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Free Press Viewpoint

Will Obama be a great president?

The election of Barack Obama as president is a watershed, a turning point in American history in so many ways.

The fact that voters worried far more about the way the country was going than they did about race or religion speaks volumes about how far this nation has come since the Civil Rights era less than 50 years ago.

In 1960, it seemed unimaginable that we could have a Roman Catholic president, despite the fact that the Roman church was the largest in the country. It simply had never happened.

How long ago, how far away that seems today.

Now, we have a black president-elect with a Muslim name. Even one short decade ago, who could have imagined.

And the country is looking for President Obama to lead them out of the wilderness.

But that's just part of the story.

Coming as it does at a similar time of economic and social crisis, this election marks an opportunity for the Democratic party that comes but once or twice a century. The only comparable times for the Democrats came with the election of Frank-lin D. Roosevelt in 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, and of Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

Under Roosevelt, with majorities in Congress, the party moved to remake the American system, instituting Social Security, union-friendly labor laws, vast new social programs and a belief that the government could solve our every problem.

FDR's legacy is with us even today, when we look to a new president to lead us out of similar problems, though this crisis — so far — is neither as deep nor as permanent as that one.

Lyndon Johnson, in his first term, seemed to be able to do no wrong. In a session, he passed a bundle of New Frontier welfare programs that had languished when John F. Kennedy was alive.

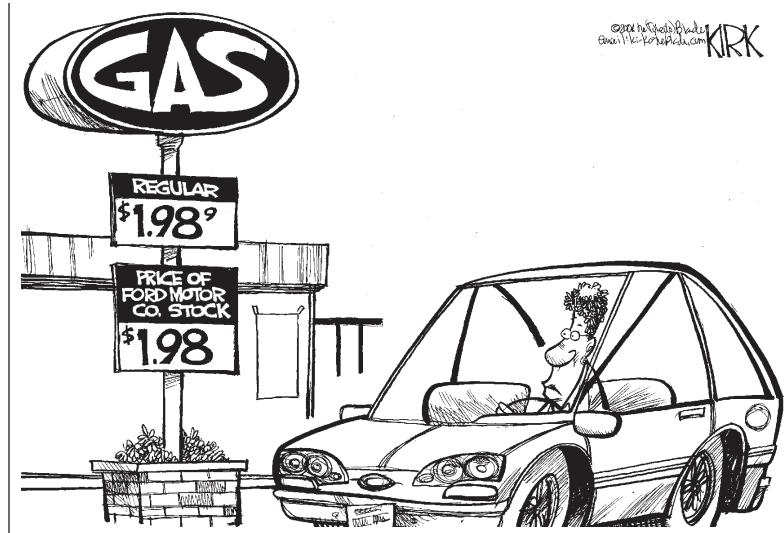
The combination of sympathy for the slain president and Johnson's persuasive powers and knowledge of the Congress was too much for conservatives to resist. He steamrolled the opposition, just as he plowed through the noble but out-ofplace Barry Goldwater.

His majority, itself of historic proportions, blinded President Johnson to the growing malaise that would drive him from office. The protesters police beat and gassed outside the convention hall in Chicago would hang around to haunt him.

In the end, he squandered his mandate, had few concrete accomplishments in his second term, and left a beaten man.

The Republicans, perhaps, had a similar opportunity after the reign of Ronald Reagan. Having vanquished the Soviet Union, ended the Cold War and tamed inflation, the GOP could have reshaped the government in its image.

Instead, it left us with a legacy of even larger deficits, a bloated and out-of-control bureaucracy, a corrupt Congress dedicated only to its own re-election and two wars of uncertain need and purpose.



Veterans have earned our thanks

When the priest asked us to pray for all the dead, especially those who have died in wars, I started thinking about the veterans I know and I said a prayer for one special veteran who probably has only me and my mother left to pray for him.

We have quite a few people who have served this country working for our company — Tom Dreiling, publisher of *The Norton Telegram* publisher, is an Air Force veteran; Dave Bergling, *Oberlin Herald* advertising manager, Army; John Dehn, the Internet guy, Army; Tom Betz, *Goodland Star-News* editor, Navy; Steifon Matthews, *Colby Free Press* graphic artist, Army, Navy and Marines; and Jim Jackson, Nor'West Press, Army, and maybe another one or two I missed.

Then there's the family. Both Steve's dad and my father served during World War II. Lacy Haynes was in the Navy and Buford Desilet in the Army. Both made it through without a scratch, as did my uncle Jeff Ellis, who served in the Navy, and my aunt Madelyn Curtis, who was an Army nurse.

In the next generation, both nephews on my father's side served.

Cousin Greg Ziller was in college and not really too excited about being drafted for the war in Vietnam, so he joined the National



Guard in Missouri. His unit was one of the few called up during that war.

Cousin David Lynn joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) when he was a student in the University of California at Berkeley, where some of the first protests against the war started. He eventually joined the Air Force investigation unit, and served until he retired as a colonel.

My maternal grandfather had to take medical retirement as a captain after serving during World War I and with John J. "Black Jack" Pershing over the Mexican border after Poncho Villa. Spinal meningitis stopped his career before my mother was born.

His only grandson, my cousin George Crocker, graduated from West Point in 1966 and served in Vietnam and elsewhere for more than 20 years, retiring as a lieutenant general. The oldest granddaughter, Judy Curtis, followed both her parents — her father had served in Korea — into the service, first in the Navy and then as an army Nurse.

But my special prayer was not for the living or even for my grandfather, father or fatherin-law. It was for Charles McClure, who was killed on D-day.

The McClures lived next door to the Ellises, and Charles was like a second brother to my mother. Either he was at their house or they at the McClures as they grew up. They attended the same grade and high school, and when my mother tells a story from her youth, it's more likely than not Charles McClure is in it.

When mother moved into the nursing home a few years ago, my sister and I went through her photo album. There among the photos of smiling sorority sisters and men with huge strings of fish was an obituary, carefully preserved for more than 50 years.

Rest in peace Charles, grandfather, Lacy and Buford. And, thank you Tom, David, Steifon, Tom, John and cousins.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Instead of an Abraham Lincoln, a Theodore Roosevelt or another Ronald Reagan, the Republicans gave use two George Bushes. You might say they blew the opportunity.

But perilous times make great presidents. Only time will tell how history views Barack Obama, or even George W. Bush.

We can say today, though, that it will be a fascinating four years. - *Steve Haynes*

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Handicapped deserve respect

To the Editor:

I am writing this letter to let you know that some, most likely many, of our fellow humans are being unfairly treated and basically shunned. I am speaking of people with disabilities. I count myself blessed to fall into that category, because maybe now I can become a voice for all of us with a disability of one kind or another, seen or unseen.

One night a couple of months ago, I received a call from a dear friend of mine. She had been stopped by the police on her way to my house, which is across town from her. She was off to the side of the road as far as she could get, but was told by the officer that the Police Department had had several complaints about her using her motorized wheelchair on the street. Where else is she supposed to ride it? On the sidewalk? In this town? When there are no sidewalks in her area?

Bicycles are to be ridden on the street, sidewalks are for walking! Kids on their bikes are told to use the street and are supposed to obey all the traffic rules, same as a licensed driver of a car. If she is supposed to use the sidewalk, why are the sidewalks not designed wider and with a ramp, so we disabled can use our wheelchairs and scooters to gain access to them and our destination, no matter where we are going in this town?

Tractors seem to get the right to use the streets and they are farm vehicles, but how many drivers can see around a tractor? Or for that matter, how many can see around a camp-

Letter Drop

Our Readers Sound Off

er or horse trailer or school bus?

Wheelchairs are not hard to see around at all. My friend was told by one of the officers to use her wheelchair, facing traffic, same as a pedestrian is supposed to do when they walk on a street. She has had no further problems with the Colby Police or with drivers in this town, and for that I'm very grateful.

I was asked not to send the above letter last summer, however something definitely needs to be said on this subject and it needs to be said now! My friend had not been harassed by the Colby Police until earlier this month.

She was on her way to take care of important business when a new police officer stopped her. He would not let her explain why she was on the side of the road (facing traffic, mind you, as she had been told to do by an officer). He would not let her explain anything about the size of the sidewalks and the difficulty she has with her wheelchair when the sidewalk is too small or is not even there!

He actually had the gall to tell her she would be taken somewhere where she could get help!

He told her to act like an adult, not a child! Now, this ticks me off to no end! He was verbally abusive and so arrogant that he wouldn't listen to anything! There was no oncoming traffic, no backed up traffic, no accident scene, nothing that would induce the attitude and threats he made to her! Nothing!

She had done nothing to even be ticketed for, yet she was treated like a criminal. We, all, as taxpayers should be ashamed because we are this man's boss! We pay taxes, which are then split among the city services and should be used for the good of all Colby's citizens.

I am ashamed that this happened in our town. If he were working in any business in town, he would at least be reprimanded or possibly fired for the way he treated a customer, but yet he is an officer of the law and is capable of treating a wheelchair-bound person this way and get away with it?

Why should she tolerate this type of treatment from someone whose motto is supposed to be "To Serve and Protect"? He didn't tolerate anything she had to say in her own defense. Where was the respect for her as a human being? Where was his understanding? Where was his tolerance?

Is he so paranoid of a woman in a wheelchair that he felt he had to treat her with not one ounce of respect? It is a crying shame for this town. We should all feel the shame this officer brought to the uniform of the Colby Police Department.

-Jari Skiles, Colby

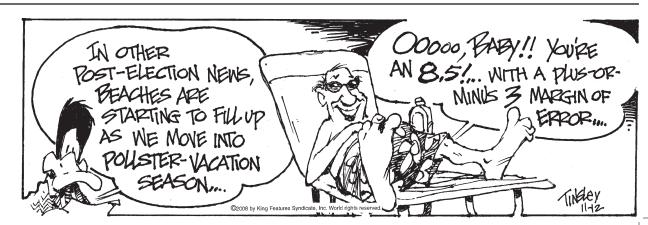
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