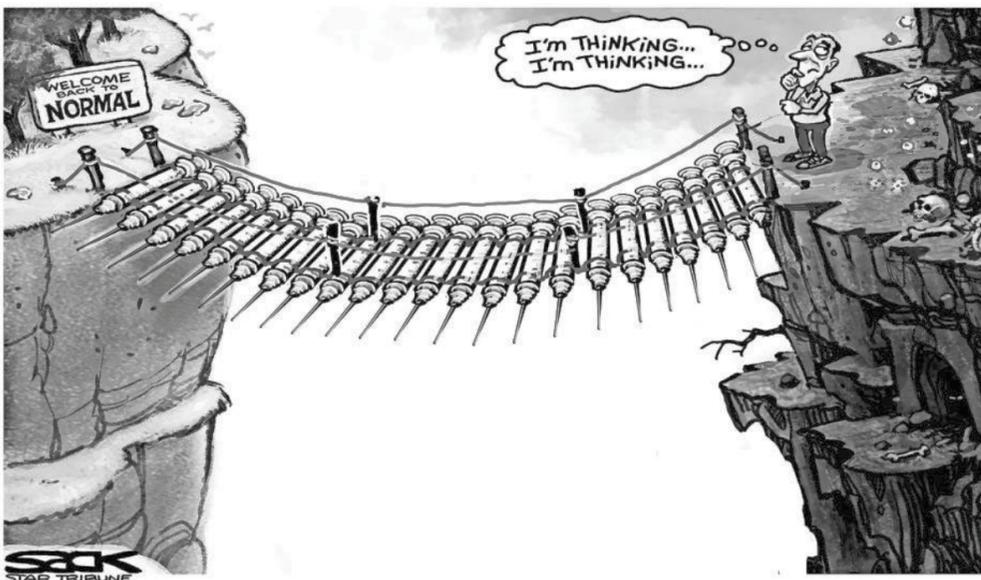


OPINION

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



STEVE SACK/THE MINNIEAPOLIS STAR-TRIBUNE

Census results: California may yet rescue Democrats



California Focus
Tom Elias

On first glance, and also at first gloat, it appeared that California's impending first-time-ever loss of one seat in Congress might ensure that Democrats lose the small majority they now hold in the House of Representatives, letting Republicans veto almost everything President Biden might want to do.

But conventional wisdom and first gloats are often not what they seem. The details sometimes end up overcoming false initial assumptions.

First, the gloats. One came from state GOP chair Jessica Millan Patterson, she who never had a critical word for ex-President Donald Trump even as he led her party to staggering electoral defeats in California.

Said Patterson, "California Republicans have a better vision (than Democrats) and we're going to...take back Congress and make the right Californian (Bakersfield's Kevin McCarthy) speaker of the House."

Maybe so, maybe not. Republicans crowded for much of the last six months that razor-thin victories in four House races last year portend future big gains for the GOP.

That's where the details come in. One of those details is that Democrats now outnumber Republicans almost 2-1 among registered voters in this state, an unprecedented margin. Almost one-fourth of the electorate still refuses to declare a party preference when signing up to vote. The majority of no party preference voters (NPPs) have consistently chosen Democrats over Republicans in past elections.

These details matter because of the shuffle that will come from dividing California into 52 congressional districts, not 53. Geographically, every district in California will get slightly larger. In big cities, this could mean district lines shift by a few blocks. In rural areas, the change could amount to miles.

And there's another detail to consider: While California did not lose population over the last decade, gaining about 6.4 percent (just behind the national rate of a bit more than 7 percent), there was move-

ment, mostly from coastal areas with the most expensive real estate to inland areas where homes generally cost less.

Some district lines must now move eastward to accommodate those changes.

To assess the likely impact of these shifts, go back to the nearly 2-1 deficit the GOP suffers among registered voters.

When geographic lines shift, they always toss some voters into districts held by politicians those voters never previously knew or supported. Most voters getting shuffled will be Democrats or NPPs. So along with the slight geographic changes, clumps of voters will also be thrown from one district into another.

This means the electorate in districts the GOP flipped narrowly last year – margins varied from about 300 votes to about 8,000 – will be different from what it has been.

The most important difference will be that, on average, each district will likely see a slightly higher percentage of Democratic voters than before. Because of today's registration numbers, that's inevitable when voters displaced by the disappearance of one district get distributed into others.

Shifts in the electorate will also occur because of that west-to-east population movement. Will the current 8th District, covering the High Desert area of San Bernardino County and stretching toward Mono Lake, remain as solidly Republican as it is today? Or will the new district in that area (perhaps bearing a different number), soon contain parts of the city of San Bernardino, adding a component of Democrats?

Even the non-partisan state redistricting commission can't yet know the answers, because no one has precise information on which to base a new configuration. All of which means the Republican gloating about the Census may be premature. For the margins by which they recovered those four previously long-time GOP-held districts may no longer exist under the state's new reapportionment plan.

So Democrats might have a chance to gain ground in the House, rather than losing control. Any shift back to the Democrats in just two or three of the districts they briefly held could have national consequences in a narrowly divided Congress.

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Your Turn
Eliot Kleinberg
Guest columnist

Don't confuse 'the media' or 'fake news' with your local paper

In numerous polls, large numbers of Americans say "the media" regularly present "fake news," ranging from skewing to downright lying.

But they really are talking about the national "media," a club that's difficult to define and whose view is insular, to say the least.

A few dozen outlets, from TV networks to national newspapers to online entities, cover Washington. Their standards for accuracy and fairness, and their journalism credentials in general, run the gamut.

Across the country, thousands of other "media" operations operate. Those are local newspapers.

Local papers don't lie, or spin, about the president, the Congress, the GOP, the rigged election, Bill Barr, Mitt Romney, or Lafayette Square. Why? Because they do not cover them.

They cover the Allentown City Council. The Cook County Commission. Taos Town Hall. The Raleigh Rescue Mission homeless shelter. The Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks minor league baseball team.

They cover car wrecks and murders and parades and turkey dinners. They give the latest updates on the chance of rain this weekend, or the tornado threat, or the winter storm warning, or the path of the hurricane. They write obituaries and restaurant reviews. They profile high school valedictorians.

I spent nearly a half-century as a reporter, my dad before me. Between us, we put in more than seven decades in the newspaper business in South Florida. We almost never wrote about Washington. Most of our colleagues didn't, either.

And we didn't speak off the tops of our heads on live TV. We researched and double-checked and edited and proofread and "lawyered" before we published anything. We didn't do fake news, whether it was about Pennsylvania Avenue or Atlantic Avenue.

And yet local newspapers regularly are attacked for lying about things in Washington about which they don't write. Trust me. I got those calls.

Or they're just told that they lie in general, because, after all, Joe Scarborough and Sean Hannity lie, and aren't media folks all the same? I got those calls as well.

I'd ask, "When we wrote that a driver was charged with running a stop sign, or the vote for the new park was 3 to 2, or the fireworks show starts at sundown, or a tree fell on a car down by the riverfront, where did we lie?" The caller said, "I don't read your newspaper. But you just do."

No one fears MSNBC or The Wall Street Journal or the Huffington Post will shut down. But across America, it seems a local newspaper closes almost every day. Changing patterns have a lot to do with that terrifying trend. But a good deal stems from public attitudes toward national outlets, for which local newspapers are unfairly tarred, even though they are different animals.

Someone always will be around to cover the president's summit. Who will cover the city council meeting?

The integrity of the Washington "media" is an important topic for discussion. It would be nice to hear a conversation about local news, and how that critical tool of democracy can survive.

Eliot Kleinberg retired in December after 33 years at The Palm Beach Post in West Palm Beach, Florida. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.

As we get past the pandemic, let's build the desert's economy again

Your Turn

Laura E. James
Guest columnist

Each year in May, Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) joins economic developers worldwide in a virtual celebration of Economic Development Week.

During 2021's week, May 9 to 15, there is much to celebrate even though it has been a challenging year for the economy and the profession.

When businesses within a community suffer at the scale seen during the height of COVID-19, it takes more than just patience and a hefty cash reserve to get through to the other side. It takes, as they say, a village. Economic developers are an essential part of the village.

Successful, resilient economies do not build themselves spontaneously. Few people realize that in some ways, building a strong economy is analogous to baking a cake, starting a business or cultivating a great relationship. The right ingredients need to be present in the right proportions, but the external environment also creates conditions for failure, success or an array of results in between.

Economic developers are charged with both sides:

cultivating the right mix of ingredients as well as encouraging the most conducive business environment possible.

Likewise, an injured economy does not spontaneously recover. Things change for a business during weeks or months of closures: customer behaviors and attitudes; supply chains; and rules and regulations, to name a few. Government programs meant to backfill lost revenues were often difficult to access.

And when reopening was finally permitted, many employers were unable to get their workers back, due to a combination of generous unemployment benefits; school closures and the resulting need to be at home with children; and continued fear of the virus.

Behind the scenes, economic developers, chambers of commerce and business service organizations adapted their longer-term missions to meet the urgent, immediate needs of the business community, such as the \$3 million worth of masks, sanitizer and face shields sourced by CVEP and distributed to businesses with help from cities and chambers.

These organizations met in structured groups multiple times per week to devise and share ways to help businesses survive the pandemic; locally, the Riverside County Economic Recovery Task Force, the Coachella Valley Economic Recovery Team, and the Palm

Springs Business Transition and Re-entry Task Force all informed and attempted to hasten recovery efforts. Rarely have so many independent organizations and governments worked together, coordinating their efforts to help reach and save as many businesses as possible. Now that vaccines are ubiquitous and full reopening draws nearer, economic developers can begin to shift from immediate recovery needs and regain focus on their critical core missions.

At CVEP, that means working with regional partners on the ingredients and environment needed for lasting prosperity: state-of-the-art bandwidth; access to equity investments for startups; a robust local university offering relevant, in-demand degrees; a well-developed innovation ecosystem to encourage innovative startups; accurate local economic and business data; attraction of high-earning telecommuters; and the leadership to encourage collaboration instead of competition among the Coachella Valley's nine cities.

Success in any one of these areas of focus is a monumental task. As the Coachella Valley's regional economic development organization, CVEP is tackling all of them simultaneously.

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