

# Benchmarks for watching election results

By midnight Tuesday, millions of conservatives probably will believe that the nation, foundering on the reefs of sin, is ruined. And millions of "progressives," emboldened to embrace truth in labeling by again calling themselves liberals, probably will have decided that Heaven is at hand, the nation revived like a flower in an April shower.

In any case, political numeracy can illuminate the hours before midnight. So as Tuesday's numbers accumulate, here are some benchmarks to bear in mind:

- The House of Representatives currently has 235 Democrats and 199 Republicans; the Senate has 51 Democrats (including two independents who caucus with the Democrats) and 49 Republicans. Republican losses on Tuesday should be measured against the aftermath of two debacles a decade apart.

President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 landslide victory over Barry Goldwater produced a House

with 295 Democrats and 140 Republicans, and a Senate with 68 Democrats and 32 Republicans. The 1974 post-Watergate congressional elections produced a House with 291 Democrats and 144 Republicans, and a Senate with 60 Democrats, 38 Republicans, one independent who caucused with the Democrats and one Conservative Party member who caucused with the Republicans.

- Five Deep South states — South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana — voted for Goldwater in 1964, the first time they had gone Republican since Reconstruction, except for Louisiana's vote for Dwight Eisenhower in 1956. In 1968, they voted for a third-party candidate, George Wallace. In 1972, they voted for Richard Nixon over George McGovern. In 1976, they voted for Jimmy Carter, the Georgia Democrat, over President Gerald Ford. In 1980,

**COLUMN: GEORGE WILL**

Carter again carried Georgia, and averaged a healthy 47.3 percent of the votes in the other four. Since then, only two of the five have voted Democratic — Bill Clinton carried Georgia in 1992 and Louisiana in 1992 and 1996. Since 1980, Democratic presidential candidates have averaged only 42.5 percent of the vote in the five states. Measure Barack Obama's performance there — built upon increased turnout of African-Americans, who are 30 percent of the five states' combined populations — against that 42.5 percent.

- Mississippi has not elected a freshman Democratic senator in 61 years (John Stennis in a 1947 special election). This year, a Republican incumbent in Mississippi, Roger Wicker, is threatened by former Democratic Gov. Ronnie Musgrove. In Georgia, Republican incumbent Saxby Chambliss is threatened

by Jim Martin. If either incumbent loses, the Republicans' Southern redoubt will have widening fissures.

- Eleven states with 63 electoral votes have not voted Democratic in the 10 elections since 1964: Alaska, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Indiana and Virginia. On election eve, Obama is competitive in Virginia and Indiana, which Bush carried in 2004 by margins of 8.2 and 20.7 percentage points, respectively. In Nebraska, which is one of two states (Maine is the other) that allocate an electoral vote to the candidate who carries each congressional district, Obama might win the 2nd District (Omaha). In 2004, George W. Bush beat John Kerry there by 22 percentage points.

Seven states with 60 electoral

votes have voted Democratic only once since 1964: North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Montana, Colorado and Arizona. It will not be startling if Obama carries two — Colorado and North Carolina. In 2004, Bush carried them by 4.7 and 12.4 percentage points, respectively.

- Coloradans and Nebraskans will vote Tuesday on measures to ban government-administered racial preferences in public employment, public education and public contracting. Voters have emphatically passed such measures in California (1996), Washington (1998) and Michigan (2006). If Colorado and Nebraska pass those measures, that will be evidence — not counter to, but in addition to, the Obama candidacy — that Americans are eager to put racial politics behind them.

The most radical measure at issue Tuesday is on the Massachusetts ballot. Question 1 would abolish the state income

tax, which raises \$12.5 billion a year — more than 40 percent of the state's budget. In 2002, a similar measure, although not much debated or even noticed, won 45 percent of the vote. Abolishing the tax would save the average taxpayer \$3,600 a year, a sum that looms larger as taxpayers' investment portfolios become smaller.

Tuesday night might be chaotic: Elections are government undertakings, so they are not expected to be well run, and judging by the multiplying warnings that voting arrangements might buckle under the weight of predictably large turnouts, Election Day seems to have taken many state and local governments by surprise, yet again.

Such dreary developments, anticipated with certainty, must be borne philosophically.

George Will, a syndicated columnist, writes for The Washington Post.

## Other Voices

### Gas prices

*Houston Chronicle*

The price numbers at the nation's gas pumps have been clicking in welcome reverse for the past few weeks and days. They may not be going down fast enough to suit consumers, but they've dropped significantly from highs above \$4 a gallon last summer. In the Houston area there have been sightings as low as \$2.22 for a gallon of regular unleaded. Now, that's relief. How long it will last is anybody's guess.

Sliding pump prices have raised concerns that the nation will slip into its old habits of conspicuous consumption and lose its political will to transition to renewable energy sources. ...

The recent relief at the pump must not cause the nation to lose sight of long-term goals. These include increasing conservation, addressing global warming issues, lessening dependence on oil from unstable areas, "greening" our energy supplies and moving toward renewable sources.

As a nation, we're building a bridge to a more stable energy future. The building blocks for this effort include enhanced domestic production of oil and gas, clean coal, nuclear, wind and solar.

Above all, the bridge will be built with our ingenuity. The project must not be sidetracked by changes in price that probably won't last.

### Elections and polls

*The Charleston, S.C., Post and Courier*

A Washington Post poll reported a 10-point lead for the Democratic presidential candidate in 13 key "swing" states 16 days before the election. That candidate was John Kerry. That election year was 2004.

When Election Day 2004 arrived, "exit poll" trends reported to the public before the real polls closed also indicated that Sen. Kerry would win the White House. When the real votes were counted, he lost by more than 3 million votes to President Bush, though it took a relatively slim, 118,775-vote triumph in Ohio for the incumbent to win the Electoral College and keep his job.

So despite Sen. Kerry's apparent inside track to victory, he was not elected president. And despite the significant edge Barack Obama has held over John McCain in most recent polls, particularly in "swing" states, he hasn't won the presidency yet. ...

If you find following competing poll fluctuations informative and even entertaining, enjoy. But don't let their often-illusory figures obscure this persisting political reality:

Polls don't determine election outcomes. Voters do.

### Sen. Ted Stevens

*The New York Times*

One of life's enduring mysteries is why powerful people risk substantial reputations and careers for relatively insubstantial sums of money. Perhaps the answer is power itself and the sense of entitlement and invulnerability it confers.

Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska has now been convicted of seven felony counts of violating federal ethics laws. His career and reputation are in tatters. Mr. Stevens still insists he is innocent, and he is imploring Alaskans to re-elect him next week. Voters there should turn him out. If they do not, the Senate must expel him.

The jury found Mr. Stevens guilty of failing to report tens of thousands of dollars in gifts and services from friends. These included an estimated \$250,000 in renovations to his home in Alaska underwritten by the owner of an oil-services company and one of the state's leading power brokers.

In his four decades in the Senate, and especially in his former role as chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Mr. Stevens dispensed untold millions of dollars worth of favors, especially to his home state. He clearly felt no compunction about accepting favors in return.

## WEEKEND GALLERY



# A memo from the boss about the elections

**COLUMN: GREG RUMMO**

**According to the tax standards the candidates are using, I am 'rich' and the rest of you are in the 'middle class'— although with one kid in college, a second one about to go off to college next year, a daughter in the first grade in private school and another right behind her in pre-K, my wife and I are trying to wrap our arms around this status of wealth.**

Memo from the boss to all employees regarding the upcoming election:

As I am sure you are all aware, there is an election looming on the not too distant horizon. There's been a lot of talk about taxes and which candidate has a better or a "fairer" plan. The number \$250,000 is being kicked around as a line of demarcation between "the rich" and the "middle class."

Well, according to this standard, I am "rich" and the rest of you are in the "middle class" although with one kid in college, a second one about to go off to college next year, a daughter in the first grade in private school and another right behind her in pre-K, my wife and I are trying to wrap our arms around this status of wealth that "The Big O" has bequeathed upon us.

I need to point out several things to you, however. As one of the owners of this small business, I am already subject to a high tax rate on my biweekly income and then to double taxation on the annual dividend that I am entitled to as the "rich" small-business owner.

After the Feds and Trenton take their combined 40 percent

at the corporate level, I have to pay almost another 22 percent on the remainder. In other words, for every dollar of profit this company earns as a result of me risking 100 percent of my capital, I am entitled to a dividend of \$0.47— less than half.

I literally cannot afford to pay one additional penny of taxes despite Mr. Biden's insistence that this is my patriotic duty. But such will be the unavoidable case should he and "The Big O" win the election on Tuesday.

Therefore I would like to put all employees on notice that should this occur, there will be some changes that will affect all of you.

At least one of you will lose his

or her job. I am certainly not going to let all of you continue to freeload at my expense. Better draw straws or start an office pool like you do every Friday for the NFL games over the weekend to determine who will stay.

That nice 100 percent company-provided health care we have? You can forget about it. We will be converting to the cheapest HMO I can find with hefty deductions taken from your paychecks. And those eye and dental exams that the company pays for that allows some of you to sport those Sarah Palin designer eyeglasses — all that tooth-rotting candy and reading in the dark.

Your personal and sick days are being reduced by 50 percent and everyone can subtract one week from his or her vacation.

Don't expect us to match a dime of your 401k contributions like we currently are doing. As the world panics and dumps quality stocks, now would be a great time to be buying them for your retirement. Too bad we won't be able to help you with that anymore.

All those goodies in the refrigerator — the beverages and snacks that we provide free of charge so you don't have to be ripped off by the vending machines in the lobby— fagged-aboutit. Now would be a good time to practice all of this talk of

"change" by carrying a little extra of it your pockets. I hear the machines take quarters.

Good thing I went out and bought new computers from Dell last year. Investment in any new technology will come to a screeching halt. You sales guys need to learn how to use a pay-phone from the field. I will be canceling your cell phone contracts. The savings on a monthly basis will be significant. And don't bother me if your company-provided laptop crashes. Learn how to use an abacus.

As a scientist, I know that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. And since I am also one of those "rich" small business owners who "The Big O" continues to trash at every opportunity, I intend to stay that way by the application of this scientific principle and too bad if you don't like it.

Oh, don't forget to go out and exercise your constitutional right to vote on Election Day. And please, don't let anything I have said in this memo influence your decision.

Gregory J. Rummo is a writer, small business owner and occasional satirist living in Montvale.