand, if a small adjustment in price causes the quantity sold to go up or down drastically, we say this product or service is "inelastic." We see this occur frequently in products where there are ready substitutions.

For example, consider the meat case at your local grocery. If the price of beef takes a jump, consumers may opt for choice cuts of pork, chicken or seafood to replace beef in their menus. Usually, this causes a surplus in the channels of beef distribution, and forces the price back down to move the product.

In economics, we call this the law of "supply and demand." If a product or service is readily available, generally the price will be lower. If there is a short supply, and folks really want it, the price will rise.

So why have gasoline prices risen by 60 percent or more in recent months? Is it in short supply? No, gas can still be purchased almost anywhere. Then it must be greatly increased demand, right? No, again. The demand is fairly steady.

So why the big price increases? It's a business



### don taylor

- minding your own business

law called the "law of under valued."

Gasoline is worth more per gallon than we have been paying. Other folks around the world have been paying the U.S. equivalent of \$2 to \$3 per gallon for years. Now, it seems our time to pay up has come. That's why I fully expect to see \$2 gas prices soon.

On the other hand, taxes aren't under valued in most people's minds. Therefore, any increase gets the public's attention and often causes referendum action.

#### Under pricing is common

Many businesses are providing their products and services at prices below their true value. The result is the same from industry to industry: sub-par earnings.

There are several ways to correct under pricing and improve profits. Here are four.

Raise your price. Use caution here. You should never raise your price if you're too busy to monitor what happens when you do. Remember, your goal is to improve your bottom line. What you're testing is the elasticity of your price. If a price increase doesn't slow sales at all, you're still under

## Great dogs turn out to be sisters

Dear editor:

After reading the article in the June 20 *Goodland Daily News* about the couple that lost their 14-year-old blonde cocker spaniel, I thought I had to call her, because on April 21 we also lost a family member, our 14-year-old blonde cocker spaniel Britney.

Britney also went everywhere with us and did everything with us. She was our best friend and companion.

She touched a lot of hearts and everything she did was special. Her personality was special, everyone that knew her can tell you a lot of special fun memories of such a fun and loving dog.

Britney is a dog that cannot be replaced. She is one of a kind, we were very lucky to have shared 14 wonderful years with her, and her memories will go on forever.

After reading Mrs. Michaels' article I called her and after a lengthy conversation it turned out our two special dogs were sisters from the same litter. How special Heaven must be now.



### from our readers

- to the editor

Britney we miss you.

Terry, Linda, Brandi, Brook and Brenae Bahe Goodland

#### Letter Policy

The Goodland Daily News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be type-written if possible, and should include a telephone number and, most importantly, a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with phone numbers, by e-mail to: <daily@nwkansas.com>.

### berry's world



**QUESTION:** Will there be anything in the Patients-Rights Bill about hospital gowns?

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e-mail: [daily@nwkansas.com](mailto:daily@nwkansas.com)



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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services ([nbetz@nwkansas.com](mailto:nbetz@nwkansas.com))  
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. ([support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com))

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