

commentary

from other pens...

GOP back on top in 108th Congress

In January 1953, a year of war on the Korean Peninsula and a Red Scare at home, Republicans moved into the winner's circle of American politics: simultaneous control of the White House and both chambers of Congress.

The GOP's triumph, the first time the party had occupied the central positions of national power since the Great Depression, lasted exactly two years. Although the country still liked Ike, Dwight Eisenhower's Republicans would not regain a Senate majority for 26 years. It took the GOP 40 years after its losses in 1954 to recapture a majority in the House.

A half-century later, Republicans have again achieved the trifecta — the triple crown — of American political success. And again conflict with Korea is in the news.

Stepping onto the rostrum where Eisenhower stood when he addressed the 83rd Congress 50 years ago, Republican George W. Bush will deliver the State of the Union address Jan. 28 before a joint session of the GOP-led 108th Congress.

Except for a six-month period at the beginning of the last Congress, a leadership opportunity ended by the defection of Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont, the 1953-1954 term marks the last time Republicans controlled the House, Senate and White House at the same time.

Korea remains a vexing issue a half-century after the armistice that ended the war. Civil rights, which was just gathering momentum when the 83rd Congress convened, is a far different issue than it was in 1953 when in many states public accommodations were still racially segregated and the right to vote severely limited.

Headlines in 1953 recorded Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy's hunt for communists in the State Department and the Army. But by the end of 1954 the Republican-run Senate had condemned its GOP colleague for abusing his office.

One of the factors in McCarthy's downfall was the 1950 Declaration of Conscience repudiating his guilt-by-association tactics issued by fellow Republican Sen. Margaret Chase Smith of Maine. She was the first woman elected to the Senate in her own right and, in 1953, the only female senator.

Fifty years have made a difference. Fourteen of the 100 senators serving in the 108th Congress will be women, a record number. Five of the of the 14 will be Republicans, also a record.

A portrait of Smith will be added to the Senate's collection of paintings of distinguished former members during the new Congress.

When Vice President Richard Nixon rapped the new Senate to order in the 83rd Congress he did so using the 2 1/2-inch, hourglass-shaped gavel employed by every presiding officer since 1789.

Senate historians say the fragile old gavel shattered in Nixon's hand during a heated late-night debate in 1954. A replacement gavel of Indian ivory took its place. And that's the gavel Vice President Dick Cheney will use when he convenes the Senate.

In the House, Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California will be the chamber's first female Democratic leader and in line to become speaker should her party regain the majority.

One precedent set at the end of the 107th Congress takes full effect in the 108th: Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, will become the first senator ever appointed by her father. Frank Murkowski named his daughter to serve the two remaining years in his Senate term after he was sworn in as Alaska's new governor.

Newcomers to the Capitol will only have to glance out an east-facing window to inspect the biggest change to the Capitol since the dome and Senate and House wings were added 140 years ago.

A hole is being dug in the East Lawn for a new underground Capitol Visitors Center. It will add underground security screening and a museum, auditorium, dining and office space.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Lawrence L. Knutson has been reporting on Congress, the White House and Washington's history for 35-years.



A city cat can find love in the country

This should be the story of a Christmas cat. It isn't.

It's just the story of Lost Boy, the city cat who found love in the country.

We were gathered at Barb and Daryl's for steaks about six weeks ago. They live in a farmhouse a few miles outside of Emporia. Barb is Steve's little sister. Their brother Doug came out from town and our kids came from Lawrence.

We were staying at the family cabin at Lake Kahola, about 30 miles outside of Emporia, that weekend and went to church in town Saturday since we were leaving early Sunday for home.

When we arrived, everyone else was already there.

Everyone including a very noisy black cat. He was crying up a storm out by the barn.

Daryl came out to see what all the fuss was about, and the cat ran up and practically jumped in his arms.

We had just figured it was one of the barn cats, but Barb and Daryl said they had never seen the cat before. They said that we'd brought him out from town because he was wearing a flea collar and country people don't put flea



cynthia haynes

• open season

collars on their outside animals.

Huh! We didn't think so. Maybe the kids had brought him from Lawrence.

They swore that they hadn't, but they had come in a pickup so maybe....

When we all left, the cat stayed behind.

In the morning, they discovered that he was really a dark chocolate brown, probably part Burmese. He had yellow Burmese eyes, and faint stripes.

He is an unneutered male. Calls to the veterinarians in the area and careful checking of the lost pet ads in the paper brought no response.

He's still at the farm, living with the barn cats. He's been named Lost Boy, or the Burmese Brat when he gets in trouble with Barb, which seems to be fairly often.

I thought maybe he would become an inside

cat, but she said that she's had enough of those. In the 20 years I've known her, Barb's only had four cats. During that same period Steve and I have had 14.

When I first met Barb, she was about 9 and her cat was Sarge.

Sarge died while she was at camp when she was about 12 and her brother Ken drove all the way to Topeka to find a suitable Siamese replacement. That cat, Mikie, lived with her for more than 20 years in at least three states.

Somewhere along the way, she acquired a part-siamese Deja and Deja had a kitten that she kept named Tiger. Deja died several years ago at age 18. Tiger is now 18. I won't say that her cats live long lives — they just never seem to die.

During that time we've gone through Spot, Beast, Baby, Dixie, Spazo, Midnight, Tuya, Hilary and half a dozen more I can hardly remember.

I called Barb just before I wrote this column to see how everything was going. She said the cats, including Lost Boy, were all sunning themselves on her back porch. The barn, it seems, is just the cafeteria and bunkhouse.

Sebelius, GOP leaders to fight on education

TOPEKA — Democratic Gov.-elect Kathleen Sebelius and Republican legislative leaders are headed toward a clash over education spending.

Sebelius has promised to reject cuts in aid to public schools despite the state's serious financial problems.

GOP leaders are equally adamant that cuts in school aid must be considered as legislators deal with the budget.

The looming conflict has its roots in the gubernatorial campaign, when Sebelius accused Republican nominee Tim Shallenburger of being willing to cut school spending.

Her victory showed that voters want schools protected, she said in a recent interview.

"I thought it was pretty clear," she said. "I thought that was one of the defining issues between my campaign and the campaign of my opponent."

But Republican leaders have been skeptical of Sebelius' promise on education spending, especially given other statements suggesting she would not support tax increases.

"I don't think you can leave education alone — it's impossible," said Senate Ways and Means Committee Chairman Steve Morris, R-Hugoton. "The hole's too big."

Neither Sebelius nor legislative leaders doubt the seriousness of the budget crisis they will begin tackling Jan. 13, when the session convenes and Sebelius takes office.

For the current budget year, which ends June 30, Gov. Bill Graves averted a projected \$312 million deficit with cuts and withholdings, including about \$17 million sliced from education spending. As much as \$800 million separates projected revenue and promised spending in the 2004 fiscal year, which starts July 1. Schools are now set to receive \$3,863 per



john hanna

• news analysis

pupil from the state under the current budget. Including funding for special education, buildings, transportation and programs for poor children, state aid to school districts totals about \$2.3 billion.

That is slightly more than half the money appropriated from the general fund, which holds most of the state's tax revenue.

Republican leaders argue the already difficult financial situation becomes twice as hard to solve if aid to public schools isn't cut. If public schools are protected, then social services and higher education will absorb deeper reductions.

"I think everything — everything — is on the table," said incoming House Speaker Doug Mays, R-Topeka. "I don't think we can afford to hold anything harmless."

Legislators could follow last year's \$252 million tax increase with another tax increase. But Republican leaders see little enthusiasm for the idea and have said taxes will be raised only with a push from Sebelius — which she isn't preparing to do.

"I am always conscious of the fact that there are people in a lot of areas in Kansas in real economic trouble," Sebelius said. "I think there's a sense of we have to tighten our belts. We have to make this government as efficient and effective as possible."

But Sebelius won't include public schools in the belt-tightening in part because she's confined by her campaign rhetoric.

She made much of Shallenburger's statement on Aug. 7, the morning after his primary election victory, that schools could deal with a cut in spending of up to 3 percent if the alternative were raising taxes.

Shallenburger later said he didn't favor cutting schools and wouldn't propose reductions in school aid. He also said Sebelius was taking his statement out of context.

Sebelius insisted the statement spoke for itself.

She said: "I heard over and over again from people, 'We really feel that a commitment to the future is a commitment to education. We don't want Kansas to lose quality schools.'"

Furthermore, Sebelius argued that holding public schools harmless is vital to an economic recovery.

"We can't afford in the 21st century not to have a well-educated work force," she said. "If you have trained workers, if you have an educated work force, people will come."

The fight with GOP leaders is coming because, even though they acknowledge the importance of public schools, they don't know how to avoid cutting school aid while reducing other agency budgets.

"If somebody can show me a way you can do that without raising taxes, I'd be glad to look at it," Mays said. "I just don't think that we could."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Political Writer John Hanna has covered state government and politics since 1987.

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