

# Opinion



## Washington Viewpoint

### GOP back in the winner's circle

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.

Living link to the 83rd Congress is Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., who was appointed to the Senate as a Democrat in 1954 and will serve until the opening of the 108th.

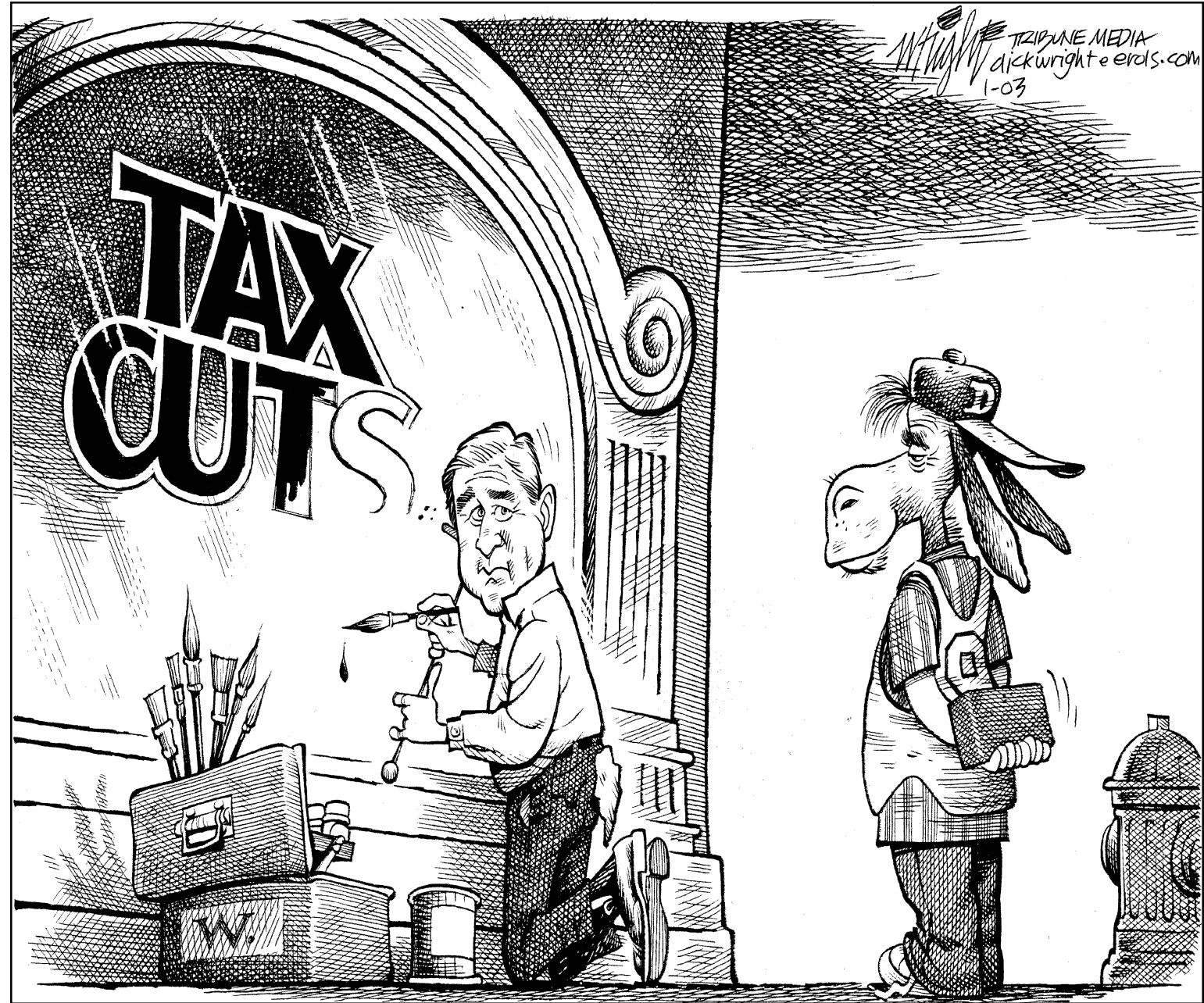
It was at the senator's 100th birthday party on Dec. 5 that Republican leader Trent Lott voiced nostalgia over Thurmond's segregationist campaign for president in 1948.

That touched off a firestorm that led to Lott's replacement as leader by Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn.

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.

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.

Lisa Murkowski and other 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. — *Lawrence L. Knutson is completing a 35-year run reporting on Congress, the White House and Washington's history later this month.*



### Lawyers take the fun out of crackers

The world we live in ... is populated by lawyers.

Take, for example, Sunshine Biscuit's Cheez-It cracker.

This venerable brand has been around forever — the company claims it has been making the little cheddar squares since 1921, nearly 82 years. And they're still a pretty good snack.

A couple of years ago, the company wanted to jazz up the line.

They started making all kinds of specialty Cheez-Its, white cheddar, garlic, party mix, you name it.

And they hired someone to redesign the box. Some smart kid in marketing, or at the advertising agency, came up with the idea of a campy little "engineering diagram" for the crackers.

It labels the perforations along the edge as the "no-slip grip." "Helps you grab more Cheez-Its in every handful."

The hole in the middle is the "air intake, improves aerodynamics during periods of rapid Cheez-It consumption."

And the bumpy, lumpy surface is covered under "surface dynamics: bumpy, crispy, crunchy,



Steve Haynes

#### ● Along the Sappa

utterly satisfying."

Cute, huh?

It was, too, until somebody showed it to legal. Nothing gets done in the corporate world unless you show it to legal.

And legal was, apparently, not amused.

Someone might read the cutsie description of the cracker and take it seriously.

The mind conjures up a vision of Dave Letterman's Dumb Guy: "Hey, Bill, look at this, wouldja, says these crackers can fly."

Then came the disclaimers: Under the heading, "Anatomy of a Cheez-It," (but don't believe it!)

And down below, in tiny type,

"These qualities make Cheez-It fun, but do not suggest any serious product performance claims."

Duh.

Heck, it makes more sense for McDonalds to print a warning on their coffee cups: "Contents may be hot."

McDonalds is kind of stubborn that way. They didn't want to turn down the heat on their coffee, even after they were sued, so they added a warning to the cups.

Personally, I think their coffee is way too hot to drink. But I can tell that without a label.

Oh, back to the Cheez-It box. Somebody at legal made them put another line on in tiny type, by a picture of a cracker in the "anatomy" section.

"Not actual size," it says.

Not true. The crackers on the front of the box are smaller than real ones. The one in the diagram is actual size.

But don't believe it!

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Steve Haynes is publisher of the Oberlin Herald and co-owner of Nor'West Newspapers.

### SUV owners shouldn't read this

Donald Kaul

#### ● Guest Commentary

fatality rates are higher than traditional vehicles (6 percent higher on the average; 8 percent in the bigger models).

However, because of their huge size, in a collision with a normal-sized car, they are more apt to kill the occupants of the other vehicle.

A Chevy Tahoe, for example, kills 122 people for every 1 million models on the road, while a Honda Accord kills only 21. This what's known as a lose/lose situation.

3. Inclement weather?

Don't make me laugh.

People with SUVs think inclement weather is when you can't play golf.

For the occasional snowy day in most areas there are better ways to get around.

SUVs are not the only four-wheel drive vehicles around anymore, after all.

There are cars with all- and four-wheel drive that are superior in every way to your average SUV.

Every way except one.

You can't bully other vehicles with a car the way you can with an SUV.

And that's what the extraordinary popularity of the SUV is about—bullying.

Keith Bradsher, a "New York Times" reporter who been waging a crusade against SUVs for

years now, has just published a book, "High and Mighty," which documents the case against the vehicle.

In it he quotes market researchers who have found that the SUV craze is about not letting anything get in your way and at the extreme, about intimidating others to get out of your way. SUV buyers, the researchers say, tend to be "insecure and vain" and often lack confidence in their driving skills.

Does that sound familiar or what? Picture the typical SUV driver—the beady, close-set eyes of a serial killer set above a snarl that could curdle a latte.

And that's just the women. The men are worse. Think of Hitler's Panzer divisions invading Poland.

On top of every else, these behemoths handle badly, get lousy gas mileage, are exempt from the safety standards that regular cars have to meet and don't have to pay the luxury tax that similarly priced cars have to pay. (It's called campaign contributions.)

Let's face it, they are an unmitigated disaster; assault rifles with power steering.

If a terrorist country was trying to do to us what the SUV is doing, we'd be bombing it by now.

Yet the SUV has become the backbone of the American auto industry, and, as such, is with us forever or until the gasoline runs out, whichever comes first, Happy New Year.

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