

from our viewpoint...

Snow plow troops building more piles

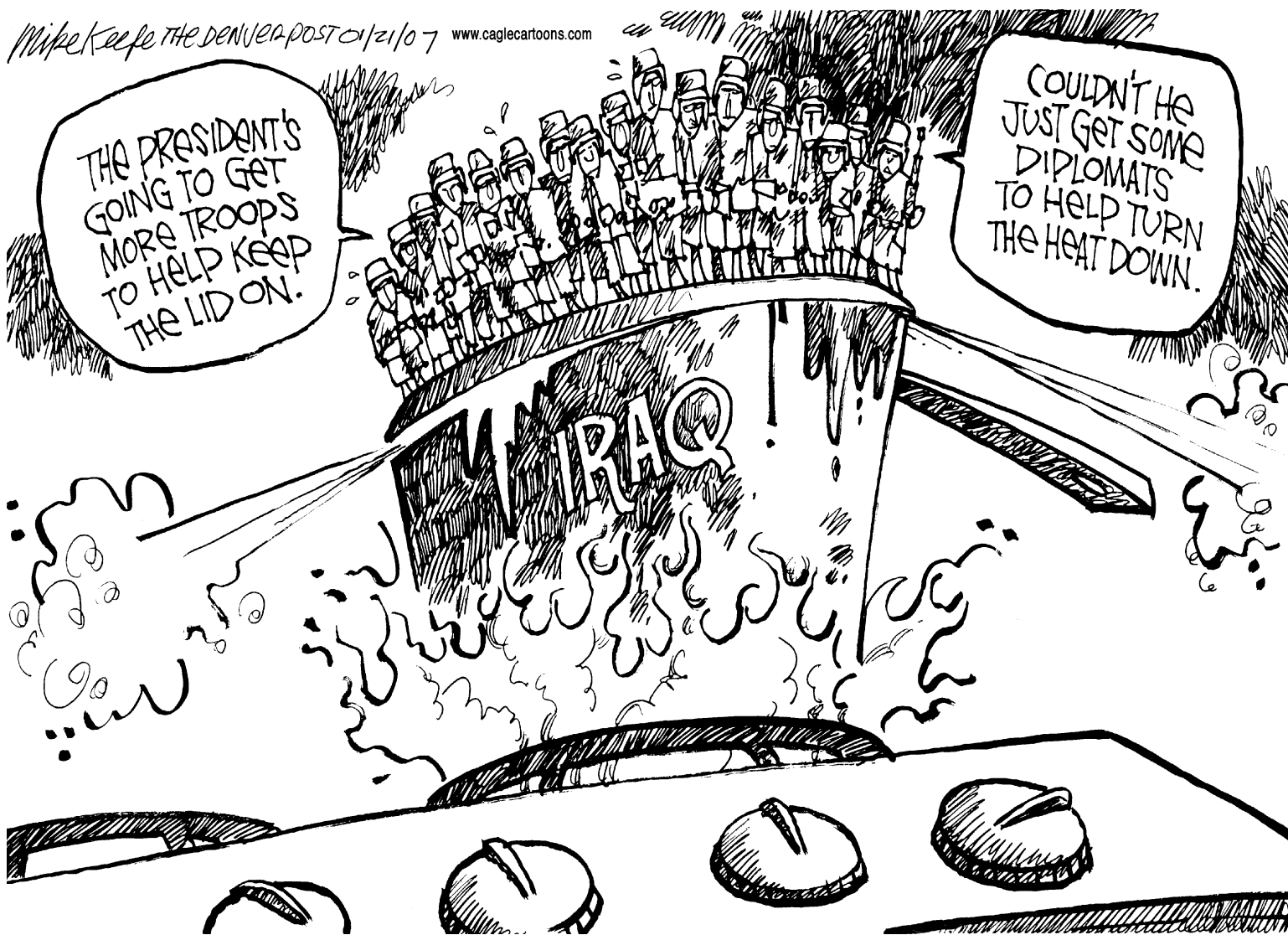
The sun shines as this is written Monday morning. We just ended another weekend featuring a deliver of more than six inches of snow.

It is getting to be a regular ritual. We tip our hat to the guys who man the machines clearing our streets, roads and highways. They do their thing while most of us are asleep.

For those of us who awakened to the sounds of snow movers Sunday morning, it was music to our ears.

Most of us just take the snow troops for granted, but we shouldn't. While clearing the driving surfaces is part of their job, their schedule is controlled not by man, but by Mother Nature. And she doesn't run on a timetable.

So, rest assured, snow movers, that your efforts are appreciated. And welcome. —Tom Betz



where to write

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; web address — roberts.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; web e-mail address — brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; Fax (202) 225-5124 e-mail address — jerry.moran@mail.house.gov

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State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Rm. 128-S, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785)-296-7399; e-mail address — ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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Snow makes it hard to put away decorations

I told you last week, part of my task while Cynthia's been gone has been to de-Christmas the house.

I didn't go whole hog. The lights outside are buried in snow, and it may be April before we can find all of them. I did coil the extension cords up in case we need them, so the outdoor lights are off.

Maybe this weekend, I'll take down the lights on the aspen tree, which is bare since the ice melted. The ones on the bushes are frozen in.

Inside, I hauled everything to the basement, where it waits someone smarter than I to pack it into the storage tubs. I'm not allowed.

And I left the big tree in the living room, lights ablaze, for Cynthia's return.

Then I had to deal with the Christmas cards. They were everywhere. She stuck the first two dozen in a cute Santa card holder she bought. His beard is made up of steel coils that hold cards; it hangs inside a door.

That filled up and she started standing them upright on the mantle. Then the table. Then the little table. By New Year's, the living room was pretty well papered in them, but they're still coming in.

Cynthia said to throw them away, and I will, but I had to skim through them once last time. The represent a pile of memories, our whole lives passing before our eyes.

Both of us still get cards from a few high school friends we've kept in touch with. I wish there were more. I suppose I could look some of them up.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Then there are relatives. Cynthia has lots of those, cousins from both sides with kids and grandkids and even great-grandkids. I just have my older cousin Mary Lou, who had three boys and six grandkids and sends pictures of all of them.

Yeah, I'm a little jealous, but she is older. My brothers and sisters, their card skills are hit or miss.

Cynthia gets cards from all sides of her family, her dad's nieces and nephews, and on her mom's side, a couple of cousins, including George the general. I've never actually met him, but there's a book about his career.

We still get a fair number of cards from old colleagues and neighbors in Kansas City, though we've been gone for 26 years. We both had our first "real" jobs there and all three of our kids were born in Wyandotte County.

There's Marietta, in Philly now, who was on the copy desk when I started at *The Star*, and Bob, maybe the smartest bureau chief I worked for. He and his wife raise free-range organic turkeys in Maine now. No kidding.

From Colorado, we get cards from both places we lived, Creede, up in the mountains, and Monte Vista, out in the great San Luis Valley. We still see a lot of our friends there in the

summer, but some have retired and moved and we keep up with them only through the Christmas letters.

Then there are new friends in Oberlin, and friends from our travels to newspaper conventions. That list seems to be growing. This year, we got a batch of cards from people we rode the submarine with.

There are fancy cards, homemade cards, kid-made cards, printed cards and personal cards. Jim, a big MU fan, always has a tiger on his. A couple of women do their own artwork every year. About a third include a letter, some a short note.

The saddest cards — though we've gotten a couple that brought tears just with the stories they told — but most years, the saddest are the ones you don't get.

Maybe you knew, maybe not. Their card comes back, marked "unable to forward." Maybe they moved. Maybe you'll never hear.

There seem to be more of those every year. I count the stack, more than 65 and I'm sure some fell by the wayside. There're the Diddies, who lived next door when I was growing up. One from the national office. A birthday card for one of us from the bank. Even a card from the accountants.

At Christmas, they're all priceless, at least until the letters are read and the decorations come down.

Then it's out the door. There'll be another batch next year.

And a couple I may hide away.

Rebuilding the GOP House

Hardly anyone beyond the D.C. Beltway has ever heard of the Republican Study Committee, but this group of more than 100 congressmen — essentially the conservative conscience of the House of Representatives — has an important (and increasingly tough) double mission: educating their less principled Republican siblings and trying to translate the conservative tenets of limited government, individual empowerment, a strong national defense and traditional values into legislation.

Needless to say, with the Bush administration spending like crazy and Democrats about to assume control of the House and Senate, there's lots of work ahead for newly elected study committee chairman Jeb Hensarling of Texas, a House member elected from the Dallas area in 2002.

Hensarling, 49, is a dedicated advocate for economic growth, job creation and tax relief who has distinguished himself by publicly challenging the White House and his party leadership on their bloated budgets and wanton spending. I talked to the former businessman and aide to Sen. Phil Gramm by phone Wednesday from his home near Dallas.

Q: Are you part of a dying breed of Republican conservatives or are you in the vanguard of a new Republican Revolution?

A: Boy, I wish I knew the answer to that. I've long since discovered I cannot be a congressman unless I'm an optimist. In the four years I've served as a member of the House, although the number of Republicans in the House has decreased, I think the number of conservatives in our Republican conference has increased. So I'm cautiously optimistic that maybe there is some silver lining in this big gray cloud, and that is that the Republican Party can once again show the American people that we are committed to our core values and that we know how to translate those values into legislative proposals that are meaningful to them and their hopes and dreams and aspirations for their families.

Q: What kind of Republican are you?

A: Let me put it this way: Until I went to



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

Washington, I didn't know how conservative I was. I am passionate about my commitment to limited government and freedom. I simply know that you can not have unlimited opportunity and unlimited government. Although today I view the terrorist threat from this radical strain of Islam to be the greatest threat to my country and my family, I frankly view the second greatest threat as a federal government that has grown too large, too intrusive, too powerful and too expensive. Since I've got into the daddy business four years ago, I've spent a lot of time thinking about the next generation. And we know if we don't reform the big three entitlement programs, the next generation is going to face a rather nasty fiscal fork in the road. The bottom line is, for all intents and purposes, there will be no federal government in one generation except Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, or we're going to have to double taxes. I find both of those untenable.

Q: Why did Republicans lose Congress?

A: Nobody can deny the power of the Iraqi conflict in that election. But it is not the only reason. Frankly, a very significant reason is that too many Americans came to the conclusion that the Republican Party lost its commitment to limited government, to accountability, to a balanced budget, to less spending. So that is where there is a huge battle. If you look at the polls, and I've looked a number of polls, particularly in swing districts, the Republican brand has been damaged. Fiscal responsibility is one of our core values.

Q: Did the Republicans deserve to be thumped?

A: I would put it to you this way. If I was a teacher, I might have given the Republicans a "B-minus," but I'd certainly give the Demo-

crats an "F." Having said that, people expected us to get an "A" grade on fiscal responsibility and we didn't do it. The "Bridge to Nowhere" (in Alaska) happened on our watch. The increase on No Child Left Behind happened on our watch. The Medicare prescription drug benefit happened on our watch. The Democrats had an even more expensive prescription drug benefit program under Medicare that you rarely heard about. As a member of the budget committee, I know that almost without exception every amendment offered by the Democrats spends more money. But again, nobody expects them to be a fiscally responsible party, but they do expect (it of) us. ... the American voters rightly held our party responsible.

Q: How will you measure your success as chairman of the Republican Study Committee?

A: Right now, I am speaking to a lot of smart people I know in the conservative movement and really trying to find out the best way to organize the Republican Study Committee in the minority. It will be a different animal with different emphases. To some extent, our ultimate purpose is the same. But we know we can not advance the Republican movement until the Republican Party once again regains the majority — not simply for the sake of having the majority, but for using the majority to further our conservative cause. We have to engage in more advocacy within our Republican conference.

Q: Do you have a sense that Republicans might be better at being out of power and on defense — at least better at upholding and defending and adhering to their core principles?

A: I think (losing Congress) was a cold slap on a cold face on a very cold morning that will hopefully wake up the conservative movement within the Republican conference within the House. Many of us have been talking for quite some time that the people are disappointed, particularly on spending.

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