

## Grins and groans

**THE ISSUE** | Grins and groans from news of the week.  
**OUR OPINION** | Groan to Stephen Coleman. Grin to Rich Negri's debate policy.

### Groan

Corning City residents had their first opportunity to see where the two candidates for mayor, Republican

Rich Negri and Democrat Frank Coccho, stood on the issues facing the city. The two appeared on "Coleman and Company", a local public affairs show hosted by Elmira College associate dean of faculty, Stephen Coleman.

The show generally went well. Coleman and his co-host, local radio talk-show personality Frank Acomb, hit all the hot-button issues, including taxes, road repair and hooligans in Centerway Square.

Unfortunately, Coleman pulled an old chestnut out of his bag of tricks. Coleman asked both Coccho and Negri to take a "No Negative Campaigning" pledge, going so far as to pull out a written version of the pledge for both to sign.

So what's wrong with a pledge to end negative campaigning? After all, in poll after poll, people say negative campaigning turns them off and they'd like to see it end.

Here are three things wrong with a pledge to end negative campaigns:

- The phrase negative campaigning means different things to different people. Some people would consider pointing out a candidate's previous votes negative campaigning. Someone else, however, would consider a candidate's previous actions and voting record as fair game.

- What's wrong with negative campaigning, anyway? The only way voters have of holding politicians accountable is through elections. So why shouldn't the two candidates use their opponent's voting record as a way of defining the difference between the candidates?

Voters deserve to know who they are voting for and how that candidate has voted in the past.

- Negative campaigning

works. Despite polling data which shows voters saying they are turned off by negative campaigning, elections show the public responds to it.

Need examples? Look at John Kerry's Swiftboating and the Republicans' plan to kill health care reform. Even when several news outlets have proven claims about death panels and a government takeover of health care to be blatant lies, enough people have responded to it to put health care reform in real jeopardy.

Maybe when the next election rolls around, Coleman can take a pledge to retire the "No Negative Campaigning" pledge.

### Grin

How many debates will Coccho and Negri have before the November election? That is very much up in the air.

Coccho said his re-election committee has decided on a policy of no non-televised debates. He said that could open the door for as many as five televised debates in the next five weeks.

That would certainly give voters ample opportunities to hear the candidates speak about the issues, but are the local television stations willing to give up prime-time slots for debates, especially because the ratings are likely to slide after the first one is televised.

While Coccho's tactic seems to be wholesale politics, Negri is taking a retail approach. Negri said he'd debate Coccho any time, anywhere. That's good news for community groups who may want the candidates to cater their message to a particular issue or interest.

But only if Coccho changes his policy and participates. If Coccho sticks to his current policy, Corning residents may be forced to make their decision based on generic made-for-television debates.

### NATIONAL VIEW | SEATTLE TIMES

## The FCC protects Internet neutrality

The Federal Communications Commission's Net-neutrality proposals unveiled Monday are important steps toward protecting the Internet from monopoly power.

A hint of that power came a year and a half ago, when Comcast was caught slowing down some large file transfers by its customers. Comcast said this was necessary because the transfers were bandwidth hogs and were slowing other customers' Internet access.

But critics noted that Comcast offers cable TV and movies to millions of customers, which could give it an interest in slowing private transfers of TV and movie files.

The FCC forced Comcast to change its procedures. Comcast did, but it also filed a lawsuit that challenged the FCC's power to intervene in the way it had.

Under this pushing and pulling is the issue of control of the nation's arteries of commerce and information.

This is a new version of an old question. A century ago, Americans struggled with this issue regarding railroads, which were the new arteries of commerce then. Railroads also carried passengers and the public's mail. People concluded that railroads had to be regulated.

The Internet is even more sensitive, because the information it carries makes democracy work. Government cannot be allowed to control its content, but it must insure that no corporation undermine the nation's democratic conversation, either.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski wants a rule of nondiscrimination under which all users are treated alike. The principle is called net neutrality, and we like it. We hope it works because the corporations that control the Internet have repeatedly slowed or blocked content. Comcast should not be allowed to decide what can be accessed on the Internet.

### ARTIST'S VIEW



### COMMENTARY | JULES WITCOVER

## Ted Kennedy's successor

With no Kennedy family members seeking their departed patriarch's seat in the U.S. Senate, Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick chose the next closest thing in appointing Paul Kirk, Ted Kennedy's longtime right-hand man.

Short of being a Kennedy himself, Boston Irish Catholic Kirk over the years has been an unofficial one in the family's political and other public-service endeavors and in a range of family activities as well.

From the presidential campaign of Sen. Robert Kennedy in 1968, political director of the Ted Kennedy presidential bid in 1980, to serving as chairman of the board of the JFK Library, Kirk has been an ever-present surrogate for Kennedy interests and concerns.

His close association with Ted Kennedy caused some Democrats to express concern at his election in 1985 as chairman of the Democratic National Committee, fearing that it would give Kennedy an advantage in a second presidential bid that never came.

Nonetheless, as the party chairman, Kirk served with an even hand, and under his leadership the Democrats recaptured control of the Senate in 1986. But also during his tenure, the party failed to retake the White House in 1988 with Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis as its presidential nominee.

In 1987, Kirk teamed up with Republican National Chairman Frank Fahrenkopf as co-chairmen of a new Commission on Presidential Debates that plucked that growing political institution from the confused sponsorship of the League of

Women Voters and other groups, restoring it to solid and respected stature.

After both men had left their parties' leadership, they continued as former chairmen to plan, organize and carry each presidential debate series thereafter. They not only chose the sites on various college campuses but also refereed the inevitable contentious jockeying between the party nominees over format, moderators and interrogators, and ground rules.

There is no constitutional or other legal requirement for the debates, and after the historic Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960, which were widely regarded as a main reason for Kennedy's election and Nixon's defeat, none occurred in the next three presidential campaigns.

But in 1976, incumbent President Gerald Ford agreed to debate Democratic challenger Jimmy Carter, and the debates have taken place in every cycle since then, in part because of public expectations for them and later the patient cajoling and refereeing of Kirk and Fahrenkopf.

Kirk's selection as the interim junior senator from Massachusetts, to serve only until a special election to finish out Kennedy's unexpired term, came only after some partisan legislative squabbling over filling the seat now.

When Republican Mitt Romney occupied the governorship in 2004, Democrats blocked a similar effort to permit him to name an interim replacement for Sen. John Kerry were he to be elected president that year.

But a rare personal appeal by ailing Ted Kennedy to Patrick and the Massachusetts legisla-

ture to provide for an interim appointment upon his anticipated death finally carried the day after a huge and emotional outpouring of public sentiment upon that event.

By prior stipulation, the interim nominee was required to promise not to seek permanent status in the subsequent special election.

Kennedy's widow, Vickie, ruled herself out for the appointment, and the only Kennedy who briefly considered running for the in the selection, former Rep. Joseph Kennedy, son of the late Sen. Robert Kennedy, subsequently announced he would not.

Kirk's appointment as interim senator assures not only a Democratic vote for the pending health-care reform legislation that Ted Kennedy called the prime labor of his life if it should come to a vote before the special election. With Kirk not running in it, the arrangement also leaves the field open for lively intraparty competition for a U.S. Senate seat.

On the down side, the appointment comes at a time of growing opposition to having governors and not voters fill Senate vacancies, which has happened five times this year alone. A constitutional amendment that would bar the practice has been proposed by Democratic Sen. Russ Feingold of Wisconsin.

But the unique circumstances of Ted Kennedy's intercession and his commitment to health care reform assured this final Massachusetts political gesture to him.

■ **Jules Witcover's latest book, on the Nixon-Agnew relationship, "Very Strange Bedfellows," has just been published by Public Affairs Press.**

## Magazine article seems to paint a true picture

There's a very interesting story in the current issue of Rolling Stone magazine. It describes how the top leaders of the Republican Party are the real brains behind the deliberate disruptions

### THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

of any gathering which tries to explain President Obama's health care reform program. And it asserts that the basic "how to misbehave" strategy was outlined long time ago by none other than a former New York state lieutenant governor – Betsy MacCaughy.

Republicans, of course, will deny the whole story, but the scenarios the magazine paints are so like what's actually happening that the odds are it's all true.

It even details what "front" groups actually bankrolled the whole business on behalf of the health insurance industry and others who get rich because of the current morass that's American health care.

The whole aim, it asserts, is to not only derail any reform efforts, but to politically discredit the president.

Best story I've read in a long time. And what a nice group of people you meet.

As a Formula One racing fan, I was glad to see that Renault won't be banished from the sport for race fixing. But I have mixed feelings about the decision of team principal Flavio Briatore and his top engineering aide to "fall on their swords" and quit just before the case went to trial.

I earnestly hope no similar case ever comes up because deliberately crashing a car to produce a satisfactory outcome for another driver is about as far out of line as it's possible to get in racing.

Speaking of racing, despite Mark Martin's heart-warming NASCAR win at New Hampshire, I still think Jimmy Johnson and Tony Stewart are the favorites to claim the Sprint Cup. Just eight more races, and we'll know!

Underground line of the week: "It's not Tom Reed who's running for Congress. It's Tom Greed."

The Haverling High School Class of 1959 plans a big blowout this weekend in honor of their 50th anniversary.

It should be some blast. My bride is on the planning committee and I doubt the invasion of Normandy was more thoroughly laid out in advance.

Though I'm not a member of that class, I even plan to put in an appearance – if only to celebrate the decrease in our gas bill that will surely occur when X-number of trips to Bath are no longer needed to clear the way.

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