

from our viewpoint...

Campaign is battle to control Congress

They say this campaign — the battle for control of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives — is about as dirty as any ever before seen, but that’s open to debate. It seems that description surfaces every time we have an election.

Still, we think this election does sound nastier because these cable network talk shows are nastier. They bring together opposing viewpoints, but far too often turn into shouting matches. And shouting matches prove nothing. Matter of fact, the shouts often drown out the opinions.

The hosts of these shows know how to fan the flames and at times they are the ones doing the debating, leaving little times to the experts they invite as guests.

We prefer the old-fashioned approach employed by C-Span. Their debates are just that — debates. Questions are asked, answers are given ... well, given as politicians would give them. But that’s the test of debating, keeping your opponent on his or her toes, finding flaw in an argument, taking advantage of fiction passed along as fact. It’s a skill.

We have watched countless hours of debates on C-Span this campaign season and have come away better informed on the various candidates’ stands on the issues. We are watching closely the Senate races in Montana, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Tennessee. Each of these has been in the C-Span spotlight. Repeats are the norm, never interrupted by commercial advertising. They generally last an hour.

The debates not only include candidates for the U.S. Senate, but also the House and governorships.

Strange how we formed opinions on some of the candidates as passed along by cable chaos, but changed our minds when we watched these same candidates square off on C-Span. There’s a world of difference.

Why would we be interested in candidates from other states we cannot vote for? Simply because whoever wins will be making the rules under which we all play.

The big day — election day — is just around the corner, next Tuesday, Nov. 7. A few days later, everything will return to normal, but only for a brief period of time. Because 2007 will usher in the start of the 2008 presidential campaign.

See what we mean by “a brief period of time”?

—Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*

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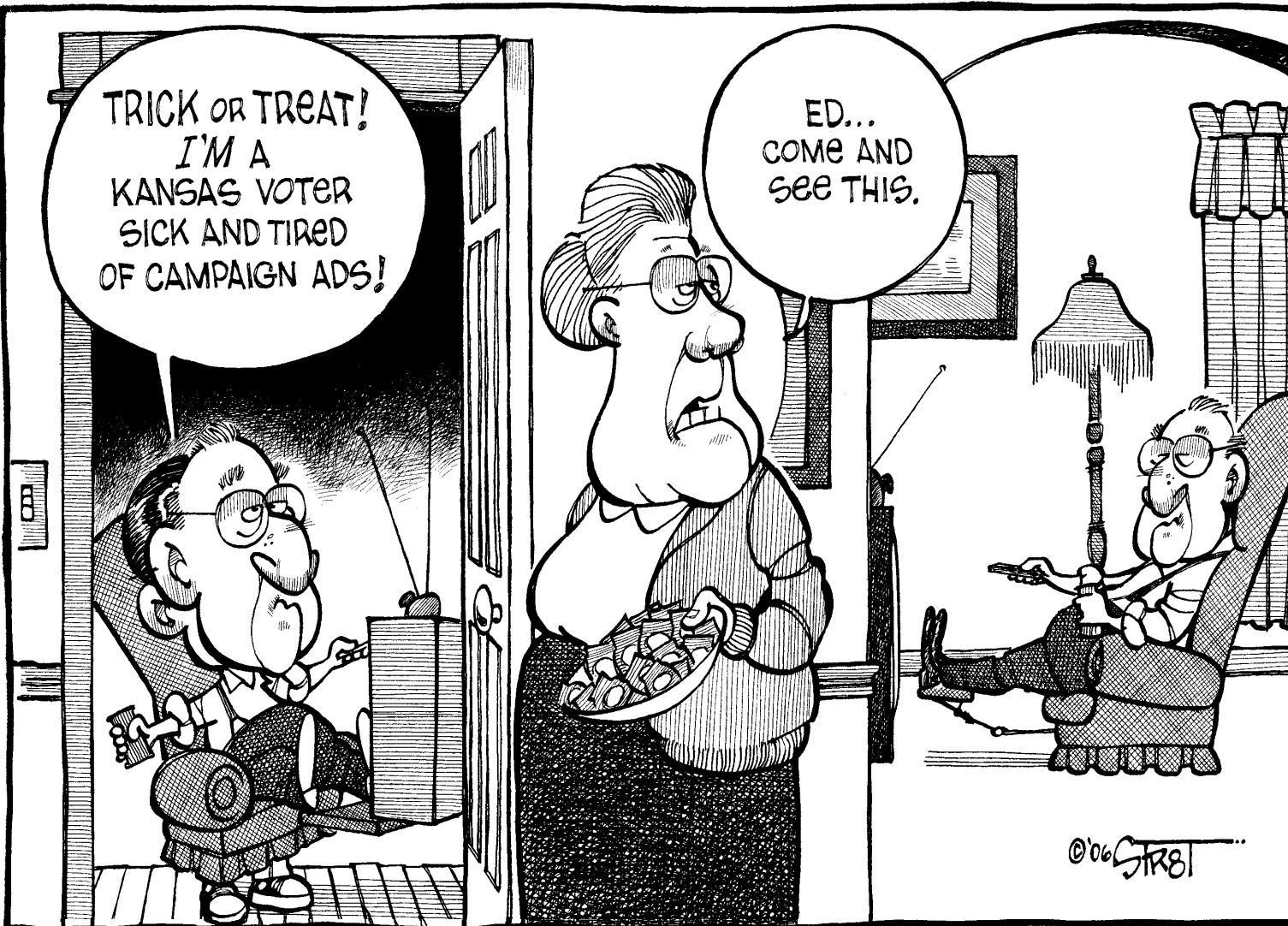
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Hard to describe ride on USS Nebraska

Wow!

I can’t think of any other word to describe our ride on the USS Nebraska.

It’s a little like being in a Tom Clancy movie, from the chatter of the watch standers in the control room to the covered shed at the docks, where warheads can be loaded and missiles changed out away from the prying eyes of Russian satellites, to the stone-faced Marine guards at the gate.

Crewmen sleep among the missile tubes, nine to a room, the lucky ones at least. Junior sailors bunk between compressors, under torpedoes or wherever there’s space for a mattress and a curtain.

Our day started early, 0615 hours, at the motel near the SeaTac airport where 23 of us, mostly Nebraskans, had gathered for a tour sponsored by the Big Red Sub Club. Drivers from the Gold Crew (a Trident submarine has two full crews, who rotate two or three times a year) drove us clear around Puget Sound to Naval Base Kitsap, where we got a lecture from the public affairs officer and transferred to a bus for another hour’s drive north.

At the John Wayne Marina, we boarded the Olympic Venture, a Navy patrol boat (PTB-951) for an hour’s ride to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, near the Canadian border, where we met Nebraska.

The day dawned gray and wet, a Seattle morning if there ever was one. Most of us braved the open deck, though some crowded near the wheelhouse or below decks in the tiny galley to get out of the mist.

Out in the strait, the weather warmed, the sea calmed and ahead, a gray hump loomed between four escorts — two armed Coast Guard cutters and two small container ships loaded with — get this — boxes of rocks.

Sometimes, said the captain, Cmdr. Jeff de



steve haynes

● along the sappa

Beauclair, an armed helicopter joins the parade. The cutters can ward off any approaching surface vessel and the container ships, one to either side, manned by civilians, are there to take a hit from any missile fired at the sub.

With 24 nuclear-tipped Tridents and dozens of warheads, Nebraska is way to valuable to risk coming into port.

The patrol boat swings a gangway across to the sub and we walk over. In glass-like seas, it’s easy transfer. An armed guard — another post-9/11 precaution — checks our ID against the list, and down the hatch we go.

A submarine, even one big enough to house standing Trident missiles, is cramped. To get anywhere, you go up and down ladders, some big enough to be stairways on land, some (like the one leading to the hatch) just vertical.

First we had lunch in the crew’s mess, which lived up to the reputation of sub food stretching back to my dad’s days on a submarine tender in World War II. He always talked about how the subs got steaks and A-1 while his crew got potatoes and hamburger.

We had a couple of old submariners with us, and they couldn’t stop talking about the differences between Nebraska and the old diesel boats. Those were tiny, cramped, one-level tubes, while an SSBN is more than 40 foot — a four-story behemoth loaded with death.

We got to see nearly everything onboard, from the control room to the missile control panel, where Cynthia got to “fire” a test Trident. (The real trigger is locked in a safe, await-

ing the president’s order, which except for tests, has never come. Thank God.)

From the torpedo room to the auxiliary diesel engine to the control room, with the wheel, diving plane controls and periscopes, we missed only the sonar room and engine room, both still too classified for public view. We got to take pictures of most anything, from the crew bunks in among the missiles to the pharmacy (sick bay) to the galley.

Then it was to the bridge, 30 foot straight up a ladder through the sail, really more of a crow’s nest than a command station on a modern submarine. The captain has a cushion on top of the sail, the officer of the deck stands by a computer display and sailors man watch holes behind them.

But what a view.

Cmdr. John Carter, the Blue crew captain, was in his element.

The captain let us ride on deck going down the sound and through the floating bridge, then stowed us below for the actual docking — some things there are still secret, it seems.

We’d been warned not to rile the Marine guards on the dock with cameras, and the Navy sprinted us out and back to Seattle by ferry. We got home about 2200 hours — a long day.

Someone asked what the best thing about the ride was — the electronic gear, the missiles primed to wipe out a quarter of the earth’s surface, the fantastic design and awesome size of the sub — but hands down, it was the crew, serious, friendly, polite, studious, highly trained and motivated.

It’s an elite unit, yes, but a shining example of the U.S. military, very impressive from top to bottom.

It was, as they say, the ride of a lifetime.

Wow.

All’s not lost for the GOP

The chattering class has been all agog over so-called generic polls showing Democrats will give GOP members of Congress a royal beating in the November elections — and this was before the so-called revelations about Rep. Mark Foley’s shenanigans, which sent them into a state of sheer ecstasy.

As heartening as this may be to the liberals and their media lackeys, neither of these apparently GOP-unfriendly revelations is going to be the main determinants on Nov. 7.

What really matters in most of the 435 House races is the enormous advantage House members have in the simple fact that they are incumbents. And they are all beneficiaries of what I call the Incumbent Protection Act.

According to a study, “Redistricting and Incumbent Protection in 2001-2002,” by the Voting and Democracy Research Center, elections to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2002 were dramatically less competitive than elections after the last round of redistricting in 1991-1992:

“In 2002, fewer than one in 10 races were won by less than 10 percent, and fewer than one in five races were won by less than 20 percent — less than half of the number of races won by those margins in 1992. Only four incumbents were defeated by challengers — the fewest number in history — and the average victory margin was nearly 40 percent. Our 2003 Dubious Democracy report has additional data quantifying this alarming state of affairs.”

Their conclusion: “This lack of competition in a post-redistricting election makes it quite possible that House elections toward the end of the decade will be less competitive than any in history.”

Democrats and Republican incumbents have schemed together to create districts for themselves that all but guarantee the members



michael reagan

● making sense

can hang around Capitol Hill for as long as they want. And the voters back home will oblige them.

The old adage that “all politics is local” holds true for members of Congress. In other words, local politics plays a major role in a congressional election. Only rarely do national issues overshadow local issues. That’s another shield that protects incumbents from the national winds of change.

As far as what they are now calling “Foleygate” damaging the re-election chances of individual Republican members, the effect will be negligible to zero. Moreover, the Democrats, by jumping feet-first into the scandal may suddenly discover that they will be the ones who get hurt.

Take Nancy Pelosi as an example. She brazenly accuses the House GOP leadership of failing to protect “the children,” implying that they willingly exposed pages to being sexually

molested by Mark Foley.

What hypocrisy! This is the same Nancy Pelosi who wants Boy Scouts to be exposed to homosexual scoutmasters. Does she really think the voters are going to let her and her party get away with this outrage?

Moreover, investigations now in progress by the FBI and the House Ethics Committee will turn over some rocks and uncover the complicity of at least some top Democrats — and a whole slew of sleazy operatives working on their behalf — in a conspiracy that kept the sordid charges against Foley undercover until they could be used as a last-minute assault on the House GOP.

The real cover-up was theirs.

Finally, if Rush Limbaugh is right — and I think he is — the reaction to this sleazy Democrat plot by the Republican’s conservative base is not anger at Speaker Hastert and his colleagues but instead, at the Democrats, who will pay the price on Nov. 7.

They’ve got it coming.

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations across the country. E-mail comments to mereagan@hotmail.com.

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