

"Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press ..."  
— From the First Amendment to Constitution

## Third year is leather

Three years ago I accepted the position of editor for this newspaper. Some said it was a good move. Others told me I was over my head. Looking back over 36 months and 1,095 newspapers, the actuality of the situation probably settles somewhere in between.

Beginning any job is a transition. A rule of thumb I used when I worked as a Human Resources Director was that it takes a full year to get completely acclimated to a new position. In a newspaper, that learning curve is much steeper and job performance is critique by thousands.

What I have found along the way is that people want to be heard, even when all they want to do is complain. Oddly enough, I appreciate complaints, regardless of the source or the content of the issue. They are opportunities to improve. The important part is to be open-minded.

I've had the incredible opportunity to meet people in this county that I would not otherwise in a so-called "regular" job. I have met and come to know mayors, council members, public safety officials, county officials and have found each one to be congenial and receptive. Some took more time and effort to reach the point of mutual appreciation, but it happens.

Senators and congressmen from the state capitol to Washington, D.C. have been in my office, talked to me on the phone or met with me in the field. You won't have that kind of opportunity in every job.

I was talking with an elected official once and was asked this question, "Do you have a good b.s. detector?" Of course, he used the full word, not the abbreviation.

"Yes, I do," I responded. "I just don't show it."

I've had the opportunity to tell the story of people who aren't in the spotlight as well. Dossy Neal, "the Can Man," was one of the first. Danny Mac the homeless man was another. A first of five stories about "Mom-a-thons" is a favorite of mine.

Unfortunately, tragedy strikes and families are changed forever. The story of Ron, a man from North Carolina who died in an accident along the interstate in Saline County, built a connection halfway across the nation that still continues. The man who died when a tornado pushed a huge oak tree upon his car as he drove along a rural road on the way to work illustrated the degree to which we never know when our time is up. Had he left home at his normal time, he would have been beyond the tragic timing of the moment and the tree would not have ended his life.

I will never forget the sounds and sights of a late night accident on I-30. A man was struck repeatedly by vehicles as he attempted to cross the highway. I interviewed passengers on a bus that witnessed the accident. The bus was one of the vehicles that hit the man. The look of shock on their faces was burned into my mind. The sound of a shovel scraping the asphalt as the victim was removed from the scene is a sound I won't forget. I interviewed the family several days later. Such a tragedy. The man's son, who witnessed the accident, killed himself a few weeks later.

But in everything there must be balance. The number of truly inspirational stories about people in this county, the compassion they have for their fellow man and the lengths they will go to help one another is truly incredible.

For the last three years, we have highlighted the stories of individuals in our annual Extraordinary People magazine. So far, 37 people have been profiled. Without exception, the stories we report have impacted the writers who report the stories. The common denominator of these individuals is humility. Every one of them states they don't feel they deserve to be recognized and are often embarrassed to receive the attention.

According to the Internet, the gift for a three-year anniversary is leather. I'm sure there are people out there who would suggest a belt to whip me with. However I'd prefer a wallet.

Brent Davis is editor of The Saline Courier. He can be reached at bdavis@bentoncourier.com.

## EDITORIAL CARTOON



## GOP agenda on hold until party analyzes Cantor's loss

It's only natural that a who's-up-and-who's-down leadership struggle would consume House Republicans after the stunning primary defeat of Majority Leader Eric Cantor. There's a big hole in the party's top echelon, and it's got to be filled.

But after a new majority leader is selected, and the leadership slate finished, GOP lawmakers will have to figure out what Cantor's loss means for the Republican agenda. Right now, they have no idea.

That's because they don't know why Cantor lost. Sure, there have been dozens of stories purporting to explain the vote, but for the moment, it's all just guesswork.

The fact that Cantor lost by 11 points in a race in which his campaign pollster projected a 34-point lead is pretty clear evidence Cantor did not know what was going on in his district. He didn't know how many people would go to the polls — turnout was far higher than in Cantor's primary in 2012 — and he didn't know what motivated them.

Explanations for the loss focus on a mix of policy and politics. "We have some theories, but we have no clear proof of which one of those theories is correct," says a well-connected Republican strategist. The operative then went down four of the most popular:

1. Cantor was on the wrong side of voter sentiment on immigration.
2. Cantor paid too much attention to Washington insiderdom and not enough to voters in his district.
3. Cantor's ads attacking opponent Dave Brat backfired, raising Brat's name recognition and hurting Cantor.
4. Cantor did not know how to campaign effectively because he misunderstood the electorate.

There's no reason all of those couldn't have played a part. But until Republicans do some research, until they talk to voters in Cantor's district, they won't know.

One bit of fallout from Cantor's loss could be a setback in the effort to develop a new Republican middle-class agenda. Cantor listened closely to a group of think-tankers who are becoming known as "reform conservatives." Less than a month ago, Cantor appeared with them at the American Enterprise Institute to roll out a new set of policy ideas — on taxes, education, health care, jobs, energy, regulation — designed to help Republicans appeal to voters stuck in that Cantor often called the "middle-class squeeze." Now, the reform movement

won't by any means disappear, but it has lost one of its most powerful advocates.

That could have a practical effect in the House. Rather than an attempt to construct a far-reaching agenda, the majority leader who takes Cantor's place might adopt a more tightly focused approach.

"I think you'll see that, rather than a huge, broad-based 57-point agenda, it's going to be, here are the two or three critical things that Republicans need to focus on to move forward, with a focus on economic growth," says the GOP strategist.

Cantor's absence could also have more subtle effects on the House Republican agenda. Much of the party's legislative priority-setting is done in regular gatherings called ELC meetings. (It stands for Elected Leadership Committee and is pronounced "elk.") Take Cantor's voice away and add a new one — be it Reps. Peter Roskam, Steve Scalise, Marlin Stutzman, or others — and the mix will change.

Then there is immigration. Both opponents and supporters of Gang of Eight-style immigration reform have been yelling at each other in the wake of Cantor's defeat, saying it did or did not play a decisive role in the outcome. It seems hard to deny that immigration played some role, but how much is just not clear. Again, some actual research is needed.

Whatever the answer, the fact is that immigration reform was dead in the House before Cantor lost. A solid majority of House Republicans oppose it — either in comprehensive form or piece-by-piece form. A GOP leadership attempt to find consensus on a reform agenda, begun at the party's retreat last January, has gone nowhere. Now, time is running out. It is already June of an election year. And a Republican conference already distracted by midterms has to deal with an unexpected leadership fight. So the bottom line on immigration reform in 2014 is: ain't gonna happen.

Cantor's departure from the House leadership won't upend the Republican Party's agenda. Voters are still overwhelmingly concerned about jobs and the economy, and smart candidates will work hard to address those concerns.

But Cantor's absence could have a noticeable long-term effect on the course of the House majority. The only problem is, like the cause of what happened on election day, we don't know what it is.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.



BRENT DAVIS  
COMMON SENSE



BYRON YORK

## Dealing with struggles makes us stronger

So many people these days moan about being a victim of something. They can't live up to their full potential in life because somebody did something to them that they can't get over or they were a victim of circumstances.

After that, why try to make a success out of your life? If you are a victim, failure is not your fault.

That is why it was so good to get to meet Todd Huston last week. At the age of 14, he was being pulled by the family ski boat on an Oklahoma lake. He got entangled in the rope attached to the tube he had been riding on and the boat started backing up.

He screamed for someone in his family to stop the boat, but nobody heard him over the sound of the motor. His legs got caught in the propeller of the boat.

He was technically dead twice before his condition was stabilized in the hospital. He kept both legs, but had no feeling in his right leg.

Todd went from being a student athlete to being the kid on the sidelines wearing a Forrest Gump-like brace. Bone disease set in and eventually forced him to have his right leg amputated below the knee at age 21.

He had to learn to walk again using an artificial leg. He describes how he fell many times during the learning process. "It is not how many times you fall that counts, but that you get back up every time," Todd says.

If anyone could claim to be a victim, it was Todd. The genuine horror he went through could easily have destroyed his life.

He did what anyone would have done. He asked over and over again: "Why me, God?"

But he decided that God must have had a reason for keeping him alive. Todd says we should all do our best because you never know what greatness is being prepared for us.

Todd became a psychotherapist and clinical director of the Annette Resource Center in California. He also worked in psychiatric hospitals for adults, adolescents and children.

He married a woman from New Zealand, but after two years she became an American citizen and left him after cleaning out their bank account.

In the middle of this despair, another door opened. He was offered an opportunity to climb the highest mountains in all 50 states with a group of handicapped people. He signed up for it, but the project was cancelled because the funding didn't come through.

Rather than feel sorry for himself, Todd decided he would raise the money and do the mountain climbing himself.

He started by printing t-shirts that he sold for \$12 each. The man who had started Hooked on Phonics heard about what he was doing and agreed to fund the entire adventure.

Using an artificial leg with a built in shock-absorber, Todd did the unimaginable.

He completed a world record-setting Summit America expedition by climbing to the highest elevations of all 50 states in only 66 days, 22 hours and 47 minutes.

He beat the previous record set by a man with two legs by 35 days.

On one of his climbs, Todd met a man who was a publisher. He heard Todd's story and wanted him to write a book about his adventures.

Todd wrote "More Than Mountains: The Todd Huston Story." The book has been an inspiration to millions of people.

This man who could have let his life be ruined by one horrible thing has gone on to be featured in thousands of publications around the world. He has been covered by Sports Illustrated, Forbes and the Wall Street Journal as well as the popular book, Chicken Soup for the Soul, A Second Helping.

He has appeared as a special guest on CBS Year in Sports and Robert Schuller's Hour of Power. He has been interviewed on ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, TNN, Inside Edition, and Extra plus numerous national radio programs.

Most people would have thought he would never amount to anything after that boating accident. He could easily have spent his life on pain killing drugs and nobody would have blamed him because he was a victim.

Instead, Todd Huston decided to overcome the bad things that had happened to him and succeed.

There is a lesson to be learned for all of us from his story. Nobody's life is perfect. It is not that we avoid obstacles in our lives that define us. Instead, it is how we deal with them that determines our character.

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