

commentary

from other pens...

Campaign year has offered surprises, disappointments

Democrats never expected to have to switch candidates in the U.S. Senate race in New Jersey just over a month before the elections and Republicans hoped for a close Senate race in Montana, never suspecting their candidate would drop out because of an ad he says made him look like a gay hairdresser.

In Florida, Democrats are thrilled to be in a horse race in their attempt to unseat Gov. Jeb Bush, and Republicans are pleasantly surprised that Democrat Kathleen Kennedy Townsend is in a nailbiter in the governor's race in heavily Democratic Maryland.

While the campaign year has had some unexpected turns, the overall balance in congressional races hasn't changed a great deal.

"The most surprising thing is that it's as competitive as it is between the parties," said James Thurber, a political scientist at American University.

Six Senate races are extremely competitive — three currently held by Democratic incumbents in Minnesota, Missouri and South Dakota and three currently held by Republican incumbents in Arkansas, Colorado and New Hampshire. Democrats have a 50-49-1 edge in the Senate.

At the beginning of the year, Democrats didn't anticipate New Jersey Sen. Robert Torricelli would drop out of the race after his ethical problems severely damaged his candidacy. Democrats promptly replaced him with former Sen. Frank Lautenberg, who has a slim lead over Republican challenger Doug Forrester.

Republican plans to challenge Democratic incumbents in Louisiana and Montana have foundered and they face uphill battles against Democratic senators in Iowa and Georgia.

Democratic challengers in Oregon and Maine haven't caught fire and the party's challengers for GOP open seats in the Carolinas and Tennessee remain longshots. Democrat Ron Kirk, the former mayor of Dallas, is in stronger shape in his bid to win an open seat in the Texas Senate race against state Attorney General John Cornyn, the Republican.

The competition in the House remains close. Republicans have the upper hand by a 223-208 margin, with one independent and three vacancies.

"This is an election where a shift of an aggregate of a dozen seats in the House and Senate could shift control," said Rutgers political scientist Ross Baker. "It may not require much of a shift of seats to produce different majorities."

For the governors, what once appeared to be the year of the incumbent has shifted to the year of the challenger because of dire economic situations in most states.

Republicans still have a big job protecting their current 27-21 lead. Two states have independents — Maine and Minnesota — and have elections for open seats this year. Of the states with elections in 2002, 23 seats are now held by Republicans and 11 by Democrats.

Connecticut Gov. John Rowland, chairman of the Republican Governors Association, acknowledges the GOP could face a struggle keeping a majority.

"We're tightening up in some races with Democratic incumbents," Rowland said, "and our Republican incumbents are in pretty good shape."

Democrats think they are positioned to win the majority of governorships, after eight years when Republicans had the upper hand.

"There are several pleasant surprises — Florida, Arkansas, Alaska and Hawaii, which appears to be closing fast," said B.J. Thornberry, executive director of the Democratic Governors Association. She said the economy has played a role, helping to emphasize "the issues, values and priorities" that Democratic candidates are talking about.

Democrats have been nervously watching the close Maryland governor's race, where Townsend, lieutenant governor and daughter of the late Robert F. Kennedy, is battling Republican Rep. Robert Ehrlich. But Democrats claim they're confident they will win.

And Republicans are watching the Florida governor's race just as closely. The president's younger brother, Jeb, is locked in a close race with the Democrat, Tampa attorney Bill McBride.

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



I need to laugh more often

I don't know about you, but I don't laugh often.

Laughter has a healing quality and releases pent-up stress. Here's some Blessings in Disguise I received by e-mail. I hope at least one of them makes you laugh right out loud.

- 1) When I'm feeling down, I like to whistle. It makes the neighbor's dog that barks all the time run to the end of his chain and gag himself.
- 2) If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.
- 3) A penny saved is a government oversight.
- 4) The older you get, the tougher it is to lose weight, because by then your body and your fat are really good friends.
- 5) The easiest way to find something lost around the house is to buy a replacement.



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- 6) He who hesitates is probably right.
- 7) If you can smile when things go wrong, you have someone else to blame.
- 8) The sole purpose of a child's middle name is so he can tell when he's really in trouble.
- 9) Living on earth is expensive, but it does include a free trip around the sun.
- 10) Birthdays are good for you; the more you have, the longer you live.

11) How long a minute is depends on what side of the bathroom door you're on.

12) Ever notice that the people who are late are often much jollier than the people who have to wait on them?

13) If ignorance is bliss, why aren't more people happy?

14) There's always a lot to be thankful for if you take time to look. For example, I am sitting here thinking how nice it is that wrinkles don't hurt."

The last one on this list isn't really funny to us older people, but it gave me something about which to think.

I urge you to do the same, and make any lifestyle changes that you feel are necessary:

15) Most of us go to our grave with our music still inside of us.

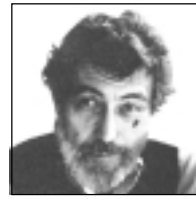
Unfree speech on college campuses

Earlier this year, I spoke at the 11th Annual Hugo Black Lecture on Freedom of Expression at Wesleyan University. During my lecture, "The Twilight of Free Speech," I told students that it was Justice Hugo Black who expanded the scope and range of the First Amendment to include local and state governments, as well as the federal government.

Part of my lecture concerned the dismaying attacks on freedom of expression for more than a decade by students at many college campuses. Student newspapers, usually of a conservative bent, have been stolen in large quantities, sometimes burned. And students with dissenting viewpoints have told me they have learned to censor themselves in and out of class.

Wesleyan is a justly well-regarded university. One of my sons went there in the 1980s and was editor of the student paper, The Argus. He has fond memories of the place and had resisted this plague of political correctness on campuses that was just starting then. The extent that expressions of independent views, in public, have diminished since the 1980s at Wesleyan and other colleges was illustrated in an editorial in The Argus soon after my last lecture.

The newspaper surveyed students about the campus culture of Wesleyan. Most troubling, the editorial said, was that 32 percent of the students "feel uncomfortable speaking their opinion. ... Debate is limited to a dialogue between liberal and progressive, which has the effect of silencing any and all conservative views. When the rare conservative stance is taken, a shouting match usually results, making impossible the dialogue, which the university claims to value so highly."



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In my experience — buttressed by reports from the Student Press Law Center and The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education — a similar survey administered at other college campuses would result in an even higher percentage of students intimidated by the chilling climate of political correctness.

I was quoted in the editorial as saying (in my Hugo Black lecture) that too many students across the nation believe they "have a constitutional right not to be offended."

The Argus editorial ended: "In our attempts to foster discussion and wrestle with issues, we have forgotten the basic liberal tenet of promoting freedom of expression. The booming voice of the left has almost completely drowned out a considerable portion of the campus's population."

But "when liberals and progressives are silenced, they decry it as ignorant and unjust."

The editor of The Argus, Bobby Zeliger — a true upholder of the spirit of Hugo Black — sent me a copy of the survey. Freddy Hill, the dean of the college, was quoted saying that she thinks "we need to provide more spaces where people can be honest with each other."

Michelle Rabinowitz, the chair of the American Civil Liberties Union on campus, noted, "Wesleyan and most Wesleyan students think that Wesleyan is a lot more open than it really is. I'm

not sure that the students are open to diverse viewpoints other than saying that they are."

"Diversity" is a much-valued goal at colleges and universities, but its meaning is too often limited to ensuring sufficient representation of race and gender in the student body. The concept of diversity of IDEAS, however, is often far less valued.

Hill understands the wider and deeper definition of diversity, "As a community (we) need to support groups that have diverse viewpoints, viewpoints that are not commonly heard on campus, and encourage new organizations with new voices." Maybe a Hugo Black Club.

The need for that kind of diversity was inadvertently revealed in the survey by Elizabeth King of the Wesleyan Democrats. "The question is how tolerant we are of intolerance," she says. "Personally, I'm not very supportive of homophobic, racist and xenophobic opinions. Nor do I feel necessarily inclined to provide those people with a venue for their opinions."

In The Argus editorial, I was quoted as having said in my lecture that "the ultimate test of a belief in free speech should be whether it can be extended to people you hate." I, in turn, was quoting Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who also said that this principle of the First Amendment "calls for attachment more than any other."

And if freedom of thought is not honored at college campuses, how devoted to this source of all our other freedoms will its graduates be as they become influential in America's future?

At Wesleyan, however, voices are rising to keep the spirit of Hugo Black alive.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

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