

from our viewpoint...

Lots to talk about since election done

Tuesday's election was interesting, to say the least. The big surprise of the night was the Democrats taking over control of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Here are some lingering thoughts.

- A lot of new faces are going to Washington to look after our cause. How that will work out remains to be seen. The Democrats, who made surprising gains, don't have much time to effect change before we go to the polls again in 2008.

- I haven't figured out yet whether the overall result was an anti-Iraqi war vote, displeasure with President Bush's leadership, corruption, the improving economy that seems to not be filtering down, or a lot of restlessness among conservative Republicans who feel the party has left them behind.

- Some of the incumbents cast aside raised eyebrows. Those so-called safe seats weren't. There were big names among them, like Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, the third ranking Republican, Sen. Conrad Burns of Republican-rich Montana, and Sen. George Allen of Virginia. It was a crazy night.

- Here in our state, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius won a second term. She carried 12 of 20 counties in our region, but in Norton County, where the Sebelius name is household, she lost. She won in Decatur, Ellis, Graham, Osborne, Phillips, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Sheridan, Sherman, Smith and Trego. She lost in Cheyenne, Gove, Logan, Ness, Norton, Rawlins, Thomas and Wallace.

- Kansas will have two Democrats serving in the House of Representatives, and that is sort of a rare thing. Two Republicans won re-election, Jerry Moran of the big 1st District and Todd Tiaht of the 4th. Democrat Dennis Moore was re-elected in the 3rd District and Democrat Nancy Boyda in the 2nd. She beat longtime Republican Congressman Jim Ryun. And that is ironical because President Bush flew into Topeka for a Ryun rally Sunday night in hopes of shoring up his campaign.

- Democrat Paul Morrison is our new attorney general. He landslided incumbent Phill Kline. That wasn't much of a surprise. It was a bitter, nasty race. And Kline's appearance earlier in the week on the Bill O'Reilly show didn't help matters.

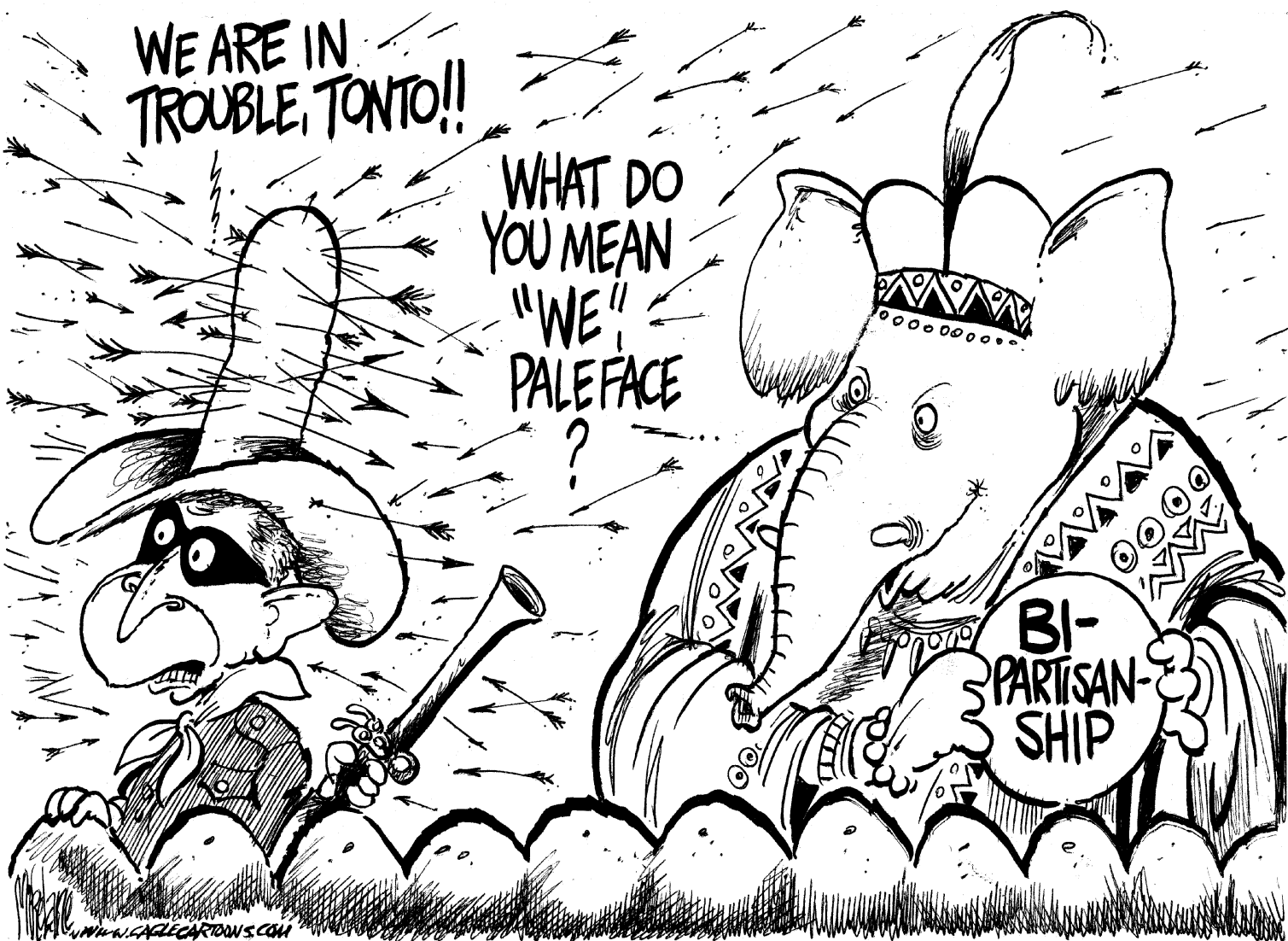
- The Republicans should have relied more on their star out on the campaign trail instead of the president and the vice president. Condi Rice, secretary of state, is the party's most popular person and pretty much accepted by the majority of Americans. Her impact would have outshined that of Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney. No question about that

- The president is the president of ALL the people. So why is it sitting presidents (Mr. Bush is not the exception) suddenly become president of only their particular party during election campaigns? Lawmakers should make a law that presidents maintain an impartial stance when it comes to elections. After all, someone who wins voter approval for this most important office on the planet receives votes from ALL interests, not just from their faithful. I've been harping on this issue for years.

- When a president campaigns all over the country aboard Air Force One, who picks up the bill? At one time, as I understand it, the national committee of the party in power picked up the tab. We wonder if that is still the case.

- The 2008 race for the White House is now officially underway. Keep your eye on Iowa and New Hampshire, where the wannabes will be swarming around like the last flies of summer.

There isn't even a time out. — Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*



Owner as confused as cats

The cats are confused, and some days, so am I. April Alice was losing the hair off her back. She has a two-inch patch just above her tail that is, not exactly bare, but definitely shorter than the rest.

Steve hauled her to the vet, who suggested a round of thyroid pills.

Luckily, April Alice is a fairly easy cat to medicate. She's the calmest of the four felines that inhabit our house. And the pills seem to help. While the patch hasn't disappeared, it hasn't continued to spread and the fur does seem somewhat longer.

I'm a little worried that the patch will disappear, and then I'll have a problem.

The cat will still need to have her pill each morning, but I'll have trouble figuring out which one she is.

The problem is Frank. Frank is April Alice's son and a carbon copy of his mother. He's a pound or two heavier and has bigger eyes, or maybe he just opens his eyes wider.

It's pretty easy to tell the two apart when they are together. However, when you only have one, that patch of short hair is the easier way to determine which cat you have in hand.

In fact, the other day, I was a little sleepy and in a bit of a hurry. I grabbed a cat, looked it in its sleepy little eyes and stuffed a pill down its



cynthia haynes

• open season

throat. It protested more than usual and when I put it on the floor, I noticed that the hair on its back was perfectly normal.

I had pillled the wrong cat!

Well, one thyroid pill wasn't going to kill Frank, but I had to find his mother and do the whole thing over again — not my favorite morning task.

Jezebel is confused, too. She's always been a skittish cat, and since Frank came she has been hiding out in the basement and avoiding everyone. I think she's also mad because we were gone so much this summer. Whatever the reason, she doesn't let us come near her and runs whenever we appear these days.

I don't care. I've got plenty of cats adding hair to my clothes and bed.

However, the first of each month, the animals get their tick and flea treatments. The dog is easy. She thinks her heartworm pill is a treat, and while she's gobbling it down, we put the liquid tick and flea medicine on her neck.

The cats are a different story. They hate being medicated. They fight and run and are a general nuisance. The first one is easy, but after that, they know what's happening and head for the hills — or the basement.

We got April Alice, Frank and Mollie, but Jez was a problem. How do you medicate a cat you can't catch and almost never see?

Trickery, of course.

Steve got on one side of the basement and I got on the other and we played Keystone Cats with Jez — up and down until I fell down — then, she disappeared into a crawl space while Steve stood there laughing so hard I wanted to hit him.

That, I knew, was the end of that so I gave up.

Several hours later, I was reading the paper in my chair. A cat climbed into my lap but I ignored it. Cats are always climbing into my lap.

He asked me what Jez was doing on my lap. I hadn't seen her upstairs in two months, and the day I chased her all over the basement, she shows up in my lap.

I held her while Steve ran downstairs for the flea and tick medicine.

That was three days ago. Haven't seen her since.

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Bad checks, brave signs, customer relations

A few days ago, I saw one of the bravest sights I've seen in a long time. On a small marquee outside a small business, the owner had placed the following (I have removed the name to protect everyone involved, including me):

"First NAME last NAME, I HAVE YOUR BAD CHECK."

Wow.

Now, I've seen lists of names of people who write bad check displayed beside cash registers, but that's the first time I've seen a name displayed like that, right outside, 20 feet in the air, for everyone in town to see. I gasped, literally, out loud. I laughed, partly in amusement but mostly in shock. And then I realized that, if the sign had that strong an effect on me, someone who has not written a bad check in 30 years, how would it impress a customer getting ready to walk in there and write a check she didn't have enough money to cover?

What effect would it have on the person named on the sign?

What the heck kind of customer relations is that, anyway?

In this country, we have accepted the myth that the customer is always right. It is just not true. Most businesses understand and tolerate one insufficient-funds episode, especially if the customer makes it good right away. But customers who do not make their bad check good, or who write bad checks over and over, are committing theft, plain and simple. And my guess is that this was not the first bad check that



from other pens

• commentary

person had written at that little business.

Last time I looked, the message was still up there. Apparently that person has not yet got herself in there and forked over enough cash to pay for her purchase and minimize her humiliation. Maybe she doesn't care. Maybe she skipped town.

I wonder how many other customers, having written bad checks after the person named on the sign shopped there, rushed in to redeem their checks before they were forced to see their own names on display right along with hers.

Now that I've had a few days to digest the

situation, I've decided I admire that business owner with all my heart. I believe that sign was one of the best examples of customer relations I've ever seen. It will almost certainly not deter honest buyers from shopping there. They are, after all, in no danger of being humiliated as the person on the sign was, and as she deserved to be. The only people that sign will scare away are ones who are driving up the price of products and services because you and I have to pay more to cover their theft. That brave sign will, in the long run, hold prices down for the rest of us.

Now, that's great customer service. I think I may just stop by there on my way home and spend a little money.

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